

Yolo County Parks Master Plan
County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife
Advisory Committee Meeting # 3

DRAFT
Meeting Summary

Yolo County Planning and Public Works Department
Cache Creek Conference Room
292 West Beamer Street
Woodland, CA 95695

September 13, 2004
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Advisory Committee Members Present: Sally Barrett, Diane Colborn, Andrew Fulks (Chair), Gerald Hartwig, Don Morrill, Eric Natti, Mary Schiedt.

County Staff Present: Brett Williams, Parks and Resources Coordinator.

Others Present: Beth Gabor, Deputy to Supervisor Helen Thomson.

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

Agenda Item: “Discussion to receive input from Committee members regarding the policies for the Countywide Park Master Plan.”

Supplemental Materials: Consultants provided an outline of the agenda item in the form of an exercise they wished to conduct with the Committee. They displayed a table of State recreation data showing participation trends, and provided (1) a “2002 Statewide Preferences for Recreation Overview;” (2) “Policy Excerpts” from the 1968 Recreation Element and the existing 2002 General Plan Open Space and Recreation Element; and (3) copies of maps associated with the State Parks’ “The Great Central Valley” initiative (see below).

Introduction

The focus for this session was on developing core policy ideas for the Parks Master Plan, within the larger context of an overall vision for the future of the County’s parks and open space areas. Prior to the meeting, staff had requested that Committee members develop 5 to 10 policy statements that they would like to see drive the Master Plan, to assist the consultants draft a preliminary overall vision statement. Staff also had recommended that Committee members discuss their policy ideas with their respective Supervisors.

By way of introduction to the session, Mr. Kemp offered that a plan for the future of the County parks system should be based on community values, in addition to existing directives and policy guidance, relevant data, and professional judgment. As representatives of the community, the Parks Advisory Committee plays a major role in articulating these core values.

The exercise for the meeting consisted of the following:

1. The “homework assignment.” Each member was requested to talk about his or her ideas for the plan’s core policies.
2. Consultant presentation. A discussion of other factors contributing to the overall vision for the plan:
 - (a) Public comments received through the public meetings and the email address.
 - (b) Previous visions and policies – plans developed by earlier advisory committees, commissions, supervisors, and staff, including:
 - The 1968 Recreation Element of the General Plan.
 - The adopted 2002 Open Space & Recreation Element.
 - (c) Statewide preferences, needs, and trends – whether the needs of Yolo County are generally consistent with State trends and how are these needs being met.
3. Discussion. Imagine that it is 16 years from now, and you have “2020” vision. Imagine the County parks system is well-funded. What does it look like? What are its best features? What is there in the future that we don’t have today?
4. Evaluation and synthesis. Identify groupings of related ideas and consider how best to state these ideas in “planning language.”

At the end of the meeting, Committee members were asked to provide closing remarks. The desired outcome of the meeting was a collection of ideas that the consultants could use in drafting a vision statement for the Parks Master Plan.

Core Policy Ideas

Committee members in turn discussed their prepared policy ideas and other thoughts on core values and the overall plan vision. Some of the major themes discussed were:

- What the proper role of the County should be as a provider of parks and recreation opportunities.
- What the proper level of acquisition of land should be for public parks and open space.
- Connections and accessibility of parkland and access to public land.
- Partnerships with other agencies and entities.

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- Creating a uniform, coherent, consistent parks system.
- Highlighting the special features and landscapes of Yolo County.

Mr. Natti reviewed a set of draft policies that he had adapted from the recent California Recreation Policy (August 2004). He remarked that the County was verging on being “park-poor:” while there seems to be considerable parkland in terms of total acres, the amount of useable lands is not that great. He also suggested that, as a general rule, the government agency or other entity closest to the park or recreation resource should provide the management for the park or resource. As in the California Recreation Policy, Mr. Natti’s suggested policies for Yolo County parks and recreation were organized under five main headings:

- “I. Sufficient park and recreation lands and facilities are available to meet the needs of Yolo County residents.
...
- “II. Provide for the health and wellness of Yolo County citizens through outdoor recreation activity.
...
- “III. Yolo County’s outstanding natural, cultural, and historic resources must be protected.
...
- “IV. Build and support strong leadership in outdoor recreation management.
...
- “V. Park and recreation lands and facilities are accessible to all Yolo County citizens.”

