

Yolo County Parks Master Plan  
County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife  
Advisory Committee Meeting # 1

**Meeting Summary**

Yolo County Planning and Public Works Department  
Cache Creek Conference Room  
292 West Beamer Street  
Woodland, CA 95695  
May 10, 2004  
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

**Advisory Committee Members Present:** Sally Barrett, Robert Beggs, Diane Colborn, Andrew Fulks (Chair), Gerald Hartwig, Chuck King, Don Morrill, Eric Natti, Meri Stratton-Phelps, Mary Schiedt.

**County Staff Present:** Gary Clifford, Parks Supervisor; Brett Williams, Parks and Resources Coordinator.

**Consultant Staff Present:** Pete Dangermond and Brian Collett, The Dangermond Group; Chad Roberts and Bruce Kemp, Roberts, Kemp & Associates LLC; and Rob Thayer, Bioregional Planner.

**Agenda Item:** “Introduction and Discussion of Countywide Master Plan Process with The Dangermond Group.”

**Supplemental Materials:** Color photographs of County landscapes were circulated by the Advisory Committee Chair; the Chair also provided Consultants with a photocopy of an annotated topographical map depicting BLM easements north of Monticello Dam. Consultants posted an illustration of possible planning zones and a County map of projected urban growth areas.

## **Introduction by Consultant Team**

Prior to the main discussion, the Consultant Team briefly described project activities to date, presented an initial concept for organizing County regions, presented highlights of a County park properties tour, and suggested a focus for the meeting’s discussion.

Following an introduction of the Consultant Team members by Pete Dangermond, Brian Collett presented an initial conceptual model for organizing parks and resource areas in the County by five geographical “zones.” A topographic profile of a generalized transect across the County from west to east was used to illustrate these five areas. This preliminary concept is expected to evolve as the Countywide Parks Master Plan planning process continues.

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Zone 1: Blue Ridge, Cache Creek, Putah Creek. The western part of the County, including Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park area, the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge, and the upper watersheds of Cache and Putah Creeks.

Zone 2: Dunnigan Hills / North County. The north-central part of the County, including the community of Dunnigan and surrounding areas.

Zone 3: Central Valley Ag & Urban Lands / Lower Watersheds. The south-central part of the County, including lower reaches of Cache and Putah Creek and areas in proximity to Davis and Woodland.

Zone 4: Sutter & Yolo Bypass Areas. Areas of the County within and directly adjacent to the Bypass floodway.

Zone 5: Sacramento River Areas. The eastern margin of the County, including the river and areas in proximity to West Sacramento and Clarksburg.

Rob Thayer provided an overview of a County park properties tour conducted by the consultants and County staff on 22 April 2004. The following are excerpts from a wide range of highlights:

- “Imagability.” The concept of a common visual identity – e.g., consistent signage and representative “icons” – for County parks and open spaces is important to creating a cohesive system.
- The boat access at Knights Landing appears to receive much use, even on weekdays.
- There are “context questions” with respect to the parkland identity of Helvetia Oak Grove.
- The desire to go camping in Yolo County appears to be a major, unmet demand; development of new campgrounds seems possible; in some areas, such as lower Putah Creek and Nichols Park, campground development should be pursued only after a tree-planting program is successful.
- Some areas have problems with invasive plant species such as arundo, also known as giant reed or giant cane (*Arundo donax*); tamarisk, also known as salt cedar (*Tamarix* spp.); and tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*).
- Portions of Cache Creek sites, including parking areas, have been “privatized” by concessionaires, who need to accommodate fairly large groups; there may be a need to find alternative concession areas for some activities.
- County lands at some parks, such as Otis Ranch, are very steep and therefore are limited for recreation use.
- Nichols Park – and the uses in the park – changed dramatically after the flood, when much of the park got washed away.

Bruce Kemp mentioned another task that is currently underway by the consultants, which is to obtain and review comparable, comprehensive park planning documents.

