



NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

YOLO COUNTY HCP/NCCP JPA

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TIME: 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. on Monday, December 8, 2014

PLACE: Yolo County Farm Bureau, Board Room; 69 W. Kentucky Ave.
(between West St. and Cottonwood St.), Woodland CA 95695

[NOTE NEW MEETING LOCATION]

INFORMATION: Contact Susan Garbini at 530-723-5909 or susan.garbini@yolocounty.org

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AGENDA

1. **Call meeting to order and introductions – *John Hopkins***
2. **Approval of agenda order – *John Hopkins***
3. **Approve October 13, 2014 draft meeting summary; review status of action items; review September 8, 2014 draft meeting summary; review status of action items**
4. **Update on 2nd Administrative Draft – *Petrea Marchand***
 - a. **Status**
 - b. **Revised schedule for chapter review**
5. **Introduction and Q&A with wildlife agency staff**

- 6. Update on Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC):
Conservation Easement and Mitigation Receiving Site review selection
process**
- 7. Update on Local Conservation Strategy**
- 8. Introduction and Q&A with wildlife agency staff**
- 9. Announcements and updates: Advisory Committee members**
- 10. Adjournment to next meeting date: January 12, 2015**

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Advisory Committee Meeting Summary
December 8, 2014**

ACTION ITEMS

- Review the conservation strategy for grasslands, including “annual” vs. “native” grasslands; review grassland definitions in Yolo County General Plan.

MEETING SUMMARY

1. Call meeting to order and introductions

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 p.m. by Executive Director, **Petrea Marchand**. Advisory Committee chair, **John Hopkins**, arrived shortly thereafter and chaired the rest of the meeting. All those present introduced themselves.

Attendees:

Advisory Committee Members, Liaisons, and Alternates

John Hopkins, IEH
Glen Holstein, California Native Plant Society
Yvonne LeMaitre, Landowner
Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society
Charles Tyson, Reynier Fund, Landowner
Jeanette Wrysinski, Yolo County Resource Conservation District
Eric Paulsen, Yolo County Farm Bureau
Jennifer Garcia, California Department of Fish & Wildlife
Paul Hofmann, CDFW
Valary Bloom, US Fish & Wildlife Service
Josh Hull, USFWS

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Charline Hamilton, City of West Sacramento
Eric Parfrey, Yolo County Policy and Planning Department
Sean Denny, Yolo County JPA Board
Ken Hiatt, City of Woodland

GUESTS

John Anderson, Hedgerow Farms
Bruce Guelding, Winters citizen
Michael Perrone, California Department of Water Resources
Lynnel Pollock, Cache Creek Conservancy
Kathryn Tyson, Reynier Fund, Landowner

JPA Staff

Petrea Marchand, Executive Director
Heidi Tschudin, Project Manager
Susan Garbini, Research Associate
Jim Estep, Consultant and Chair, STAC

2. Approval of Agenda order

The agenda order was revised by unanimous consent to move item 4 (“update on 2nd Administrative Draft”) to follow item 6 (“Update on STAC”).

3. Approve September 8 and October 13, 2014, draft meeting summaries; review status of action items

The meeting summaries were approved with no changes.

Action items from September 8:

- *Petrea* – Will send Cindy, Jeanette, Charline copies of the reviewed chapters [*done*]
- *Petrea* – Will inquire about Valary Bloom, Josh Hull attending a future Advisory Committee meeting [*done see item 5*]
- *Heidi* - will send Sean Chapters 1-4 (with maps/charts/tables) to review [*done*]
- *Petrea* - will send the LCS outline for feedback from Chris and Eric [*pending*]

Action items from October 13:

- Determine the quorum requirements for the Advisory Committee to conduct formal business [*done*].
- Develop cost and schedule for Local Conservation Strategy, including role of AC, itemization of AMMs, how much additional funding is needed and where can it be found. [*ICF still developing*]

5. Introductions and Q&A with wildlife agency staff

Petrea introduced the liaisons from CDFW: Jennifer Garcia and Paul Hofmann (who is retiring soon); and from the USFWS: Valary Bloom, Josh Hull. She expressed the appreciation of the JPA Board and the Advisory Committee for wildlife agency staff participation and presence, pointing out that the process has been collaborative, with a strong sense of partnership between member agencies and the wildlife agencies. She thanked them for their willingness to spend time resolving issues at numerous meetings.

USFWS:

Valary Bloom has worked for 12 years on recovery plans, HCPs. **Josh Hull** has worked for 6 years on recovery plans and conservation strategies.

CDFW:

Jennifer Garcia has been working with Paul Hofmann before he goes to retirement. She has also been involved in streambed and lake alteration agreements, and CESA and CEQA review

Paul Hofmann started work with the CDFG in the 1970s. He is a biologist by training. .

Q&A:

Jeanette Wrynski: What is unique about our effort in Yolo County is the inclusion of agricultural practices as part of the HCP/NCCP conservation strategy. How is that viewed internally and higher up at the agencies?

Josh: This is not usual or typical, but it has created some discussion, and challenged the agency to explore new options. How do we arrange the landscape? Which crops are acceptable? How many acres? We are retraining ourselves to some extent.