Mr. Morrill stressed that *accessibility* was important, including the accessibility of County parklands from urban areas. He also suggested that County parks be easily (and consistently) *identifiable*, so that people know that there is a Countywide park system and where the parks are located. He also emphasized the idea of *connectivity*, so that people can understand and appreciate where they are and so that they can develop a sense of the bioregion. Parks should enable more recreational options (e.g., primitive camping). He supported the idea that environmental education is a proper role of a park system. He also supported the idea of “representative landscapes” within the County as part of the park and open space system. (Mr. Morrill subsequently provided additional comments; these are attached to this meeting summary as Attachment 1).

Ms. Colborn had prepared ten “Park Principles,” which she presented to the Committee, staff, and consultants:

- “1. Promote responsible stewardship of county public lands and resources.
- “2. Protect natural resources, with particular attention given to sensitive natural resources and meeting legal obligations of the county to protect endangered or threatened species habitat.

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- “3. Promote and enhance public access to county lands compatible with natural resources.
- “4. Meet diverse needs and interests of Yolo County residents for parks, open space and different types of recreational activities.
- “5. Promote public accessibility over exclusive use by specific interest groups, while also accommodating appropriate long-term uses by specific groups, subject to reasonable rules and regulations.
- “6. Develop a coordinated and cohesive parks system, with consistent signage and user-friendly interpretive features. This should include maps and a linked countywide trail system as a long term goal.
- “7. Identify potential land purchases for acquisition and improvement to meet growing and unmet future park needs of county residents, including consideration of possible habitat corridors and wildlife migratory routes.
- “8. Highlight spectacular county park features (such as Cache Creek Canyon) while also providing for park activities, such as hiking and public access to natural areas, near urban centers.
- “9. Promote the diversity of Yolo County as a valuable asset providing many recreational opportunities, from boating, rafting and fishing on Cache Creek, Putah Creek and the Sacramento River, to wildlife viewing in county wetlands and riparian corridors, and study of native plants in Grasslands Park. Generate revenue for maintenance through user fees, including park use by nonresidents. (Promotion of local agriculture in conjunction with visits to county parks could also be a potential attraction. For example, a recommended day trip in county literature could include a visit to an organic farm in Capay Valley, the almond orchards in season, or a visit to a local winery, and a hike, picnic or raft trip on Cache Creek.)
- “10. Provide enhanced recreational opportunities and improved quality of life for county residents, by protecting, restoring and improving the county’s irreplaceable park lands, open space, and wildlife habitats.”

Mr. Hartwig identified five topics that he would like to have included in the plan:

- *Acquisition.* He would like the plan to prohibit acquisition for purpose of recreation at the County level. In his opinion, the government in one form or the other already owns much of the State and has enough property to meet the needs of the public.
- *Access easements.* He stated his belief that the plan should not allow nor encourage the use of easements for access because it erodes private property rights.
- *Scope. (Appropriate role for each level of government).* Mr. Hartwig suggested that the proper focus for the County should be on local issues and needs. He suggested that larger issues and needs should be addressed at the State

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and federal levels. In his opinion, the County should not try to be everything to everybody, but rather, focus on what it can do best.

- *Zoning.* Mr. Hartwig stated his belief that County parks should follow all zoning ordinances and minimize effects on surrounding property owners.
- *Exclusive uses.* Mr. Hartwig indicated his opposition to certain types of recreational uses that seem to exclude other types of recreation. Where hiking or rafting is allowed, he believed that other uses were restricted. He stated that the public should be able to use public land.

Ms. Barrett generally concurred with Ms. Colborn's principles, and she continued with some additional comments. She noted that parks can contribute to the economy, attracting users and serving as an economic engine. Ms. Barrett indicated her belief that County parks should not attempt to meet social needs, which are more of a City function; for example, the County may provide a place to go camping, but it would not provide camping leaders. Ms. Barrett stated that the County park system needs better signage, with consistent graphic format, presenting a uniform public image; she further suggested that every sign provide similar types of information, such as a location map and information to explain where the park is situated within the bioregion. In her opinion, every park needs some recreation area and some habitat protection. She also noted the importance of parks and recreation for health, stating that the County should do its share in helping people with physical fitness. She was in favor of access easements that link public properties.

Ms. Schiedt recommended that, for each existing or proposed park property, the County try to maximize the unique character of the park as special places in Yolo County, whether in terms of habitat, location, unique features like vernal pools, or other characteristics. She also recommended that recreational facilities or improvements be developed where they are needed and not where they might be harmful to natural resources. In addition, she recommended making County parks and recreation dollars go further by using County funds for "hardscape" and maintenance, while making use of volunteers and programs like "Adopt-A-Park" and "Friends of Yolo Parks" for programs and functions. She also supported the potential benefits of Joint Powers Agreements.

