

# Yolo County Parks & Open Space Master Plan

## Meeting Summary

Yolo County Board of Supervisors

**17 May 2005**

10:00 a.m.

Yolo County Board of Supervisors Chambers  
County Administration Building  
625 Court Street  
Woodland, CA 95695

### Introduction

An update on the development of the Countywide Parks and Open Space Master Plan was heard at the Yolo County Board of Supervisors' regular meeting on 17 May 2005. The purpose of the update was to inform the Board regarding the progress on the overall planning process for the Master Plan, to review the recommendations in the "working paper"<sup>1</sup>, to receive input from members of the Board and the public, and for the Board to direct staff to consider comments from the Board in revising the Master Plan.

### Staff Presentation

Mr. Williams presented the staff report.<sup>2</sup> He summarized the overall planning process, from initiation by the Board in the spring of last year to the present date. The process has included: initial public outreach activities and workshops; a series of public meetings before the Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee; publication of the draft master plan and associated public input; additional meetings with rural landowners; comment review and analysis; and the development of recommendations for revising the draft plan in the form of the "working paper."

Mr. Williams covered a number of the issues of significant concern, noting the draft plan contained a lot of non-controversial material that was not being addressed in this update. Mr. Williams noted several of the proposed changes in format and organization of the plan document – for example, that the revised document would

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<sup>1</sup> The "working paper," prepared by the planning team, is a summary of issues of concern, major themes for revising the draft master plan, and recommendations for revising the first public draft of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan. The document was attached to the staff report; it was also made available on the County website at [http://www.yolocounty.org/prm/master\\_plan.htm](http://www.yolocounty.org/prm/master_plan.htm).

<sup>2</sup> The staff report is available on the County's website at <http://www.yolocounty.org/org/bos/agendas/2005/051705/001.pdf> (item 32).

more clearly separate “vision statements” from “action items.” He noted that the revised plan will also provide additional information on the planning context, particularly with more emphasis on County agricultural land use and related compatibility issues. The revised plan will recognize the need to build upon existing parks and open space resources. Future recreation and open space opportunities will not rely solely on acquisition, but will also recommend the use of public-private partnerships, conservation easements, landowner-sponsored tours and activities. Mr. Williams referred to the Sutter Buttes – where a non-profit organization, the Middle Mountain Foundation, provides hiking access and interpretation on the privately owned hillsides and peaks – as a positive example and possible model. The revised master plan will emphasize park and recreation expansion involving only willing participants.

Mr. Williams explained that the County’s role would not be changing fundamentally; the revised plan will indicate that the County provides facilities for outdoor recreation in primarily natural settings, as well as assists unincorporated communities meet their recreation needs.

In terms of financing and implementation, Mr. Williams explained that the plan would emphasize a variety of ways to provide and increase recreation opportunities in a “menu” of options. He referred to the Sonoma Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District as one example of how a jurisdiction can set up financing for a multiple-purpose district, based on a minimal (¼ percent) sales tax.

## **Public Comments**

### ***Comments by Bob Wirth***

Mr. Wirth provided the Board with copies of a map he had prepared, showing recreational areas in the broader region around Yolo County. In his opinion, the initial plan was focused too much on hiking-related matters; even so, it failed to address the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area. He expressed a concern that some of the language in the plan, particularly in the vision statement or guiding principles, could be seen by state and federal agencies as supporting eminent domain actions in partnership with the County. He suggested that it was incumbent upon the Board to protect private property rights through legislation. Mr. Wirth said that rural landowners do not want easy access across their land that cannot be controlled and monitored. He also recommended that the composition of the Parks Advisory Committee be restructured to include more representation from rural landowners.

### ***Comments by William Chapman***

Mr. Chapman commented on the “divisiveness” that this plan has caused. He explained that he had offered a hike on his property at no cost to the government (with, however, conditions and fees), and he had not received any response except from Supervisor Thomson, who had declined. Mr. Chapman commended the Parks Advisory Committee on the responses to issues. He expressed a concern that eminent domain might be used. He noted that, in the first draft plan, his property (in the

Rocky Ridge area of western Yolo County) had been encircled as a gateway park. He noted that his suggestion that there be comparable “urban gateways,” however, had not been incorporated in the proposed revisions to the plan.

### ***Comments by Bob Schneider***

Bob Schneider, representing Tuleyome and the local chapter of the Sierra Club, indicated that he appreciated County staff meeting with the Sierra Club; his concern was that the plan development process had recently become somewhat lopsided. He requested the release of Appendix D to the draft plan, “Environmental Resources and Conservation Opportunities,” which to date had not been made publicly available.

