

# Draft Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan released for public comment

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy** From page A1 | June 23, 2017

A draft plan aimed at protecting Yolo County's natural habitats and sensitive species over the next 50 years will be the topic of discussion at an upcoming Board of Supervisors meeting as well as at a public meeting scheduled for next week in Davis.

The Yolo Habitat and Conservation Plan and Natural Community Conservation Plan was released on June 1 for a 90-day public comment period. A draft environmental review document accompanied the release of the draft plan and the conservancy will accept comments on both documents until Aug. 30.

The countywide conservation plan will provide Endangered Species Act permits and associated mitigation for infrastructure (including roads, bridges and levees) and development activities (such as agricultural facilities, housing and commercial buildings) identified for construction over the next 50 years in Yolo County.

The plan aims to coordinate mitigation to maximize benefits to 12 identified sensitive species, as well as conserve additional habitat while supporting agricultural sustainability.

Species protection and mitigation is required by state and federal law, but by establishing a county plan, Yolo County assumes local control of this process, officials said.

In the absence of a local plan, state and federal agencies would direct where and how habitat is protected.

The Yolo County plan, officials say, will be a model for other communities throughout California in its promotion of the conjunctive use of land for both agriculture and habitat.

"We intend to demonstrate that protection of endangered species can be accomplished hand-in-hand with promotion of agriculture and a strong farm economy," said Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis, chair of the Yolo Habitat Conservancy.

Petrea Marchand, executive director of the conservancy, added that "the Yolo plan strikes a sensible balance between natural resource conservation, agricultural land protection and economic growth in the region."

"The conservancy achieved this balance through a collaborative process that included not only the state and federal government, but dedicated members of the

environmental, agricultural and development communities in Yolo County,” Marchand said.

The Yolo Habitat Conservancy operates under a joint powers authority consisting of the county and the cities of Davis, Woodland, Winters and West Sacramento, with UC Davis participating as a non-voting member.

The conservancy last year came under fire from the Yolo County grand jury, which in a report titled “Yolo Habitat Conservancy: A Never Ending Story,” criticized the length of time and money that had gone into creating the plan. However, the grand jury’s report, in turn, was sharply criticized by Provenza and other local government officials as being deeply flawed.

In a letter to the grand jury, Provenza said he was “deeply disappointed that the report ... contains statements of opinion that are either unfounded or contrary to evidence that I believe is in your possession.”

Provenza and others defended the work of the conservancy as well as that of Marchand, who also expressed disappointment that the grand jury chose to release its report months before the final draft was expected to be released.

In any case, the report was released earlier this month and was praised by Davis City Councilman Lucas Frerichs, the conservancy’s vice chair.

“The completion of the Yolo plan will improve outcomes for endangered species through a science-based conservation strategy, as well as partnerships with local conservation organizations and city and county open space programs,” Frerichs said. “The board of directors is proud to bring this innovative approach to Endangered Species Act implementation to Yolo County.”

For more information about the conservancy or to review and comment on the Yolo plan or related environmental review documents, visit [www.yolohabitatconservancy.org](http://www.yolohabitatconservancy.org).

In addition to providing comment online, members of the public will have additional opportunities to do so in person next week. Upcoming public meetings include:

\* Tuesday, June 27, 1 p.m., Board of Supervisors meeting, 625 Court St., Woodland;

\* Wednesday, June 28, 7 p.m., West Sacramento City Council meeting, 1110 West Capitol Ave., West Sacramento; and

\* Thursday, June 29, 6:30 p.m., Davis Senior Center, 646 A St., Davis.

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