As other Team members had stated previously, Mr. Kemp suggested that the main purpose of the evening's meeting was to obtain ideas and input from Advisory Committee members regarding their views on the present condition of County park properties, their visions regarding desired future of the County park system, and their initial guidance regarding development of the county-wide Master Plan. At this early stage in the planning process, "visions" can be expressed with minimal regard to financial, technical, regulatory, or other constraints.

## **Discussion by the Committee**

The discussion that ensued was generally directed toward each of the five planning zones in turn, preceded by general comments regarding the park system as a whole.

Advisory Committee members indicated that the zone approach appeared to be a useful concept for organizing County resource areas. Mr. Fulks recalled that a similar, if simpler, approach was considered in earlier comprehensive parks planning efforts, based on mountainous areas, the valley, creeks and sloughs, and the Sacramento River and Delta area. Advisory Committee members saw that planning zones also have relationships to vegetation associations or habitat types. Ms. Barrett commented that she approved the zone concept particularly because it recognizes that there are important habitat resources in each zone.

The following is a summary of major points in the discussion. The order of presentation in this summary does not necessarily follow the order of presentation during the meeting. Statements are attributed to individuals where applicable; other summary text may represent more than one speaker. Opinions expressed by individual members of the Advisory Committee are not presumed to necessarily represent consensus views of the Committee as a whole.

### **System as a Whole**

- Ms. Barrett commented that parks and open space areas basically serve two distinct needs: (1) as amenities that enhance the lives of County residents (2) as an economic engine for the County – for example, by attracting visitors to come here. Although sometimes opposing, both of these basic functions should be considered.
- Visitors to County resource lands need to understand what they are seeing, so interpretation is important. Resource interpretation considerations are applicable in parklands across all five zones.
- Park appearance and visual identity should be consistent throughout the park system. On the other hand, as Ms. Schiedt suggested, it may be better to define "icons" and signature images for County parklands later, as derived from a working park system.
- Mr. Natti suggested that one approach to parkland development may be to consider what we *don't* have. This could be defined in terms of under-

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represented ecosystems or in terms of under-represented services to communities. Where should we put our energy to improve outdoor recreation in the County?

- What draws people here may not always be what we might first think. Mr. Natti observed that people come to Yolo County to escape the Bay Area – and what they are seeking is to get some heat and sunshine. Visitor services could capitalize on this (e.g., with more areas near water).
- Mr. King emphasized three major concepts that he believes are essential to this effort:
  - *Identification.* Consistent and visible signage is needed to clearly identify properties as County parks (Elkhorn Park, for example, needs to be better identified).
  - *Interpretation.* Interpretive information boards are useful.
  - *Facilities.* Visitor services are needed in parks, such as water, restrooms, and shade.
- Mr. Fulks suggested that among the trends to consider is the future growth of the region, as recently modeled through SACOG's Blueprint process. Yolo County is important to the region for its open space, visual quality, and agriculture (including ag-tourism). As growth occurs, changing ownerships could lead to ranches and farms becoming home sites, as has occurred in Solano County. The County supports the preservation of working landscapes.
- One focus could be on trying to find large parcels of land, with connections to other public lands, and not too far from population centers. We seem to be in need of more recreation destinations within one hour's drive of County population centers.
- Under-represented landscapes include blue oak woodland, rock formations, hot springs, and cultural use areas (e.g., old shepherd huts, Native American habitation areas).
- A wide variety of existing and potential recreational activities should be considered in park system planning.
- Based on his experience in other areas, Mr. Dangermond recommended proceeding with caution with respect to planning for OHV use areas; OHV planning can become somewhat volatile in some communities.
- Equestrian trails and trailheads are needed in most if not all zones.
- The park master-planning process could also be a conservation planning process, identifying areas of conservation that should be designated for protection, including the preservation of high-value ecosystem elements. Many ecologically important landscape elements in the County are not currently represented adequately in County parklands.

