

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
May 24, 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

- Prepare a consolidated list of species for review by the SAC.
- Prepare a matrix that shows the linkage of objectives and conservation measures.
- Prepare information and recommendations on the wetlands component of our plan – pros and cons – including what has been done with other plans with regard to wetlands, and the requirements for the NCCP act for dealing with natural communities, including wetlands.

The Biological Working Group is tasked to determine whether the term “upland” (as a Yolo County landscape unit) could be changed to “montaine” or “foothill” to avoid confusion.

MEETING SUMMARY

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Yolo Natural Heritage Program Steering Advisory Committee Chair, John Hopkins.

2. Introductions and Welcome

All those present introduced themselves.

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members

Steve Greco, UC Davis

Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings

John Hopkins, Institute for Ecological Health

Yvonne LeMaitre, Yolo County Farm Bureau

Stefan Lorenzato, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society

Jeannette Wrysinski, Yolo RCD

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Bruce Boyd, City of Davis

Rick Landon, Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner

Chris Lee, Yolo County Board of Supervisors

Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks and Resources

Sandra White, City of West Sacramento

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

Charles Tyson, Yolo County landowner
Kathryn Tyson, Yolo County Landowner

3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was changed by request so that items #6 and #5 were reversed.

4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The draft meeting summaries for the SAC meetings on March 22 and April 26 will be submitted for approval at the next SAC meeting.

Action Items

- Action items from the March 22 and April 26 meeting are deferred to the next SAC meeting.

6. Presentation and discussion regarding proposed additions to the draft covered species list

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

The Biological Working Group has made the following recommendations regarding 9 species for the covered species list.

- Add the following species as “species of local concern”:

Jepson’s milk-vetch, Heartscale, Vernal pool smallscale, Round-leaf fillaree, and the San Joaquin pocket mouse
- Shift the following from “species of local concern” to “covered species”:

Purple martin
- Retain the Redhead as “species of local concern”
- Include the Least Bell’s vireo in “covered species”

The rationale for these changes is listed in the summary table.

DISCUSSION

Comment: The Redhead is on the list primarily at the request of the City of Davis because of some potential problems that may arise related to the operations at the Davis wetlands. It is not a recommended covered species at this time because of the low likelihood of listing.

Question: What is a likely scenario should a species be listed after the plan is in effect?

Response: The advantage of recognizing a species as a “species of local concern” in advance would presumably make it easier to get the species permitted if it should become listed. The NCCP implementing entity would apply to amend the plan and document what has been done under the plan for the species and what would be done going forward. This is the recommended approach from the wildlife agencies.

Comment: The Sacramento Valley Red Fox is not yet on the recommended list, but we are looking into it. In Yolo County, this species is represented by both a native subspecies and an introduced Eastern red fox. Most of the fox found in Yolo County are of the introduced species. However, new evidence indicates that some of the red fox in Yolo County are native species. It is not clear yet what that means. A species expert will be consulted to get up-to-date information..

Comment: The JPA has been monitoring this issue for a few years. We need to guard against attracting concern about species unnecessarily and placing a potential burden on landowners.

Response: The current list of species of local concern is more solidly backed by evidence. Least Bell’s vireo is likely to be added to the plan based on available information.

Question: What is the process for deciding? We would like to know which species are agreed upon by the Fish & Wildlife Service and which are still under discussion. The process for all these decisions with regard to species will be described in the plan Appendix

Response: We will provide that insofar as possible, but we never know for sure which species will be permitted until the Biological Opinion is issued. This is an evolutionary process. The agencies will be looking at the impact analysis for the whole county. At the next meeting we will review a consolidated list of species. We hope to lock in the species list in early June. We now have a two-tiered list: covered species, which are permitted within the plan, and species of local concern, which are not permitted at the outset. At present there are 31 covered species in the plan and 35/36 species of local concern.

