

Agriculture and the Yolo HCP/NCCP

Yolo HCP/NCCP Background

The Yolo Habitat Conservancy has prepared the Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (Yolo HCP/NCCP). The Yolo HCP/NCCP is a countywide conservation plan to provide Endangered Species Act permits and associated mitigation for infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, and levees) and development activities (e.g. agricultural facilities, housing, and commercial buildings) identified for construction over the next 50 years in the area.

The Yolo HCP/NCCP strikes a sensible balance between natural resource conservation and economic growth in the region. It will coordinate mitigation to maximize benefits to species, as well as conserve habitat above and beyond required mitigation for 12 identified species.

Emphasis on Agriculture

Yolo County's long history of responsible land use planning has directed growth to cities, thus resulting in contained urban areas and the preservation of extensive agricultural and open space lands. Many of the working farms and rangelands within the county provide important habitat for the Yolo HCP/NCCP's covered species by providing foraging, cover, and nesting habitat. Given the significant role agriculture plays in the provision of covered species habitat in Yolo County, the Yolo HCP/NCCP conservation strategy places a strong emphasis on the purchase of habitat conservation easements on agricultural lands from willing sellers.



Conservation Easements

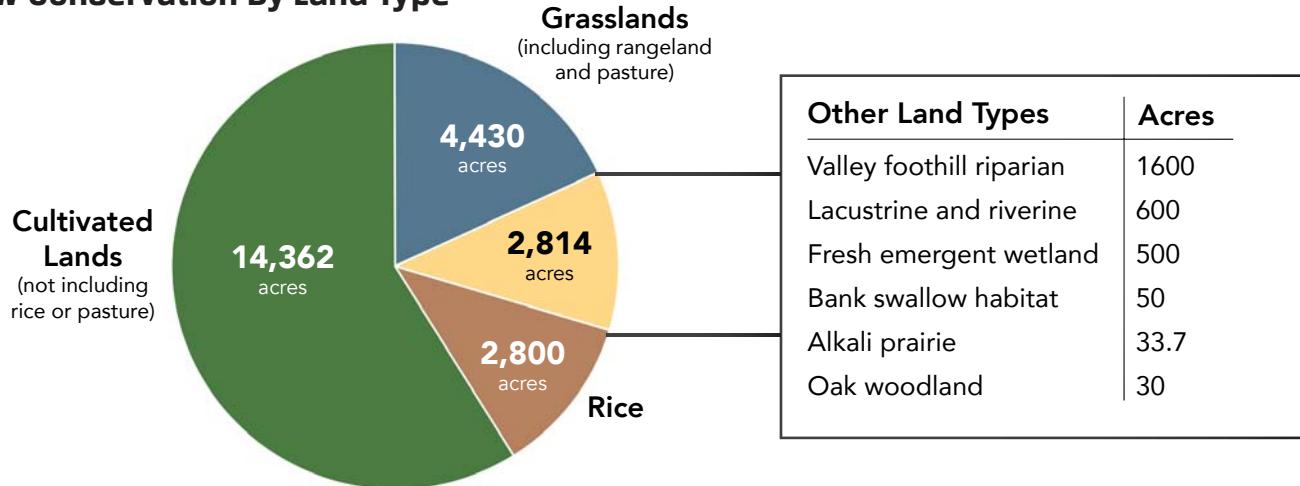
The Yolo HCP/NCCP relies on the voluntary establishment of conservation easements on lands that provide habitat value for HCP/NCCP covered species and their habitats. The primary types of land that comprise the conservation commitments of the Yolo HCP/NCCP include: cultivated lands (non-rice row crops), rice, grasslands, valley foothill riparian, fresh emergent wetland, lacustrine and riverine, oak woodland, and alkali prairie.

