

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program  
Steering Advisory Committee  
Meeting Summary  
April 26, 2010**

**Note:** *“The policy in preparing meeting summaries is to produce a record of discussion by all participants. Statements do not necessarily reflect the views of the YNHP Steering Advisory Committee or the JPA Board of Directors.”*

**Action Items**

- The Biological Working Group was asked to review some terms, e.g. “core” and “corridor”, along with some of the elements of the uplands conservation strategy, and bring their comments back to the SAC for discussion and approval.

**Summary**

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. by YNHP Executive Director, Maria Wong.

**2. Introductions and Welcome**

All those present introduced themselves.

*Attendees:*

**Steering Committee Members**

Steve Greco, UC Davis  
Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings  
Glen Holstein, CNPS/Tuleyome  
Yvonne LeMaitre, Yolo County Farm Bureau  
Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society

**JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons**

Chris Lee, Yolo County Board of Supervisors  
Dave Shpak, City of West Sacramento  
Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks and Resources

**JPA Staff**

Maria Wong, Executive Director  
Kate Montieth, Assistant to the Director  
Susan Garbini, Graduate Fellow  
Dan Airola, Airola Environmental Consulting  
Pete Rawlings, SAIC

**Interested Parties**

Lynnel Pollock, Cache Creek Nature Conservancy  
Charles Tyson, Yolo County landowner

### 3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

### 4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The draft meeting summary for the SAC meeting on March 22 will be submitted for approval at the next SAC meeting. The draft meeting summary for the Riparian Conservation Strategy workshop on April 19 will be available at the next Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop (set for May 10). It is more appropriate for all participants in the workshops to have the opportunity to review those proceedings before preparing a final draft.

#### Action Items

- Action items from the March 22 meeting are deferred to the next SAC meeting.

### 5. Presentation and discussion regarding the draft Riparian Conservation Strategy

Dan Airola and Pete Rawlings [SAIC]

The “Straw Proposal” for the riparian conservation strategy was presented at the third Riparian Conservation Strategy workshop on April 19. This discussion is intended as a brief recap for those who were not there and to provide an opportunity for comment. A number of comments have been received to date, and we will accept comments throughout the iteration of that chapter.

#### **DISCUSSION**

**Comment:** Concern was expressed about the comment in Table 7, on page 14, that “pesticide/herbicide application” would be restricted in Lower Cache Creek. The Cache Creek Nature Conservancy relies on herbicides (in combination with other strategies) to control and manage riparian areas in Cache Creek – particularly to control invasive plants.

**Response:** This comment is an oversight and will be eliminated.

**Comment:** Lumping all blackberries together with regard to management strategy is not appropriate. For example, Himalayan berry is the primary nesting area for the Tricolored Blackbird, but some other species of non-native invasive berries may need to be eradicated. It would be better to create some bifurcation among the various species of blackberries.

**Response:** This section will be reviewed and these concerns will be addressed.

### 6. Presentation and discussion regarding the draft Upland Conservation Strategy

Dan Airola and Pete Rawlings [SAIC] [see ppt handout]

The purpose in writing the draft sections for Chapter 5 (“Conservation Strategy”) is to present the framework and a process for crafting the overall plan. The approach has been to set aside discussion of the amount of acreage targeted. The Biological Working Group has reviewed various elements of this strategy over the past year.

Habitat types in the upland conservation planning units fall into six natural communities: grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, riparian and wetland areas, and agricultural lands. Within each community are a variety of habitat types (e.g. Annual Grassland, Serpentine, Mixed Chaparral, Valley Oak, etc.). Management strategies will differ for each habitat type depending on the number of acres in each category, and the number of acres that currently have conservation protection. The components for determining the details of the conservation strategy include the following

- Assembly rules: guidance for selection lands
- Conservation land designations: core and corridor
- Land conservation objectives
- Conservation land management and monitoring

Core conservation areas are designated into the following categories:

- High quality habitats (intact, species richness)
- Key geographic location
- Occurrences of key Plan species
- Higher level of conservation management to enhance value

Corridor habitats are important for their role in connecting core habitat areas, protecting or buffering them from deleterious changes in land use. These may be enhanced through voluntary conservation efforts.