## **Zone 1**

The following points were made during the discussion of Zone 1-related matters:

- Mr. Fulks commented that the County should use County parklands as “gateways” to other public lands:
  - In the Cache Creek basin, link from the vicinity of Road 53 to BLM lands.
  - In the Putah Creek basin, link from Putah Creek No. 4 to the Bobcat Ranch.
  - Continue the linkage across the BLM lands at Berryessa Peak.
- Mr. Natti continued this thread by suggesting a trail linkage across the Blue Ridge to Lake Berryessa, and that the BOR lands in Napa County should be considered in this effort. For example, under development is a 165-mile trail around Lake Berryessa. With the right combination of trailheads and trails, it would be possible to have a “wilderness experience” in Yolo and Napa Counties, starting from and returning to an appropriately located staging area in Yolo County.
- Expansion of the Cache Creek Casino has generated more traffic, which may have impacts on County recreation; it may even be a deterrent. But now that it is here, we need to accept it as a given, and we should re-think how to work with them. The casino could be a resource as a future teaming partner for outdoor recreation activities. They may even wish to “diversify” their resort offerings by including outdoor recreation activities.
- Ms. Stratton-Phelps suggested that the County should try to work with the Casino. For example, would the Casino be interested in contributing funds to parks and recreation, allowing use of their lands for recreation, or participating in future County interpretive programs about Native Americans?
- Opportunity areas for possible County parkland in this zone may include the first ridge in front of the Blue Ridge, owing to transportation issues in the Capay Valley. Mr. Natti suggested that acquisition priorities in this region be based on representative ecosystems within County Park units.
- Mr. Beggs suggested that additional recreation opportunities should be provided in the foothill areas south of the Capay Valley:
  - The general area of Capay and Esparto; and
  - Areas in the vicinity of Buckeye Creek.

Mr. Beggs suggested that these opportunities would best be focused on low-impact uses such as remote camping. Even such recreational uses as these would require substantial County investment in developing facilities.

- The owners of Bobcat Ranch are reportedly interested in conservation, and this large parcel has been the subject of negotiations related to public acquisition, first with the Yolo Land Trust, then with the Wildlife Conservation Board.

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- Road 53, which may be closed in winter, provides access to lands having considerable public recreation potential. Other locations of potential interest include access to Bear Creek and access to Fiske Peak.
- Regarding the above, however, this planning effort should avoid drawing targets on specific private properties; rather, the idea should be to pick desirable types of lands, based on resources, under-represented landscapes, connections to other public lands (e.g., connections to Blue Ridge Trail), or other criteria.
- Many recreational venues or activities in the County tend to be linear, particularly in Zone 1. To encourage people to leave their cars in favor of hiking, rafting, and equestrian trails, Ms. Shiedt suggested that parking areas are needed at strategic starting and ending points to allow shuttles.
- Mr. Fulks commented that the majority of people in the 400-person Yolo Hiker club who go on hiking trips come from population centers within the County, such as Woodland. People want to get out of town to go hiking, but they do not want to have to go too far away to do it.
- Yolo County park properties could be staging areas for hikes in the Blue Ridge Berryessa Area. The 1968 plan refers to the Blue Ridge Trail and access connections to BLM land.
- A pedestrian bridge across Cache Creek would be of benefit to hikers, bikers, and equestrians, Mr. Fulks said, because it would connect to an existing, graded BLM road on the opposite side from County property at the middle Cache Creek Canyon site.
- From the Upper Canyon site, a link to the former Payne Ranch (BLM) could be considered.
- At the Otis Ranch site, there could be a trail up to the Blue Ridge Trail from the parking lot, and smaller loop trails along the Otis knolls, suitable for families. It was also mentioned that CDF graded a road on the Otis property that could serve as a trail.
- There is demand for OHV use areas in Zone 1.

## **Zone 2**

The following points were made during the discussion of Zone 2-related matters:

- The Dunnigan geologic formation and the landscapes in this area provide good interpretation opportunities.
- “Dunnigan” is now a wine appellation. Mr. Thayer referred to a recent article in “Outside Traveler” magazine that described Yolo County as (potentially) the “next Napa” (winery touring area).
- Natural resources are important in this area, particularly in the Dunnigan Hills and stream corridor areas to the north. Particularly important are riparian

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areas, vernal pools, and habitat for raptors and listed or proposed species such as the California tiger salamander.