He expressed his opinion that the draft master plan was a visionary plan. In his opinion, a connected Blue Ridge Trail concept should be retained; he also favored access to Berryessa Peak. Mr. Schneider stated that he considered eminent domain to be a serious tool for local government, which should be used with discretion. He said that hikers do not mind addressing serious issues, such as access, parking fees, and related matters; however, they would not want the County to institute a pay-by-the-mile approach. He also suggested that the plan consider I-505 and State Highway 16 as possible scenic highways.

### **Board Discussion**

The Board approved the staff recommendations unanimously: (1) to receive and file an update on the planning process for the Countywide Parks and Open Space Master Plan, and (2) to direct staff to consider comments from the Board in preparation of revisions to the draft plan (included in the Supervisors’ packets) and well as recommendations in the “working paper.” Several supervisors offered comments.

Supervisor Siefertman offered an example of how property rights and public access are related in terms of his family’s past experiences with hunters using their property; generally, those who asked were given permission to hunt, and those who didn’t ask were reprimanded or received a visit from the sheriff. He indicated that he has received many comments on the issue of access, including the issue of access for the disabled. He stated that plans for public areas needed to incorporate disability access.

Supervisor Chamberlain also commented on private property rights. He stressed the importance of working with landowners.

Supervisor McGowan commended the Parks Advisory Committee and staff. He noted an inherent problem in parks planning – that, on the one hand, rural landowners object to hordes of people invading their lands, while, on the other hand, there was a legitimate desire to improve public outdoor recreation opportunities. He saw the planning process as an opportunity to enhance the quality of life in Yolo County without intruding on private property rights. He commended the planning team for “floating” controversial issues. By testing the waters and responding to concerns, he said, the County gets a better product.

Supervisor Thomson noted that the Central Valley has the least amount of State Park land in California, and in this context, she mentioned the current “Great Central Valley Vision,” sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation.<sup>3</sup> She said that she and County staff have met with State Parks director, Ruth Coleman. She also noted the public input session held by State Parks in Woodland on April 27.

Supervisor Thomson expressed the idea that the people of Yolo County cannot “control our destiny” if we do not have a plan. We need a vision, she said. The region is growing exponentially, as described in the SACOG Blueprint project, and the County is changing.

Concerning revisions to the parks master plan, she indicated that the maps should reflect the truth: existing trails should be shown. She suggested that the text could mention the Bay Area Ridge Trail as an example of a concept that began in a similar way. She recommended not tying future Boards to limited visions; she stressed the need to look forward.

Supervisor Thomson also offered a number of more specific comments:

- Regarding financing, the plan should address all possible options, including methods that use funding from a sales tax.
- The Conaway Ranch option should be retained as a possible area with future public open space and recreation opportunities.<sup>4</sup>
- The plan should identify potential sources of operations and maintenance funding, considering how under-funded these functions have generally been in County parks over past years.
- The plan should indicate what natural resources are the most unique and unrepeatable in the County.
- The model of the (Sonoma County) Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is important to include in the plan.
- The plan should note that the County does not provide the same services as the incorporated cities. Yet there are a number of rapidly growing areas in the

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<sup>3</sup> See the department's Website at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

<sup>4</sup> The Board's discussion of the Parks Master Plan was interrupted by a pre-scheduled press conference. At the press conference, County supervisors and the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians announced a new partnership to pursue the acquisition of the Conaway Ranch for public benefit. While the total sale price of the property is not yet known, the tribe indicated that it would help to fund the purchase of the 17,300-acre ranch, which is located near Winters, Woodland, and West Sacramento, generally in the Yolo Bypass and Cache Creek Settling Basin. The County began eminent domain proceedings for the land last summer. The tribe, which owns and operates the Cache Creek Casino Resort in Brooks, will join the Conaway Ranch Joint Powers Authority, which includes the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, and Woodland, as well as the County, the University of California Davis, and the county flood control district.

County, such as Esparto and Dunnigan, so there is a need to get creative with how parks and recreation opportunities can be funded. Park impact fees are one method.

- The parks master plan – the first such plan in the County, she noted – should provide and keep open a list of options for outdoor recreation. What’s not possible today should not be precluded as an option for tomorrow.
- Supervisor Thomson also provided staff with an annotated copy of the working paper, containing her comments on the table of itemized suggested revisions.