



Yolo Habitat Conservancy

County of Yolo • City of Davis • City of Winters • City of West Sacramento
City of Woodland • University of California, Davis

Yolo HCP/NCCP Small Urban Infill Project Guidance March 25, 2020

The Conservancy strives to minimize the administrative and financial burden on small infill projects within the limits of the Yolo HCP/NCCP permits. The following guidance applies to small infill projects. Applicants will also find this information in the Yolo HCP/NCCP Permitting Guide.

- Most small infill projects (two acres in size or less and surrounded by development) are located on “developed” land and therefore are exempt from fees. Table 2-1 of the Permitting Guide lists the land cover types exempt from fees: urban, urban-ruderal, vegetated corridor, and barren-anthropogenic. Applicants should fill out the Screening Form to determine if a small infill project is exempt from fees.
- Determining the difference between the urban-ruderal land cover type and the grassland land cover types can be difficult, so the Conservancy prepared the following guidance in the section below titled “Distinguishing Urban-Ruderal from Other Land Cover Types,” also included in the Permitting Guide under instructions for Box C, Item 5 of the Screening Form. A qualified biologist must verify all land cover mapping.
- Small infill projects exempt from land cover fees (but still subject to Avoidance and Minimization Measures (AMMs)) can request to be exempt from the application fee because of economic hardship.
- Small infill projects exempt from fees may still need to implement AMMs. AMMs for these projects are required if the project overlaps with any resource protection buffers for sensitive natural communities or covered species habitat as specified in Table 2-3 of the Permitting Guide, unless a qualified biologist determines the project will not affect sensitive natural communities or covered species (see page 42 of Permitting Guide for instructions on filling out the Screening Form, Box C, Item 7).
- The most common AMM applicable to infill projects is AMM16 for Swainson’s hawk and white-tailed kite because these species sometimes nest in urban areas. AMM16 requires a qualified biologist to determine whether trees onsite and within the resource protection

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buffer (1,320 feet for Swainson's hawk/white-tailed kite) are potential nest trees. To facilitate this process for small urban infill projects, the Conservancy has defined "potential nest tree" within an urban setting as native and non-native trees (e.g., cottonwood, valley oak, walnut, sycamore, eucalyptus, redwood, ornamental pine) that are at least 40 feet tall. If potential nest trees do not occur onsite or within the resource protection buffer, no further surveys are required. If potential nest trees do occur, then surveys are required to determine presence/absence of active nests. Upon request and on a case-by-case basis, the Conservancy is available to assess the presence/absence of active Swainson's hawk/white-tailed kite nests on and around urban infill project sites.

- Discretionary projects that are exempt from fees and AMMs do not need to fill out the HCP/NCCP Application, just the Screening Form.
- Projects exempt from fees but for which AMMs are required will need to complete the HCP/NCCP Application, but only need to fill out Boxes A-C, F, G, and I of the HCP/NCCP Application.

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Identifying the Urban-Ruderal Land Cover Type

The intent of the urban-ruderal designation is to characterize sites that have already been disturbed and have no covered species habitat value, such as small infill areas within the urban core. The plant composition would be primarily invasive weed species, but sometimes it is difficult to distinguish these urban-ruderal lands (non-fee paying land cover type) from grasslands or fallow agricultural lands that have weedy components (fee paying land cover types).

A couple of things are important when characterizing a site as urban ruderal and distinguishing it from grassland or agricultural land. The qualified biologist should follow these guidelines when uncertain whether or not an area should be mapped as urban-ruderal.

1. Review the recent history of land use on the site. An idle agricultural field at the edge of an urban area – or a recent infill resulting from new surrounding development – can potentially meet the definition in Table 2-1 for urban-ruderal, but may be more accurately classified as agricultural land. Idle fields are typically comprised of a variety of non-native weed species, often very dense associations of invasive species. If the surrounding agricultural land was recently developed and a small infill or edge remains, one might regard this as an urban-ruderal land cover. But instead, it could be part of an idle agricultural field. In one or two seasons, an active agricultural field can convert to a weedy, idle field, which may meet the vegetation definition of an urban-ruderal site, but may be more appropriately considered agricultural land cover. So, reviewing the recent land use history of the site is important in making this distinction.
2. Carefully assess the vegetation composition and determine the dominant species. Of the three types under grassland natural community, only the California annual grassland alliance is potentially problematic (see definition in Table 2-1, and note the potential overlap with the urban-ruderal definition). To distinguish urban-ruderal from California annual grassland alliance, it is important for the qualified biologist to clearly identify the dominant species and their relative cover. The land cover definitions refer to the *dominant* plant associations. A grassland may, and usually does, include a variety of invasive species, such as yellow star-thistle. If the dominant plants are grasses and forbs, but the site has an herbaceous overstory of yellow-star thistle (which might be more obvious through casual observation), then by definition, the site is a grassland. Biologists can make this distinction through a simple visual survey of the site. There is no expectation that a complete vegetation survey will be conducted. The result could be a simple table that describes the dominant species or species alliance and their relative cover or just sufficient text to

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