- The community of Dunnigan is a potential growth area, with a new auction yard and truck stop planned.
- Zone 2 may be a possible location for hang gliding and use of ultra light aircraft; it should also be considered for potential OHV areas.
- Off-creek water storage facilities have been considered in this area in the past and are being re-evaluated. This could mean future joint-use opportunities for water-related recreation activities.
- Arbuckle Road (in Zones 1 and 2) is a good mountain bike road; this area has a history of being used by Native Americans for gathering plant materials.

### **Zone 3**

The following points were made during the discussion of Zone 3-related matters:

- Re-use of former gravel mining areas should consider recreational activities. Ponds could be created or re-filled. Mr. Hartwig suggested that previously disturbed gravel mining areas could be designated for OHV use. Mr. Fulks pointed out that being below-grade could help reduce noise associated with such use. There is demand for OHV use areas in Zone 3.
- Mr. Natti commented that some sort of regional park seems to be needed in the vicinity of Woodland; a Grasslands-type park along Cache Creek may be a possibility.
- The Conaway Ranch, which is currently identified for possible acquisition by the County and other public agencies, may be a consideration for future park and open space uses.
- Seasonal use of the Cache Creek Settling Basin may be worth exploring; further information is needed regarding U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' control and management of the site.
- Dedicated equestrian trails would be desirable; lots of people with horses live or visit in this area.
- Here and in Zone 4, it may be worth exploring the potential for using existing levee systems as locations for foot, bike, or equestrian trails. Loop trails may be possible, using levees along Putah Creek, adjacent to the Yolo Basin, and around Woodland. Much of the distance could be on lands in public ownership.
- In Supervisorial District 2, the smallest of all districts, the only public land belongs to UC Davis, Mr. Fulks said. UCD may be interested in collaborations (e.g., with Prop 40 funds) with the County to improve open space, recreation, and conservation uses along Putah Creek.

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- Willow Slough may be an area worth exploring for possible park and open space uses.

### **Zone 4**

The following points were made during the discussion of Zone 4-related matters:

- County could look at park land development near and in conjunction with the Fremont Weir State Wildlife Area.
- Parks could be developed like “a string of pearls” along a corridor. However, enhancement of amenity values may lead to development of up-scale housing. As Mr. Thayer pointed out, a County-wide park system benefits all County residents and add value for all landowners.
- Creating new parklands in the vicinity of unincorporated communities depends on the initiative from the community itself. The County can then assist with planning, engineering, and other expertise, as Mr. Fulks noted. Assessment districts could be considered for unincorporated communities; however, as Ms. Barrett said, it again depends on the initiative of the community.

### **Zone 5**

The following points were made during the discussion of Zone 5-related matters:

- This planning effort should consider ways to provide recreation areas for people in West Sacramento. Ms. Stratton-Phelps suggested that we should consult with the City of West Sacramento regarding parkland development, for example, along the ship channel.
- Ms. Stratton-Phelps also commented that rowing clubs are another user group in need of facilities. Rowing requires quiet water away from other activities.
- There is also a concentration of equestrian uses in this area, too, as Ms. Stratton-Phelps also pointed out. The levees along the shipping channel or along the toe drain are potential trail locations; equestrian groups also have interest in going into the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area.
- County could look at park land development near and in conjunction with the Sacramento Weir State Wildlife Area.
- Access to the southernmost portion of this zone, including the Clarksburg vicinity, is limited.
- Mr. Morrill suggested that volunteers or non-profits (a “Yolo Legacy Trust” organization) could assist with acquisition efforts, conduct funding searches, and hold titles or conservation easements. Other groups (a “Friends of Yolo County Parks” organization) could assist with park maintenance. The County’s Open Space Element should be reviewed in this regard.