The Conservancy recognizes that most the lands identified for conservation are actively managed agricultural lands that provide habitat value due to existing management practices. While all conservation easements associated with the Yolo HCP/NCCP will prohibit the planting of orchards and vineyards, conservation easements placed on existing agricultural lands are intended to encourage ongoing operations that provide habitat value to the 12 HCP/NCCP covered species with minimum disruption to routine agricultural practices. The Conservancy will work with willing landowners to jointly agree to wildlife-friendly agricultural practices in a management plan that accompanies each individual easement. Conservation easements typically sell for 30%-60% of the fair market price of the property, depending on the ecological value of the property as covered species habitat.

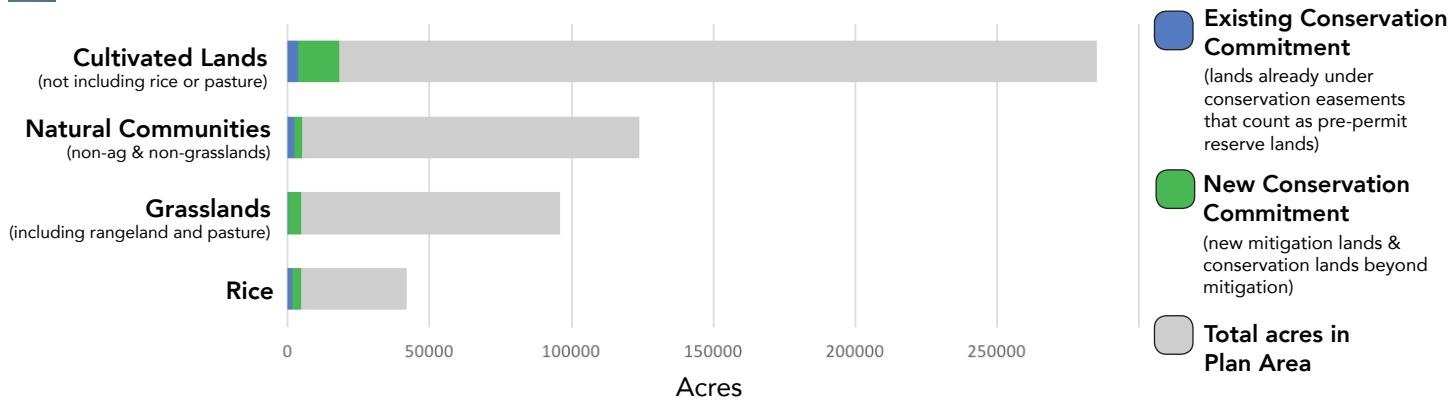
Visit yolohabitatconservancy.org/landowners for the Conservation Easement Application, and see Section 7.5.5, Conservation Easements for additional information about conservation easements.

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New Conservation By Land Type



New Conservation Compared to Plan Area



While the Yolo HCP/NCCP conservation strategy will help provide a more comprehensive network of lands to protect covered species relative to standard project-by-project mitigation that would occur in the absence of the HCP/NCCP, the total acres committed to new conservation is still only a fraction of the total acreage of each land type identified for conservation.

In addition, 8,000 of the total acres identified as Yolo HCP/NCCP conservation commitments are lands with established conservation easements. These lands are identified in the Yolo HCP/NCCP as pre-permit reserve lands and are included in the Yolo HCP/NCCP in part to acknowledge existing conservation commitments in Yolo County. By including these pre-permit reserve lands as part of the overall Yolo HCP/NCCP conservation commitment, the properties also are eligible to participate in any grant programs and/or incentive programs for which other HCP/NCCP conservation lands are eligible if the landowner decides to enroll their property in the HCP/NCCP reserve system. This may include programs that provide funding for hedgerow establishment, payments for farmers that plant specific crop types, or other incentives for conducting specific wildlife enhancement practices. Landowners are not obligated to enroll their property in the HCP/NCCP reserve system.

Mitigation Receiving Sites

Establishing a mitigation receiving site is a means of preserving habitat, conserving agricultural land, and potentially bringing income to landowners through the sale of mitigation credits. Developers of projects in Yolo County that decrease or impair habitat may purchase mitigation credits provided by a local receiving site to offset the impacts of development.

