

# County, city approve Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan

**By Anne Ternus-Bellamy**

WOODLAND — The Yolo County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan on Tuesday, one week after the Davis City Council did the same.

Both the city and county, along with the cities of West Sacramento, Winters and Woodland, are members of the Joint Powers Authority — the Yolo Habitat Conservancy — which created the plan and must now approve it.

The Winters City Council approved the plan on May 15 while the West Sacramento and Woodland city councils will consider the plan in the next couple of weeks.

The habitat conservation plan will provide Endangered Species Act permits and associated mitigation for infrastructure and development projects over the next 50 years throughout the county.

The plan aims to coordinate mitigation efforts to benefit 12 sensitive species, conserve habitat and support the county's agricultural economy. Currently, public agencies and private developers pay for loss of endangered species habitat on a species-by-species basis. Under the new plan, one fee would cover 12 species and be assessed by acre.

The new plan also eliminates the need to seek approval from both state and federal agencies, instead providing a streamlined permitting process with permits being issued locally.

If all JPA members approve the plan as expected, the new permits will be issued beginning this summer, possibly in June, according to Petrea Marchand, executive director of the conservancy.

The plan — at an estimated cost of \$406 million over 50 years — will result in new habitat reserves, thanks largely to Yolo County farmers and ranchers willing to sell conservation easements or establish mitigation sites on their property. Easements can be donated or sold by land owners who still retain property rights, including the ability to farm and live on the land.

More than 66 percent of the funding needed would come from mitigation fees. State, federal and other sources would provide 21 percent of funding, while local agencies like the Davis Open Space Program, Cache Creek Area Plan and Lower Putah Creek would provide another 10 percent. Endowment funding and other sources would cover the remaining costs.

Protected thanks to all of that would be 12 local species, including a plant (the palmate-bracted bird's beak); an invertebrate (the valley elderberry longhorn beetle); an amphibian (the California tiger salamander); two reptiles (the Western pond turtle and giant garter snake); and seven birds (the Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, western yellow-billed cuckoo, Western burrowing owl, Least Bell's vireo, bank swallow and tricolored blackbird).

County supervisors praised the plan Tuesday as well as the years-long effort to reach the point of final approval.

"I'm really proud of this plan," said Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis, who chairs the conservancy. "We all know that the mitigation has to occur — it's required by state and federal law — but it's going to be controlled locally and done in a way that's respectful of agriculture and includes agriculture.

"This is really probably the first plan that has so emphasized the protection of agriculture along with habitat. They don't compete for protection but they can go forward together. We're doing it in our own way and this is something we can all be proud of."

Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis noted that "most of these habitat conservation plans rely on large-scale development... We didn't do that. We did not set out with the traditional concept of funding this plan through those kinds of development. Rather we are bootstrapping on the existing habitat conservation efforts that are already underway."

"This is a good place to be," he added. "We're doing it together ... to protect some valuable habitat for generations to come."

The West Sacramento City Council will hold a public hearing on the plan on Wednesday and the Woodland City Council on June 5.

Learn more at <https://www.yolohabitatconservancy.org>

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