Mr. Fulks had prepared a set of suggested Master Plan policies, which he noted could also be framed as implementation measures in some cases. He presented these policy ideas to the Committee, staff, and consultants:

- The County should seek to leverage its resources by acquiring parklands that are adjacent to other publicly managed lands, thus creating larger blocks of publicly usable spaces and wildlife areas.
- The parks acquisition plan should focus on large-acreage parcels to provide maximum open space, wildlife, and passive recreation activities.
- The County should work with the unincorporated communities to make sure that their needs are met with regard to community parks. Parks within unincorporated communities should be managed by local entities such as

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assessment or school districts, rather than managed by the County, in keeping with the above policy.

- The County should work to connect existing and future parks with a regional trail system.
- The County should seek opportunities, and support the efforts of other agencies and non-profits, to work with willing sellers of fee title or easements to allow for public access to publicly owned parcels that are currently landlocked.
- Park lands leased to other groups should be open for use by the public when not in use by the lessee.
- County roads and rights-of-way when proposed for abandonment should not be fully abandoned. Instead, roads should allow for equestrian, vehicle, and pedestrian access, and be converted into “trails” with vehicle access only for parcel owners served by the roads. Too many County roads (e.g., Road 78 and Road 57) have been abandoned, taking with them the recreation benefits they would have otherwise provided.
- The parks plan should reflect and build upon existing policy statements, including some of the items within the County’s Cache Creek Resources Management Plan (which promotes “nodes” along Cache Creek) as well as implement the policies of the General Plan Open Space and Recreation Element.
- A Yolo Legacy trust should be established to acquire open space and habitat lands for public use.

Guidance from Existing County Directives & Statewide Trends

Mr. Kemp distributed a collection of excerpts from the 1968 Recreation Element and the existing 2002 Open Space and Recreation Element; he briefly reviewed the relationship between these previous or current policies and the development of the Master Plan, calling attention to a few selected policy statements. Among the items noted in the 2002 Element was that the implementation measure requiring the County to pass a Quimby Act ordinance has not yet been implemented.

The Committee, staff, and consultants discussed several of the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures of the 2002 Element with potential applicability to the Master Plan. Mr. Fulks recommended that the consultants consider certain policies and, in particular, look at the implementation measures in the element (while the element should be considered as a whole, among the specific policies and implementation measures mentioned were RP-1, RP-12, RP-16, RP-17, and RP-23; and RI-10, RI-11, RI-13, and RI-14). Some of the policies were recognized as appropriate more for a General Plan than for a Parks Master Plan.

Mr. Collett distributed an overview of Statewide preferences for recreation and, referring to a summary table of Statewide recreation data from the past five years,

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briefly reviewed some of the significant trends. In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Natti commented on the various ways this Statewide information could be measured and portrayed; one metric to consider is participation level – i.e., it is possible that only a relatively small number of people do a specific activity, but those who do the activity, do it often (e.g., archery). He also noted that another metric is “latent demand” – activities that people want but are not available. Ms. Barrett commented that parks can provide places for “generational outings,” where families and other visitor groups made up of people of various ages can all visit the same park and find activities that suit their ages and activity levels.

The consultants and the Committee also discussed a fairly recent initiative for the Central Valley by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. In 2003 State Parks initiated a study of the Central Valley to investigate the State Park System’s possible future role in the Central Valley in terms of potential acquisition and development projects. An April 2004 brochure about the program is available on the State Parks website (<http://www.parks.ca.gov/>). According to the brochure, State Parks is interested in acquisition and development in the Valley both to increase its “visibility and service to Valley residents, and because as an ecological region the Valley supports the least amount of publicly protected areas.”

The Consultants shared with the Committee copies of a preliminary map of potential project sites obtained from State Parks. Among the sites is a general location in the Dunnigan Hills as well as an unspecified location in the Valley for a Park unit that will “tell the story of agriculture in California’s heartland.” The brochure also outlines the factors to be considered in acquisition and development projects.

Developing 2020 Vision

Following from the above discussions, the Committee members proceeded to offer comments on their visions for the Yolo County park system in the future – what the parks system might look like in the year 2020.

Mr. Hartwig commented that he would like to see better utilization of what the County already has in terms of parks and open space areas. He noted that a major limiting factor is funding.

Ms. Barrett said that she would like to see network of parks; acquisition efforts should be directed toward linking to this network. She would like to see destructive and exclusive uses reigned in.