5. Presentation and discussion regarding the draft Valley Natural Communities Conservation Strategy

Dan Airola and Pete Rawlings, SAIC

The Valley Natural Communities Landscape Unit of the plan consists of the remaining uncultivated lands, other than riparian and watercourse areas, within lowland portions of the county, where agriculture (and, to a lesser degree, flood conveyance) are the predominant use. This area consists mainly of small remnant areas of annual grasslands, vernal pool, alkali sink, and valley oak woodland habitats. The natural community lands within this landscape occupy only 12 per cent of the total area, with most of the remaining land in agricultural use. Many of these remaining natural lands have been significantly reduced in habitat value from their original

condition due to past and ongoing disturbance. Nevertheless, they provide a disproportionately high biological value, as the sole remaining habitats for a substantial number of covered species in these planning units. They also contribute to local and regional biodiversity by providing suitable opportunities for breeding and resting by a number of species that forage in agricultural lands. The conservation strategy for the Valley Natural Communities is closely related to the strategies for the Upland, Riparian, and Agricultural Landscape units.

DISCUSSION

Comments: Table 5.5-1 presents the amounts in acres of habitat type by geographic area within this landscape area and existing conservation protection. "Conserved" lands are currently public land. This definition may need to be tightened up. The proportion of wetlands being conserved is relatively high in proportion to land already preserved (e.g. vernal pools).

Question: How was this landscape area defined?

Response: The process was to assemble acres remaining as natural lands within the valley natural communities designation. Some discussion took place of whether to include riparian areas that occur within the landscape unit. In the end, we lumped all of the riparian into the "riparian" category.

Comment: This typology for dividing landscape units does not appear to be logical. Why are wetlands included?

Response: The process is somewhat arbitrary. The planning framework was defined in this manner. It is an operational description. Definition and classification were, to some extent, based on management regimes that were needed. In some respects, the geographic areas are the basis for classification; in others, the approach is based on rules that apply within each landscape unit. We can parse it in many different ways.

Comment: Ultimately, what is mitigation is based on: landscape unit, ecosystem type? We would like to see consistency across the planning units.

Response: We use the landscape unit as the basis for planning. We will be dealing with mitigation and conservation management at a variety of levels. Recommended strategies and measures will be nested within different units. We will attempt to integrate as appropriate within the geographic unit. We need to clarify how these approaches fit together. The strategy is still evolving. The framework can be readjusted.

We do need to work on the consistency issue, although in some cases, there will have to be divergence.

PRESENTATION (cont)

Conservation strategy components include: assembly rules, land conservation objectives, and conservation land management and monitoring. Assembly rules for this landscape unit are based on a different notion of the amount of land. The measures here address the first iteration of goals and objectives presented previously. We may need to prepare a matrix that shows the linkage of objectives and conservation measures.

A mitigation program will be established based on the following considerations:

- Not applicable to vernal pools or alkali sinks
- Emphasize avoidance in other habitats
- Mitigation is “in-kind” and within the same planning unit, where feasible
- Use mitigation ratios based on the extent of impact and benefits of conservation actions
- Emphasize larger of remaining remnants, except to maintain geographic distribution of habitat
- Designate mitigation areas for impacts to covered activities in developed areas

DISCUSSION

Comment: The term “in-kind” mitigation is not in keeping with the current approach with regard to wetland mitigation. The current thinking is that wetland values are better preserved in a watershed context and in mitigation banks.

Response: There is debate regarding watershed approach and the role of “no-net-loss” calculation. Sometimes mitigation has to be done out of the watershed.

Comment: The HCP provides opportunities for larger-scale habitat planning – that is the one of the major advantages of preparing a plan.

Response: We may need to make a conscious decision about the approach. We may want to define different scenarios for accomplishing different goals. We will set up restoration parks to fulfill overall goals and objectives.

Comment: The statement “emphasize avoidance in other habitats” may lead to little postage-stamp preserves, which are not meaningful in most cases for providing biological value. This approach tends to rely on drawing lines around areas, rather than on emphasizing ecological functions and processes. It is more important to look at how processes can be restored and conserved.

Response: In some cases, we need to preserve patchy areas that have value, e.g. large, individual trees in an agricultural landscape. We shouldn’t set in motion a process that eliminates these options.