Petrea: No other HCP/NCCP has had a cultivated lands easement template. Also we have to come up with a management plan template for cultivated lands. Some of that will have to be worked out during implementation.

Jennifer: We have to keep a balance between technical vs. policy issues. Developing and acknowledging adaptive management in an active landscape will change as farming practices change.

Chad Roberts: What are you thinking about the impacts of climate change?

Josh: This will be related to how much water we expect to have. The biggest issue is orchards and vineyards. We are mostly thinking about availability of water in places where we want to have giant garter snake; how to ensure that water delivery is guaranteed, even if lands are fallowed -- enough water to create habitat benefits. Water delivery is the major issue for the future.

Chad: What is the relationship between the HCP/NCCP plan and the Local Conservation Strategy? Do we know the relationship of the LCS to the NCCP requirements?

Paul: It's not driving it as much as benefiting from it. The permit is going to be focused on the HCP. The LCS is your plan; the agencies are looking to get their checklist completed within the HCP/NCCP.

Chad: We would like some indication from you that the LCS is valuable for implementation of the NCCP requirement. We need to know that in advance.

Jennifer: In order for us to make findings on the NCCP side with regard to management and conservation, the LCS needs to be very consistent with the NCCP in terms of goals, objectives, and give us assurances, so that our findings have relevance in both plans.

Chad: Have you said this to the consultants? (ICF).

Jennifer: I feel that ICF understands the need for coordination of the two documents. They should have many overlapping features.

6. Update on Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC): Conservation Easement and Mitigation Receiving Site review selection process

Petrea: When the JPA is implemented, all mitigation in the County related to the Yolo HCP/NCCP covered species will be coordinated through the JPA. The current conservation easement and mitigation receiving site properties and process will be the foundation of this as we go forward.

The current version of the process is focused on the hawk. In the future, we intend to expand or revise it for other species.

Jim Estep: The evaluation process has become more in-depth, with eight categories of attributes, contributing to the scoring of candidate lands. The STAC determined that a total combined score didn't work and adding a qualitative analysis to the quantitative analysis is a good way summarize the habitat value of a particular site. Also, we wanted to focus on objectives that correlated with goals of the plan at the time; for example, if we were maxed out on nesting habitat, we wanted to be flexible to change the emphasis as needed in the future.

Glen Holstein: Can we expect similar documents for other species?

Jim Estep: We are working on an evaluation tool for burrowing owl now. It is a work in progress. The properties that we have looked at in this cycle were specifically focused on Swainson's hawk. This version has worked well to achieve this purpose.

Chad: What about future cropping patterns?

Jim: The conservation easement template has certain restrictions with regard to crops that can be grown, e.g. no vines or orchards are permitted.

Glen: Can we assume that the evaluation will capture benefits to other species?

Jim: We have added that in a generalized way.

Petrea: We felt that this qualitative element is important for this reason.

Lynnel: Alfalfa hay has highest multiplier. Yet most alfalfa is only planted for three years – it is not a permanent crop. Why rank alfalfa higher if you are not sure it will be grown?

Jennifer: Hopefully it is planted on a rotational basis. However, the fact that there are no assurances makes it difficult for the agencies to achieve certainty with regard to habitat suitability in the long run.

Jim: The evaluation identifies lands that are suitable for alfalfa, even though the easements will not restrict crops to alfalfa. We are taking a chance that farmers will not grow alfalfa.

Petrea: In return for an easement template that does not restrict crops to alfalfa, the JPA has agreed to monitor agricultural acreage countywide and monitor crops grown on our reserve. It could be that we apply for a grant to grow alfalfa if the market for this crop declines. At the very least, if alfalfa acreage in Yolo County declines, the JPA will have to discuss options to address the issue with the wildlife agencies. But again, the easement template will not restrict farmers to alfalfa.

Michael Perrone: What is the landowner's obligation when the land becomes a mitigation receiving site if the easement doesn't require them to grow alfalfa?

Petrea: The easement only restricts conversion to orchards and vineyards. They do not have to grow alfalfa, but we are focusing our conservation efforts in areas where alfalfa is likely to be grown.

Chad: When you look at multiple species, you make different assessments. A landscape has higher value if it serves more species. You can score it that way.

Jim: That makes sense, but there may be times when you are maxed out on habitat for a particular species. So then you have to focus on another species.

Chad: Judgments about species differentiation should be left up to the Board and staff. The STAC should just score the habitat scientifically. You will introduce a bias otherwise.

Bruce Guelden: Alfalfa is a very thirsty crop. Does a farmer holding a conservation easement have priority for water in contracts for water with Yolo County?

Eric Paulsen: There are differences between surface water and other sources of water. I don't think they take into consideration what crop you have.

Petrea: Right now, the plan does not envision water supply priority for those who hold conservation easements. If there is no water, they will have to leave their fields fallow. We would have to report back to the agencies in this case.

Bruce: Lot of the alfalfa that is grown in Yolo County is being sent overseas to Taiwan, China, and Japan to feed their cows.

John: These considerations are beyond the scope of our plan.

Glen: Is there a metric for tree availability; a metric for tree species?

