

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
June 14, 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 schedule with all meeting information to SAC members.
- Post Agricultural Working Group information and reports on the YNHP website.
- Arrange for 2 articles by Steve Greco to be available.

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
Yvonne LeMaitre, Yolo County Farm Bureau
Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society
Jeannette Wrynski, Yolo RCD
Denise Sagara, Yolo Farm Bureau

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
Dave Shpak, 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

3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The draft meeting summaries for the SAC meetings on March 22, April 26, and May 24, 2010 were approved with minor changes. The draft meeting summary for the Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop on May 10, 2010 was approved with no changes.

Action Items

- Action items from the March 22, April 26, and May 24 SAC meetings are deferred to the next SAC meeting.

5. Recommend the updated draft covered species list to the JPA Board for adoption.

Maria Wong (see handout)

An updated and consolidated recommended list of species to be addressed in the YNHP HCP/NCCP “covered species” was submitted to the Committee for approval. The motion was to accept the list as presented on the handout and move it forward to the agencies for approval. The motion was passed.

Discussion

Question: What about the red fox?

Response: The species will be evaluated to determine if it should be added. We are attempting to schedule a meeting of the Biological Working Group with the species expert to review recent information on the status and its sensitivity to land use. The list can continue to expand and contract based on new information in the future.

6. Approve revised SAC agenda schedule, including recommended sequence of discussion topics and deliverables, though 2010.

The proposed schedule of meetings with topics for discussion at each meeting through 2010 represents an aggressive schedule for completing a draft plan by December. We will meet twice per month as long as needed to complete the tasks before us. We will cut back to one meeting per month when possible, probably after December 2010. The final schedule will be presented and voted on at the next meeting.

7. Presentation and discussion regarding proposed revisions to the Land Area Classification approach and the Conservation Lands Classification System approach.

Dan Airola and Pete Rawlings, SAIC [see draft report: “Revised Yolo NHP Land area Classification for Planning Purposes”, June 9, 2010]

Land Area Classification

The terminology and structure of the Yolo NHP’s approach to designating landscape units for planning purposes has been modified in response to concerns expressed in discussions at previous SAC meetings. The purpose of the change is to provide a better alignment with the

geographic system of land classification, while retaining meaningful ecological distinctions, and also to simplify the system to make it more easily understandable by all concerned.

The new approach proposes two major landscape units:

1. Hill and Ridge: This unit replaces “Uplands” and includes Planning Units 1-6, and 8:
 - Includes areas of steeper terrain dominated by chaparral, oak Woodland, and grassland; agricultural habitat types on steeper terrain; and associated riparian habitats.
 -
2. Valley Lowlands: This unit includes lands within Planning Units 7, and 9-21
 - All lowland areas, which support agriculture, area riparian (including lowland portions of Cache Creek and Putah Creek), emergent Wetland, alkali Sink, vernal pool grassland, grassland, and oak Woodland (mainly scattered valley oak), and developed Lands

The modified system simplifies the Landscape Unit designation by separating the two dominant landform types in the County: elevated topography and lowland areas. It consolidates riparian habitat within Planning Units 1-5 into the Hill and Ridge Landscape unit. It adds the upper Cache Creek area (Planning Unit 6), with its associated riparian habitat and specialized agriculture, and the upper portion of Putah Creek (Planning Unit 8).

The separation of the landscape units requires care to ensure that conservation strategies for the two areas are closely linked, especially in the treatment of riparian habitats, to ensure that necessary connections are provided.

Discussion

Question: In the description of the Valley Landscape Unit, are “grain” and “field crops” the same as “row crops”?

Response: The list is not intended to be complete, but illustrative of what classes are in the next level down. The classification of crop type groups remains unchanged.

Question: How do we coordinate conservation efforts across the two landscapes?