Comment: We have to have some sense of the habitat value of pieces of the landscape, even under scenarios of change in practices on the landscape.

Question: Who will set ratios and determine loss of value? Now the agency sets a value and ratio on the activity. Who will be doing those valuations?

Response: We will do an assessment of the events of all covered activities and tell them up front how we will mitigate. The individual applicant is no longer subject to fluctuating requirements. Applicants have the choice to go to the HCP or to a mitigation bank. However, in order to obtain all the benefits of the plan, the developer will have to participate in the plan.

Question: How will history be incorporated into the plan?

Response: CEQA does not allow management to be based on historical conditions. However, we can seek to restore some of the lost habitat or landscape using other funding sources. There

are ways of accomplishing conservation goals outside the HCP/NCCP, based on the County General Plan.

PRESENTATION (cont)

Grassland conservation measures include the following

- Conserve larger grassland areas
- Conserve important remnants (tie to agricultural and pollinator strategies)

Valley Oak conservation measures include the following:

- Use existing Oak Plan conservation priority evaluation methods to assess stands for ecological values and for enhancement and restoration potential
- Conserve, enhance, and restore oak stands
- Protect and replace older isolated trees in priority nesting areas for Swainson's hawk and other species

Vernal Pool and Alkali Sink habitats:

- Conserve a high proportion of remaining habitats

Emergent wetlands habitats:

- Largely conserved through state actions (e.g. the Yolo Basin wetlands area)
- Conserve wetland habitats elsewhere
- Coordinate conservation efforts with state and private entities

DISCUSSION

Comment: We should remove wetlands because this is handled by other agencies. There is no strong linkage in our plan and we are not seeking any permits.

Response: Including wetlands is useful in helping others. Also, we may later seek programmatic 404s.

Question: If we do not include wetlands in our plan, how do we preserve wetland species?

Response: We concentrate on habitat requirements. We don't need to mitigate wetland impacts.

We can task the consultant team with coming back with information and recommendations on the wetlands component of our plan – pros and cons – and what has been done with other plans with regard to wetlands. Also include the requirements for the NCCP act for dealing with natural communities, including wetlands.

7. SAC Schedule of meetings

Staff proposed that the schedule of meetings through December 2010 be changed to be from 5:00-7:00 pm on the 2nd and 4th Mondays (from alternating times of 4:00 – 6:00 and 6:00 – 8:00 pm on 2nd and 4th Mondays). All meetings to be held in Woodland insofar as possible.

This will be decided at the next meeting.

8. Working Group Reports

- *Biological Working Group:* The Biological WG met on Friday, May 2 and prepared the proposed list of additional species presented at this meeting. They will meet again in June to discuss core and matrix definitions and issues. Meeting place and time will be posted on the YNHP calendar.
- *Agriculture Habitat Interface Working Group:* the Ag WG has met regularly from February through April 2010 and completed an examination of a set of issues with agricultural content relevant to the YNHP plan. They have prepared a draft report summarizing their findings and will submit a final report to the SAC in June.
- *Urban Interface Working Group:* The Urban Interface WG is awaiting the appropriate time to discuss governance and implementation issues for the plan.

9. Public Comment

The question was asked whether “upland” is a landscape unit and whether the term could be changed to “montaine” or “foothill” to avoid confusion. “Upland” means many things to many different people. Resolution of this issue was assigned to the Biological Working Group.

10. Announcements and Updates

The California Wetlands Conference (CLE) will be held June 10-11 in Sacramento. Cost may be a deterrent to attending

The Sacramento River Watershed Program “State of the Watershed” Forum will be held in Sacramento on June 2. It costs \$125. California Natural Resources Secretary Lester Snow and Congresswoman Doris Matsui are the keynote speakers.

11. Summary and Next Steps

The next phase of reporting will be the plan agricultural strategy. JPA staff meets with the Fish & Wildlife Service on June 3 to discuss this aspect of our plan.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm. The next meeting on Monday,