Land conservation objectives will be developed based on the following factors:

- Existing land protection
- Assembly rules
- Covered species goals
- Amounts of covered species goals met within other landscape units
- Non-biological factors (e.g. funding)

## DISCUSSION

**Comment:** This is a good strategy overall for incorporating riparian into the upland. However, the definition of “range of habitat” needs to more specifically target the size of desirable patches. See p. 2, line 18: “full range”; line 24: “large”; line 25: “intensively”. The meaning of these terms is vague and needs to be much more carefully defined.

**Response:** A glossary of frequently used terms will be included to identify these terms, as used in the Plan, more precisely.

**Comment:** What types of habitat and which species are intended on pp. 3 and 4, under #4 (Habitat and Species Diversity)? It is too all-inclusive and vague as currently worded. Also on p. 4, lines 19-21, the discussion of the necessity for burning as “an important source of natural disturbance in chamise chaparral and other shrubland habitats” is open to debate, based on current research. Evidence suggests that managed fire is not necessary. Also on p. 4, line 24, the term “modified hydrology” is not clear.

**Response:** When there is a choice between a natural or a highly modified regime, we would choose the former as a rule. We wouldn't want to put a lot of effort and funding into restoration of an area with a modified hydrology.

**Comment:** On p. 5, line 21, it is not wise to presume congruity between the goals of BLM management and our plan!

**Comment:** How would areas for mitigation activities be selected?

**Response:** As covered activities take place, a whole set of criteria will be used to determine which landscape unit is used for mitigation. The mitigation strategy will depend on the larger strategy.

The upland area conservation plan is driven by local concern. In an earlier HCP effort in Yolo County, the upland area was not included. This area is "tricky" on the funding side. Money might be collected for activities in that area but conservation activities may be delayed. We need flexibility. There are few listed species in this area and a low expectation for listing other species.

**Comment:** It would be helpful to know which planning units have which species. Do these drive the planning in each unit?

**Response:** It is one of the drivers from the federal agency point of view, but not the sole driver. The state NCCP requires protection of habitat as well as species.

**Comment:** The use of the term "grassland" has been dropped from the California Manual on Vegetation. The new term is "natural herbaceous communities".

**Response:** We intend to follow up on the terminology throughout the report at the end of the process. For now, we will leave it as a working term.

**Question:** If DFG or FWS adds a species to the protected list in the future, what would happen?

**Response:** The assurances in the plan apply in this case. FWS would issue permits to cover that species if it was included in the plan. If another species is listed, the implementing entity for the plan would likely coordinate with the FWS to determine if a plan amendment was needed and whether additional measures should be added to the plan. This is essentially a local decision. All these eventualities will be described in the completed document and in the implementing agreement.

**Question:** Why was it decided not to include fish in the plan?

**Response:** None of the planned activities in the county required dealing with fish. Also, Yolo County actions are likely to be inconsequential in dealing with fish issues. We do not have the ability to control the crucial factors (e.g. water) affecting fish. Even with every intention to do good for a species, we may be unable to make a difference. Including such species could be detrimental to gaining approval for our plan. However, we may confer benefits to fish species indirectly through certain components or management strategies in our plan (e.g. improving water quality or supply).

**Question:** How do core and corridor concepts work in the upland strategy? What constitutes a core area (p. 6, lines 5-10). Is it a parcel? Does it have a boundary? What about a corridor? Is it adjacent to the core or is it a path to the next core? What is meant by “voluntary efforts” to “enhance” corridors? Will we seek easements?

**Response:** We will have to take some areas (core) to a higher value to protect a species. We need to also make sure these areas are connected (corridor). We will include some mapped examples and will also add some attributes to the definitions. Many different approaches are possible. We need to be more specific with regards to size, width, process.

The problem with presenting “pieces of the plan” is that the definitions may be in earlier sections that are not yet available. We will be providing the SAC with new sections soon: management plan, implementing plan, numbers, assessment strategies, interaction with other regional plans.

We will lay out a schedule describing pieces that will be added. The basic operating framework is essential to completing these sections.

**Comment:** On p. 3, line 28, we need to include diversity within a particular habitat as well as diversity between habitats.

We also need to focus on getting back habitat for species that have been lost or are rare. The focus on the priority of “diversity of habitat” is wrongheaded. For example, in a Douglas fir forest in the Northwest we would want to concentrate our conservation efforts on preserving and enhancing habitat for “spotted owls” rather than on “deer”! For Yolo County, we need to concentrate on covered species that are rare or in decline. What about eucalyptus? Will we maintain it or eradicate it?