Thinking ahead to 2020, Ms. Schiedt envisioned a park system where interpretive information is well-developed, and people understand where they are in the region. Information about wildlife and cultural resources and other features should be well-developed, and there should be more emphasis on providing for the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities.

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In Mr. Fulks's vision for the future, Yolo County has a vibrant, regional park system, similar to that of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, East Bay Regional Parks, and Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District. There are large, diverse areas that touch upon all the representative landscapes of Yolo County, including a linear parkway along Cache Creek, additional parks along Putah Creek, and thousands of acres opened in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Blue Ridge Trail has been completed, allowing through-hiking from Putah Creek to Cache Creek along the ridgeline. Trails connect all the county parks and the urban areas. Local parks support groups raise funds, and participate in parks cleanup and building events. It is a connected system, reminiscent of the "string-of-pearls" concept.

Mr. Natti envisioned JPAs with cities, other counties, and other agencies; there could even be inter-county regional parks. Each unincorporated area has its own parks that they can call their own. There is more State involvement at Lake Berryessa in the form of a State Park or Recreation Area. Putah Creek is well-managed and attractive. There are dedicated bike trails that connect parks to urban areas. There are interpretive trails along the creeks and the river. There is public access to the top of Blue Ridge from the valley floor and down the ridgeline.

Mr. Morrill would like to see better connectivity of parks and trails, so that it is clear that the trails and other properties are all part of the same system. In his vision, the parks system helps preserve representative landscapes. There may be an East Bay Regional Parks-type entity. A "Friends-of-the-Parks" group is very active, and there is a lot of interpretation at all the sites.

Ms. Colborn expressed her agreement with the visions that others had expressed. She hopes that the County does a good job in planning for the future. She indicated that the County should plan to meet future needs and strive to enhance the overall quality of life, making Yolo County a great place to live.

In summary, these possible, initial components of a 2020 vision statement were noted:

- Better utilization of existing County assets; better use of existing parks and open space areas.
- An appropriate level of new acquisition.
- A network of inter-linked parks. New parklands adjacent to other publicly managed lands.
- Park properties also inter-connected in terms of interpretation and information.
- Destructive and exclusive uses on County parklands are reigned in.
- Integrated information, so public can think of where to go.
- Considerations for people with disabilities and for the increasing number of older users.
- Vibrant parks and open space network, like East Bay Regional Parks, Mid-Peninsula Open Space, or Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

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- A system that contains representative Yolo landscapes and attractively displays the County's special features.
- Countywide cooperation, with grassroots support. Active booster groups (e.g., Friends of Yolo Parks); an engaged public.
- State Park/Recreation Area at Lake Berryessa.
- Joint Powers Agreements (JPAs) with cities, other counties. Possible park district.
- "String of Pearls" park sites in County.
- Significant enhancement of the Putah Creek corridor.
- Implementation of the recreation nodes along Cache Creek.
- Dedicated bikeways.
- Interpretive trails along river and streams.
- Unincorporated areas achieving their recreation needs via alternative agencies.
- Access to Blue Ridge from the valley floor (in Yolo County) to Lake Berryessa (in Napa County).
- Connectivity of trails, bike paths, habitat, image, and education for the County parks.
- A self-sufficient County Parks agency entity, well-supported by other agencies and organizations.
- A system that is based on good planning for the future, which helps to improve the quality of life for Yolo County residents.

Attachment 1

September 27, 2004

To: Brett Williams
From: Don Morrill
RE: County Parks Master Plan

Following are components of an effective park system for Yolo County:

- 1) County Parks represent as many of the varying landscapes and bioregions as possible.
- 2) County Parks provide gateways to larger tracts of public land, and encourage use of such lands – i.e., BLM and California Dept. of Fish and Game.
- 3) County works to acquire land from willing sellers to assure that unincorporated areas with park needs are served and parks, trails and scenic corridors are enhanced.
- 4) A Yolo Legacy land trust is established with the specific charge to assist in land acquisition for County Parks.
- 5) Interconnectedness of parks is encouraged by easement, acquisition and construction of trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding.
- 6) Access is acquired for access to currently isolated public lands, such as Berryessa Peak.
- 7) Environmental education is emphasized using interpretive tools to demonstrate the type of landscape, biology, and watersheds and their connections
- 8) Open space and wildlife habitat will be valued for it's existence for simple viewing
- 9) The County will move toward a Regional Park System similar to East Bay Regional Parks, utilizing the significant amount of current public land in the western County.