The application to become a Mitigation Receiving site is the same as the Conservation Easement Application and can be accessed at www.yolohabitatconservancy.org/landowners.

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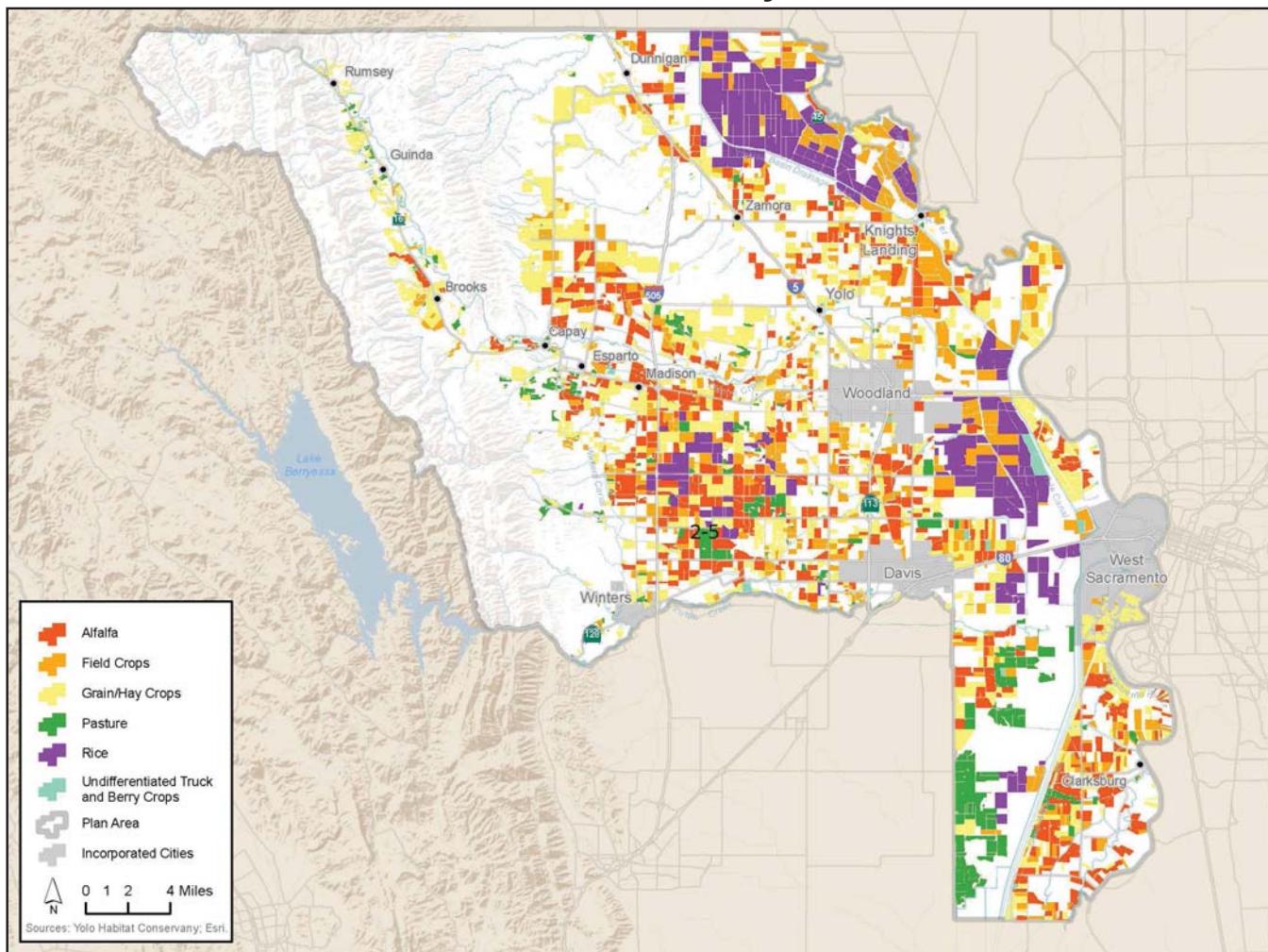
Covered Activities on Conservation Easement Lands