**Response:** We are not in disagreement about this. But we are also interested in preserving large landscapes so that we don’t lose species in the future. We will go back to the NCCP findings and develop some alternative language. We will appropriately revise the discussion of habitat diversity to address this concern.

**Comment:** On p. 6, line 25, Stebbins Canyon Reserve is not in the Blue Ridge, it is in Solano County. The McLaughlin Reserve is in the Blue Ridge.

**Question:** Will this information be presented in a map?

**Response:** We will produce illustrative graphics, but not a specific map. There are a number of different configurations that could achieve our goals. We need to maintain flexibility.

**Question:** Is a core area where covered species exist?

**Response:** Not necessarily. Other considerations also come into play, e.g. landscape factors. It may be one factor, and in some cases, it may be the most important factor.

**Comment:** There are alternative ways of looking at covered species. For example, we could look at the habitat requirements throughout the entire landscape. The ideal approach is to combine a species and habitat perspective.

## Summary of Discussion

The question is where to go from here? We could ask the Biological Working Group to review some terms, e.g. “core” and “corridor”, along with some of the elements of the strategy, and bring their comments back to the SAC for discussion and approval.

This was agreed upon and a Biological Working Group meeting will be held as soon as possible.

### 7. Presentation and discussion regarding recommended revisions to the draft covered species list

Dan Airola and Pete Rawlings [SAIC] [see ppt handout]

The draft covered species list has two categories: “Covered Species” and “Species of Local Concern.” Generally, only species likely to be listed in the future are included.

#### Discussion

“Coverage” means you will get a permit from the FWS.

**Question:** What motivates conservation of non-covered species? Will funds be allocated to a species or to the plan?

**Response:** Federal dollars do not go to mitigation. The money collected for local permitting goes to fund mitigation. But mitigation money has been used in the past to leverage conservation dollars. There is currently an ongoing discussion at the state level to address this issue. Different strategies and formulas are used for accounting and for discharging responsibilities: purchasing land or easements; paying in lieu fees; going to mitigation banks; making a deal with the DFG.

**Comment:** There is a danger of spending a lot of money on one locale.

**Response:** We are looking at other plans’ strategies and results. We have a number of choices based on these experiences. The lessons are that we need to be flexible and pragmatic. The most important thing is to develop a plan for which we can get approval!

We did risk assessments to predict (guess) what will happen to species during the life of the plan. We sometimes are hedging that they will be listed during the life of the plan. We hope that FWS will look first to the plan to see if we have an adequate management plan in place.

**Comment:** Mitigation will be required for all species covered under the plan. They get treated as if they are already listed. Assurances apply to all the species. Many of them are CEQA listed. We have the opportunity to identify situations in which we can provide benefits and value to both covered species and species of local concern.

We struggled with providing a sufficiently robust suite of species, while avoiding setting up a plan where we are the only entity planning for certain species. We have to have a guaranteed funding plan to achieve our species and conservation goals by the time the plan is signed off. This is related to the reasons for making some choices on the list of species to be included. What is the consequence for retaining non-listed species? The plan will provide a path to mitigation – a streamlining tool – if it is credible. There are also ancillary benefits for cities in

supporting their patterns of development and geographic identity. The plan has to be competitive with regard to other mitigation banks in other areas, offering multiple advantages in terms of discharging responsibilities.

#### Summary

We will have an action item on the agenda later for this strategy and for this list of species. For now, we will work from this list and make a pitch to the wildlife agencies based on this list. The next stage is to filter the list of species through the list of covered species – to parse out the list.

**Comment:** Perhaps some additional plants could be added.

### **8. Working Group Reports**

In the interest of the late hour, the working group reports are deferred to the next SAC meeting.

### **9. Public Comment**

None at this time.

### **10. Announcements and Updates**

The YNHP will have a table at the Whole earth Festival at UC Davis on May 8. Volunteers are needed to staff the table.

### **10. Summary and Next Steps**

The JPA will meet next Monday, May 3, to discuss the options for funding to complete the YNHP plan.

### **11. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:07 pm. The next meeting on Monday, May 10, 4-6 pm, will be the final Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop.