
Chapter 14. Habitat, Wildlife, and Natural Areas

BACKGROUND

The Davis area does not consist of pristine biological conditions in that most of the non-urbanized land is currently used for agriculture. Areas that provide habitat value are: marshy wetlands in slough channels; irrigation and drainage ditches; riparian woodlands along the North and South Forks of Putah Creek; the old channel of Willow Slough; parts of Dry Slough; and ponds.

The valley landscape that once existed in the Planning Area was predominantly a mixture of native valley grassland types, with small groves and scattered individuals of valley oak and strips of riparian woodland (cottonwood, box elder, willow, oak, sycamore) along natural drainageways. There were probably significant thickets of elderberry, willow, native blackberry, and other riparian plants in the lowlands and along watercourses.

The Planning Area is situated in a strategic position in the Pacific Flyway, a major migration route for waterfowl and other birds in North America. Although the area has little natural habitat for such species, its location and the presence of water in the Yolo Bypass and Putah Creek give high potential for natural community restoration. A current list of special status plant and wildlife species in Yolo County is available through the California Department of Fish and Game.

Yolo County, the cities in Yolo County, and the California Department of Fish and Game are currently working on a County-Wide Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), a 20-year plan that provides a framework for long term habitat conservation. The two primary goals of the plan are to mitigate the loss of biological resources due to urban development, and to maintain agricultural values in areas where mitigation will occur. By viewing the County area as a single large ecological system, the HCP intends to provide for species survival at a level that would not occur within isolated pockets of habitat. Implementation of the HCP is dependent upon innovative public and private sector partnerships and creative management strategies, and implementation costs are to be reduced by the use of public lands when feasible.

Some of the key areas managed for wildlife habitat value in and near the Planning Area are the UC Davis Putah Creek Riparian Reserve, 125 acres, which supports riparian habitats for highly diverse plants and animals; the UC Davis Arboretum, 119 acres, with 1,400 species of plants (not all native); the Audubon / Hunt-Wesson Hawk-Owl Reserve, in the northern portion of the planning area west of the County landfill site; the City-owned South Fork Preserve on Putah Creek; the demonstration wetlands east of the Wastewater Pollution Control Plant; and the State-owned Yolo Basin Wetlands Project in the Yolo Bypass, directly east of the Planning Area. In total, approximately 4,600 acres in the Davis Planning Area are currently managed

for enhanced habitat value. In addition, the City continues to participate in the establishment of a 50,000 acre national wildlife refuge in the Yolo Bypass that stretches from Putah Creek to Liberty Island in the delta.

GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

GOAL HAB 1. Identify, protect, restore, enhance and create natural habitats. Protect and improve biodiversity consistent with the natural biodiversity of the region.

Policy HAB 1.1 Protect existing natural habitat areas, including designated Natural Habitat Areas.

Standards

- a. Heritage oak trees and City-designated signature trees shall be protected. Sensitive biological resources should be protected .
- b. Project design shall demonstrate that avoidance of sensitive resources has been integrated into project design. Where avoidance is not feasible, the project proponent shall compensate for the loss or disturbance within Yolo County. The type and amount of compensation shall be determined in conjunction with the appropriate local, state, and/or federal regulatory agency involved.
- c. Active recreation facilities should be minimized within natural habitat areas.
- d. Recreation or interpretive facilities within natural areas should be designed to be site-sensitive and minimally intrusive. Public access into Sensitive Habitat Areas should be limited.
- e. New developments shall incorporate setbacks from creeks and channels.
- f. Restoration plans are required for all habitats that are to be restored in new development areas.
- g. Storm-retention ponds and drainage ponds that have become wildlife habitats should be restored as habitat.
- h. Develop a list of wildlife species that should be encouraged or protected. A map should be developed that indicates the areas where these species should be encouraged or protected.
- i. The City shall require a biological survey be prepared by a qualified biologist for proposed development areas that may contain sensitive

resources as defined by the City or appropriate state or federal regulatory agencies. The biological study shall be prepared as a requirement of the environmental assessment of a given project unless the City's Planning Director determines, based on previous studies or other evidence, that the site's current state would preclude the finding of sensitive resources. Agricultural use or plowing of a site does not eliminate the probability of sensitive resources. Such studies, when required, shall include:

- surveys and mapping of special-status plants and wildlife during the appropriate identification periods;
- mapping and quantification of sensitive habitat loss; and
- delineation and quantification of waters of the U.S., including vernal pools, swales, alkali wetlands, seasonal wetlands, and other wetlands shall be done using the current USACE wetland delineation manual.