Jim: It has to be some specific tree species. It probably is possible to do it. But it depends where the trees are.

Charles Tyson: One of the important issues is to make this process attractive to landowners and farmers. My basic suggestion is to use examples so that they see what you're looking for. Make the process more user-friendly.

- Why exclude groundwater? It varies in many ways from other sources of water with regard to availability, cost, etc. It could be very valuable information in an application.
- Give an example for all of the items in the application, such as crop history (FSA fields). You are looking for general use of the property.
- What are the known covered species on the property?
- Provide access to the maps of Swainson's hawk occurrences, etc.
- Don't just specify alfalfa hay, also grass hay. Also rice.

Yvonne LeMaitre: Birds will adjust to new crops if we give them a change.

David Stroud: The ultimate success depends on how many landowners will submit themselves to this process. What is a passing grade? More important would be the easement document that farmer has to sign in perpetuity, provides restrictions. What kinds of resistance exist to this document? Are we going to debate this?

Petrea: We have an existing Swainson's hawk conservation easement agreement which is changing based on new wildlife agency requirements. There is a framework (passed out to Board on August 18). We had to go through water, mining, crops, etc. For example, use of rodenticides will be prohibited. We will have the new template in the next 2-3 months.

David: Conservation easements and mitigation arrangements have been formed nevertheless.

Petrea: Developers have the opportunity to separately go out and purchase an easement on property or purchase mitigation credits.

Glen: Each species has specific habitat needs. Birds have more options. I think this evaluation tool is correct to Swainson's hawk. But for other species, rice will be important, as well as other habitat considerations. There is a difference between ground water and surface water. Ground water actually takes energy to pump. Surface water is much more sustainable.

Chad: When we are looking at multiple species, will need to figure out how to score landscape in a different way.

Jim: A healthy agricultural environment is this diverse crop matrix that we have in Yolo County. Even orchards contribute to the diversity, as long as we retain the elements that support a particular species.

4. Update on Second Administrative Draft

Petrea: We have had a number of all-day technical meetings with wildlife staff to discuss chapters, issues, etc. Thanks to the agency staff, we are making progress.

Two major policy issues remain:

- The number of acres in conservation target if we are not going to restrict crops.
- How to treat lands that are already protected. We may need to elevate the standard of management of those lands.

Paul: Yolo County has been difficult to fit into the classic HCP/NCCP model. But we have all worked hard to achieve this. I think existing protected lands couldn't require a lot more effort in order to count. What about the lands outside the plans? These also affect the species. These issues will be more of a policy decision. But hopefully will recognize the history sound agricultural practices in Yolo County.

Petrea: Thanks for all the comments. We are going through the Second Draft chapter by chapter. I have contacted some of you already.

The entire document will be given to agencies and to the Advisory Committee from February 24-March 13. This is different from the Public Review period. That is when Chapter 8 will be available as well.

7. Update on the Local Conservation Strategy

The status of the LCS is the same as at the October meeting -- ICF has been directed to move forward with developing the scope and provide with cost estimates. They need to finish the Second Administrative draft first, however!

Chad: Have you decided whether LCS will have AMMs (Avoidance and Minimization Measures)?

Petrea: We need to see cost estimate first.

Jeanette: In the Conservation Strategy (Ch 5), preserving annual grasslands was listed as a conservation goal. Annual grasslands are by definition not native. We should discuss this.

Jim: Every HCP/NCCP in the state has the same conversation re objectives with regard to grasslands: what are they, what is their value? Some stems from the hawk, but other species as well.

Jeanette: That seems to imply that we need to maintain non-native grasslands for the next 50 years. A solution: Just say “grasslands” not “annual grasslands”. Just seems wrong (e.g. medusa head).

Jim: There is a problem with lumping grasslands together. For example, for the hawk and the kite, the models show that grasslands in the valley floor have more value than those in the Dunnigan Hills. We are thinking about how to distinguish them.

John Anderson: Lots of error arises from lumping them together. Many annual grasslands do not have value – they are where invasive species flourish.

Glen: The historical name was “California Prairie”, the dominant plants are not even grasses at all. The native grasses were creeping wild rye that provided habitat for Swainson’s hawk

Paul: These confusions are related to the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System (CWHR) and also GIS identification categories. There is wide variation between “good” annual grass and really “bad” annual grass. Maybe you could just have “grassland” goals and objectives (not “annual”).

Lynnel: I assume that you want the LCS to be consistent with the Yolo County General Plan? I believe there is something in the Plan about “grassland”. We should check and then confer with ICF about how to refer to grasslands in the conservation strategy.

Michael: I’m with Jeanette about non-native grasses; I think the protection of non-native grasses has no place in the plan.

John Anderson: We have data from 500 acres, also including forbs in a restoration project. These annual grasslands are in a constant state of flux: medusa-head, goat grass, false brome, are dominating and changing the species composition on large acreages.

9. Announcements and updates

John Hopkins: The wildlife agencies have just issued a 180-day emergency listing of the tri-colored blackbird. Does this mean they are likely to do a permanent listing?

Chad: Inevitable!

10. Adjournment to next meeting date: January 12, 2015