Normal and routine agricultural practices on conservation easement lands in the Yolo HCP/NCCP reserve system are covered activities under this HCP/NCCP, provided they are consistent with the associated conservation easement and follow avoidance and minimization measures described in Section 4.3.5, Avoidance and Minimization Measures within the Reserve System that are applicable to the covered species whose habitat is identified for conservation in the easement area. Covered activities also include habitat management activities to maintain suitable habitat conditions, restoration, enhancement, and creation of habitat; construction and maintenance of facilities necessary for the management, maintenance, and access control of conservation easement lands (e.g., fences, stock ponds, access roads); control of invasive nonnative species by mechanical means or other means; and all other management and monitoring activities described in Chapter 6 of the Yolo HCP/NCCP.

Covered Activities Associated with Agricultural Economic Development

The Yolo HCP/NCCP recognizes there are future agricultural commercial and agricultural industrial development activities within Yolo County that will require take coverage. The Yolo HCP/NCCP provides coverage for 332 acres of activities associated with agricultural commercial and agricultural industrial development that is consistent with the Yolo County General Plan and under the discretionary authority of Yolo County. Agricultural industrial uses include agricultural research, processing, and storage; supply; service; crop dusting; agricultural chemical and equipment sales; and surface mining. Agricultural commercial uses include roadside stands, wineries, farm-based tourism (e.g., u-pick, dude ranches, lodging), horseshows, rodeos, crop-based seasonal events, and ancillary restaurants and/or stores.

Distribution of Cultivated Land Seminatural Community in the Plan Area



Neighboring Landowner Protection Program

The Yolo HCP/NCCP provides the Neighboring Landowner Protection Program as an option for landowners with actively farmed properties located adjacent to Yolo HCP/NCCP reserve lands. Covered species populations may increase because of implementation of conservation activities under the plan, particularly in areas where habitat is restored and populations of these species may move to adjacent lands that are not part of the reserve system. In recognition of this potential, the Yolo HCP/NCCP includes a process by which neighboring landowners may receive assurances through certificates of inclusion under the Federal Endangered Species Act and the Natural Community Conservation Plan Act permits. Such landowners can opt into a voluntary program from which they can receive permit coverage for incidental take of endangered species for routine agricultural activities that occur during the Yolo HCP/NCCP permit term. Coverage under the program is for four covered species: California tiger salamander, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, giant garter snake, and western pond turtle. The Neighboring Landowner Protection Program only covers take of endangered species above the baseline number of species that existed prior to the establishment of the neighboring Yolo HCP/NCCP conservation easement.

Benefits

- A voluntary program administered locally.
- Provides protection against enforcement actions related to the take of endangered species above baseline populations.
- Provides “no surprises” assurances to landowners, creating an “insurance policy” for the Endangered Species Act compliance.

Process

1. **Conduct Baseline Surveys.** The landowner will contract with a qualified biologist (or the Conservancy) to conduct surveys for the species for which they are seeking coverage, and identify all occurrences of the species and habitat on a property map.
2. **Identify covered practices.** The landowner will provide a written description of the ongoing and expected future agricultural practices on the property.
3. **Pay a fee.** The landowner will pay a fee to cover the Conservancy’s enrollment cost.

Details about eligibility and estimated acreage are described in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.4, Neighboring Landowner Protection Program. Details of the application process for coverage are described in Chapter 7, Section 7.7.1, Neighboring Landowner Protection Program.

Costs

- Landowner pays for baseline surveys and property enrollment costs.
- Conservancy uses a portion of its incidental take permit coverage from the Yolo HCP/NCCP for the neighboring landowner’s property.