For areas of non-native grassland, rural, developed, or agricultural lands that are determined to contain no special-status species, inclusions of alkali grassland, meadow and scrub, native perennial grassland, or wetlands, no further mitigation will be required. If sensitive habitats are identified, please refer to the mitigation measure(s) below pertaining to that resource to avoid, minimize, or compensate significant effects on these resources accordingly.

- j. If a biological study of a site determines the presence of sensitive biological resources, the project proponent will retain a qualified biologist, approved by the agency(s) with regulatory responsibility, to monitor construction activities in sensitive biological resource areas.
- k. Sensitive biological resources located in or adjacent to the construction area will be protected by placing orange construction barrier fencing, or stakes and flags, including buffer zone (where appropriate and depending on the type of resource). Adjacent resources that may require protection include oak woodland, riparian woodland and scrub vegetation, drainages, vernal pools and swales, other wetlands, native grassland, special-status species populations, and elderberry shrubs.

Actions

- l. Develop and implement an Urban Wildlife Program to coordinate habitat protection/expansion and wildlife conservation.
- m. Maintain an inventory and map of locations of special status habitat types and special status species within the Davis Planning Area.
- n. Pursue opportunities for the acquisition of wildlife habitat and natural resource areas, using the map of special status habitat types described under Action HAB 1.1 as a guide to priority order of acquisition sites.
- o. Seek external sources of funding for habitat enhancement and acquisition.
- p. Encourage the University to protect natural habitat areas on campus.
- q. Maintain the City-owned South Fork Preserve site as natural habitat and compatible agriculture with public access limited to certain portions of the site so as to minimize impacts to sensitive areas.

Policy HAB 1.2 Enhance and restore natural areas and create new wildlife habitat areas.

Standards

- a. Native plants should be used wherever possible in public and private landscaping.
- b. Storm-retention ponds, drainage ponds, groundwater recharge areas, channels, and other similar areas should be designated and managed as wildlife habitats when appropriate and environmentally sound.

Note: See Action HAZ 4.5a.

- c. Landscaping should provide wildlife habitat where appropriate.
- d. Hedgerows and other features to provide habitat for beneficial insects and wildlife are encouraged within the Urban Agricultural Transition Area and other agricultural areas.
- e. As a means to promote safety of habitat areas from toxic materials, new habitat areas should be designated on non-agricultural lands or on agricultural lands that are in organic production.

Actions

- f. Cooperate with other governmental agencies, the University, and citizens' groups in restoring natural areas and habitats that have been lost or degraded. Preserve these areas as habitat and scenic areas, and, where appropriate, for passive recreation.
- g. Implement a program of habitat enhancement in the existing drainage ponds and other appropriate areas within the Urban Agricultural Transition Area for migratory wetland wildlife.
- h. Implement the Wetlands Demonstration Project associated with the City's wastewater treatment plant. This should be done in a manner that does not impose restrictions on adjacent agricultural operations.
- i. Continue to work with community groups such as Tree Davis to organize tree planting activities.

Policy HAB 1.3 Commit adequate City resources and staff time so as to protect habitat and other natural resources.

Actions

- a. Continue to utilize City staff to work towards conservation of natural resources.

Policy HAB 1.4 Preserve and protect scenic resources.

Actions

- a. Study and implement options for the preservation and protection of scenic resources.

GOAL HAB 2. Increase public awareness of habitat, wildlife and sensitive species.

Policy HAB 2.1 Develop environmental educational programs and public access areas and programs to allow viewing of wildlife and habitat through controlled interactions of people with natural areas.

Standards

- a. The sensitivity of wildlife habitat and the inherent conflicts in providing public access to habitat areas should be considered in all site design or management plans for natural areas.

Actions

- b. Develop programs to provide education about plant and animal habitats, particularly those of native or local plants and animals.
- c. Provide and distribute to schools and teachers information regarding City environmental programs in wildlife habitat creation and wildlife protection.
- d. Establish information walks and observation days for habitat and wildlife education.
- e. Include youth, school groups and families in actual preparation, construction and upkeep of nature areas and recreational areas.
- f. Provide educational material and signage that provides for enhanced enjoyment and understanding of habitat areas.