Question: We will coordinate riparian management strategies between the Hill and Ridge and Valley Landscape Units. The implementing entity will deal with this. The management approach ultimately plays out in the landscape unit. The proposal is intended to add in the Putah Creek unit and the Cache Creek units into the landscape units.

Question: From the water district’s perspective, is there a way that what happens in “upland” areas has consequences in the Valley unit?

Response: This plan does not emphasize or prescribe water management regimes to produce certain outcomes.’

Comment: The water district is interested in using water management to affect habitat.

Question: Is there a set of policies/plans for the “Hill and Ridge” unit and a set of policies/plans for the “Valley” Unit? It is not wise to separate the management of riparian areas.

Response: Area-wide conservation measures will address how connected landscapes interact. There could be the same set of policies and approach to riparian in each landscape unit; it could be uniform across boundaries. We will try to clarify this as the plan proceeds.

Comment: Farmers would not be comfortable with the program dictating water management within an agricultural system.

Response: The plan will not exert control over water use.

Comment: The landscape classification system breaks up riparian habitats into different zones. There is some logic to these divisions, e.g. “gaining”, “losing”, and “accumulation zone”. This is a good simplification of these processes. However, we need to see a map of the new system.

Response: The maps that have been prepared in earlier stages still apply with regard to planning unit boundaries. None of the planning unit boundaries have changed; they are simply being reassigned to revised landscape units.

Comment: There is some biological “meaning” to the categorization strategy, but there are some potential problems with the way riparian is classified in this system – especially for Cache Creek, which has a meandering sector that extends through Capay Valley. We need to be careful to craft conservation recommendations that are sensitive to functional (vs. geographical) aspects of landscape unit “assignments.”

Response: Nuances such as these will be acknowledged in the plan.

Question: Within the Hill and Ridge Landscape Unit there are agricultural ponds, stock ponds, reservoirs that are biologically important in some cases, or recreational in others. How are these included?

Response: The pond habitats are included in the Hill and Ridge unit. We will look at functions of ponds for covered species. The plan can propose creation of additional ponds as habitat for covered species (e.g. the tiger salamander).

Question: There are two situations: (1) creation of new habitat and (2) preservation of existing habitat.

Response: Both protection and enhancement approaches will be employed in the plan. Enhancement is important to certain covered species, particularly where the quality of habitat rather than the amount is limiting populations. Different levels of conservation strategies (e.g. easements, land acquisition) may be used to enhance habitat or to prevent changes in land uses that might affect species.

Comment: The State Water Resources Control Board has a process for approval of pond creation.

Response: The plan will acknowledge the need to follow the policy as it develops.

Comment: Our plan needs to employ a win/win approach, in which landowners are assured that they won't be negatively impacted or punished by providing habitat.

Response: The plan is based on a voluntary participation by willing landowners.

Question: Is mitigation to be conducted within the same landscape units where impacts occur?

Response: Mitigation will apply to habitat removal by covered activities. In most cases, the target will likely be to obtain mitigation within the landscape unit where impacts occur. There could be instances where mitigation would be more effective within another landscape unit. It depends on the resource and how to best achieve conservation goals and objectives. No decision has been made on this aspect. The planning units are designated in order to establish the framework. Flexibility in implementation over time is essential.

Comment: The taxonomy on the red-legged frog has changed and the California form is now recognized as a separate species. The proposal splits Putah Creek into landscape units and different planning units (8 and 9), when there is no functional difference between these areas in terms of habitat.

Response: The topographic setting of these two creek habitat areas is different: one is in steeper terrain; the other is in the lowlands. Separation will not be a problem as long as conservation measures can extend across planning unit boundaries and landscape unit boundaries.

Conservation Lands Classification

The Yolo Natural Heritage Program's (NHP) Conservation Plan requires a land conservation classification that reflects their current and proposed level of protection and conservation management to achieve natural community and covered species goals. To date, the NHP has used a conservation land classification that recognized three Resource Management System (RMS) classes. This classification has been criticized for combining lands with different types and levels of land protection and conservation management. The revised conservation lands classification system (Table 1) more finely segregates the status of current and future lands in the plan area.

The proposed revised conservation land classification system recognizes five general land conservation categories, based on the certainty of land protection. All lands in the planning area can be assigned to one of these five major categories.

Category 1 lands achieve the highest conservation protection, through use of irrevocable conservation easements or other permanent protection mechanisms.

Category 2 lands are protected by administrative actions taken by a government agency (i.e., adoption of a land use plan) that emphasizes conservation.

Category 3 lands are those for which temporary land uses (especially the growing of certain crops) would be applied to meet conservation goals and objectives.

Category 4 lands are not currently protected nor intended to be protected through the conservation strategy, but also are not scheduled to be modified by covered activities. Thus, they are not conserved, but are expected to retain some level of habitat value. Most agricultural lands, for example, would occur in this category.

Category 5 lands are existing developed lands or lands proposed for development by covered activities. These areas would have low or no conservation value.

Within categories 1-3, subcategories a and b are applied to designate the level of conservation management applied.

Question: What category is agriculture in (Table 1)?

Response: Most agriculture is in category 4, but could be in different categories. Under category 3a/3b (“Temporary protection”), a landowner might be offered incentives to retain current desirable conditions or to increase habitat value for a limited period.

Comment: Some of this is may concern landowners. It needs to be clear that it is a *contractual* agreement with time limits, and that all agreements are voluntary.

Comment: NRCS/RCD already has such voluntary contractual programs in place. Yolo NHP agreements could be modeled on NRCS agreements, where a suite of management options are permitted. These agreements have been very successful with landowners.

Question: Will this conservation lands classification be written into the plan

Response: All of these considerations and strategies will be laid out in the Plan’s Conservation Strategy. The plan will be explicit about the tools that will and will not be used.

8. Presentation and discussion regarding Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group “Summary of Issues Related to Agriculture”

Susan Garbini and Jeanette Wrynski [see report: “Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working : Summary of Issues Related to Agriculture”, June 7, 2010]

The Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group (Ag Working Group) is a sub- of the Yolo Natural Heritage Program (YNHP) Steering Advisory Committee (SAC). In the 2008-2009 meeting cycle, the Ag Working prepared a set of tables on “Agricultural Activities and Practices” for all the major crops in Yolo County (including a “Summary of Potential Impacts of Agricultural Flood Control and Water Supply Activities on Covered Species”). These were provided to the YNHP Executive Director on September 30, 2009, for use in the preparation of the YNHP habitat conservation plan. These will be posted on the YNHP web site, along with the current “Issues” report.

During the 2010 meeting cycle, the Ag Working Group delineated four major issue areas for review and discussion by the agriculture/habitat interface Working that will be important to the plan:

Agricultural-Habitat Issues

1. Fallowing of land (schedule, patterns, habitat benefits, economic parameters) and its consequences for habitat.
2. Water supply and availability for agriculture and the effects on habitat.
3. Role of government constraints and support for agriculture (e.g. Williamson Act, tax rate, parcel regulations) in shaping agricultural management and practices.

4. The importance of habitat associated with agriculture (e.g. hedgerows, edges, sloughs/ditches) and incentives for creating habitat on farmland.

At their meeting on March 10, 2010, the Agriculture-Habitat Interface also conducted a preliminary review of the report on the "**Pollinator Conservation Strategy**"* for the SAC, which was presented at the March 22, 2010 SAC meeting. This review is available in a separate document. The following presentation is a summary of the discussion for the four agricultural-habitat issues defined above. We recommend that these issues be addressed in the YNHP conservation strategy and plan.

Issue 1: Fallowing of Agricultural Land

- Impacts on species' biology and behavior
- Role of incentive-based programs
- Role of water cost and availability
- Long-term factors and impacts

Some of the problems associated with fallowing land are that it may result in the rise of invasive plants, lead to decadent or decrepit fields, with associated loss of biological productivity and habitat value.

Issue 2: Water Supply and Availability for Agriculture and the Effects on Habitat

- Factors affecting water supply (drought, water allocation policies, seasonal cycles)
- Water delivery systems (wells, sprinklers, pipes, drip, other infrastructure)
- Water-related decisions that affect the agriculture/habitat interface:
 - Crop choice
 - Irrigation method
 - Irrigation timing
 - Tailwater management

The availability of water has a rotating influence across the landscape and will have substantial consequences for maintaining habitat in the valley portion of the county as the plan is implemented. It is crucial to take into account the variables of likely water supply in the future since this has major impacts on most management approaches.

Comment: A bigger threat to plan implementation is water quality. Also, how is water availability factored into planned growth in the county?

Issue 3: Role of Government Constraints and Incentives in Shaping Habitat-Friendly Agricultural Practices

- *Incentives/support:* Williamson Act, NRCS programs, County policies
- *Constraints/Regulations:* tax policy, water allocation policies, water/air quality regulations, ESA, prohibitions and restrictions, waste management regulations
- Alternative Policies
 - Incentives based on ecosystem services
 - Ombudsman process
 - Rewards for good stewardship

* Report prepared by the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation for the Yolo Natural Heritage Program (November 2009), located at http://www.yoloconservationplan.org/yolo_pdfs/reports/Yolo-pollinator-consvtn-strategy-2009-11-16.pdf

The role of the Ombudsman would include communicating and mediating between farmers and the regulatory/governmental system.

Issue 4: Habitat Associated with Agriculture/Incentives for Creating Habitat

- *Potential Habitat on non-production areas:* edges/fences, low corners, non-farmable areas, sloughs and canals
- *Incentives:* compensation, farm programs, regulatory reform, education, agritourism, ecosystem services, marketing, recognition
- Concerns
 - Loss of production
 - Crop damage from depredation
 - Costs for managing/maintaining habitat

General Issues for Yolo HCP/NCCP to address:

- Risks associated with wildlife-friendly practices
- Incentives in Yolo HCP/NCCP to encourage wildlife-friendly practices
- How to make plan “user-friendly” for future generations
- How to ensure continuity and longevity for sustainable practices

Comment: The challenge to the YNHP planning process is to create a diverse “tool box” to effect change in the desired direction.

Comment: It may be preferable to talk about “constraints and opportunities “; risk and cost”; and “incentives and benefits” in this section. Some of the other issues of concern to farmers are worries about neighbors’ reactions to your decisions – they may see them as limiting their options. Also food safety issues are now undermining the incentive to preserve habitat near cropland.

9. Working Reports

- *Biological Working :* The Biological Working is reviewing wetland and riparian strategies, including wetland impact offsets and whether they should be devised on a watershed basis. It also will examine the “core and corridor” approach and alternatives. They will meet in the next 2 weeks at a time to be determined.
- *Agriculture Habitat Interface Working :* The Ag Working met regularly from February through April 2010 and completed an examination of a set of issues with agricultural content relevant to the YNHP plan which is contained in their report summarizing their findings (presented today).
- *Urban Interface Working :* The Urban Interface WG is awaiting the appropriate time to discuss governance and implementation issues for the plan, along with covered activities..

10. Public Comment

No comments.

11. Announcements and Updates

Steve Greco would like to distribute 2 articles on relevant topics to the SAC. We will determine how that can be done in accordance with policy prescriptions.

The JPA Board of Directors will meet on Monday, June 21, to discuss budget issues. The time and location are available on the YNHP webpage Events Calendar.

[<http://yoloconservationplan.org/calendar/June2010.html>]

12. Summary and Next Steps

The next meeting will focus on the proposed draft agricultural conservation strategy, which is a key component of the YNHP plan.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 pm. The next meeting will be held on Monday, June 28, at 5:00 pm.