

WORKING PAPER – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISING THE DRAFT PLAN

25 April 2005

Introduction

This working paper discusses the ongoing process for development of the Yolo County Parks & Open Space Master Plan, particularly in terms of possible changes that are under consideration with respect to the first public draft of the plan, issued in February 2005. The main purpose of this paper is to provide recommendations for development of a revised draft master plan for further review and comment.

In making these recommendations, County staff and consultants (“the planning team”) have considered the entire record of this plan’s development, from the results of early background studies and public workshops, to input from the Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee, to recent comments on the first draft of the plan and subsequent meetings to further engage rural landowners.

In the planning process to date, including the recently concluded public review period for the draft plan, more than 50 comment letters or email messages representing approximately 100 individuals, various organizations, and several public agencies have been received and reviewed by the planning team.

Based on this review, as well as other public involvement and landowner input sessions, the planning team has identified a number of common issues and recurring themes, which are believed to warrant particular attention in the upcoming revised plan. These issues and themes are discussed in the next two sections of this paper as well as several specific points that emerged through public comments.

The final section of this paper presents a list of substantive, suggested revisions to the draft plan, each of which is paired with the planning team’s comments and recommendations.

1 Issues of Significant Concern and Responses

The following issues of significant concern emerged during the public review of the first draft plan. The summaries below identify some of the most prominent issues, with the issue stated in brief, followed by a response statement. These (and other) issues are addressed further throughout this working paper and will be incorporated in the revised plan.

Timing of plan implementation.

Issue: A number of public comments indicated that the draft plan was unclear regarding the long-range nature of plan components, including possible future parks and open space areas. Concerns were expressed which suggested that readers may have perceived the proposed actions as being initiated immediately upon approval of the plan.

Response: The plan is intended to be a long-range planning guide, especially with respect to expansion of the park system. The timeline for implementation was deliberately left indefinite because the necessary tasks are highly variable, difficult to predict, and often require additional reviews and approvals. Further, it is not certain that all elements in this plan will necessarily be implemented, especially the future park and open space proposals. These timeline and probability matters will be discussed briefly in the revised plan.

Emphasis on existing park and open space facilities.

Issue: Many comments addressed the condition of County park units, recommended that the existing parks be given higher priority, and/or commented on specific improvements or concerns at individual parks.

Response: The plan will be revised to place further emphasis on the County's existing parks and open spaces, as was originally intended.

The Blue Ridge Trail.

Issue: The draft plan System Map showed a dotted line extending the Blue Ridge Trail south of the County's Otis Ranch property as a proposed extension under consideration by other parties. Objections were raised that the depiction of this trail failed to properly consider landowners' rights.

Response: The Blue Ridge Trail south of the Otis Ranch property is not a County-sponsored proposal in this plan but rather noted as a reference. Consequently, references to and depictions of the Blue Ridge Trail south of Otis Ranch will be removed in the revised plan.

Identification of private lands as potential future park or open space areas.

Issue: Many comments expressed concerns and opposition to the identification of specific private property locations as potential future public parks, access points, trail corridors, or open space areas.

Response: Possible locations of future parks and open space areas will be generally described by ecological characteristics, functions, or plan sub-area descriptions, rather than depicted graphically. No specific private lands will be identified. The revised plan will emphasize willing participation and mutually beneficial partnerships. The revised plan will present possible future park components as suggested ways to expand recreational and open space opportunities; these may not necessarily involve land acquisition.

Eminent domain.

Issue: Comments suggested that the draft plan could be used as a basis of eminent domain actions by the County to take private land for public parks and open space areas.

Response: The draft plan did not mention, nor was it intended to support, the use of eminent domain. The revised plan will clearly state that it is not the County's intent to use eminent domain for projects outlined in the master plan, nor is implementation of the plan dependent on eminent domain.

Conaway Ranch.

Issue: During plan development, the status of the Conaway Ranch property has been, and continues to be, the subject of ongoing legal actions involving the County and other parties. Commenters objected to the property being identified in the draft plan as a potential park or open space area.

Response: Specific references to Conaway Ranch will be removed from the revised plan.

2 General Themes

This section is intended to characterize some of the broad, general “themes” that are proposed to be applied in revising the plan text and system map. Various specific details may be changed throughout the plan consistent with these general themes. Specific proposed changes are also discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Planning Context. The revised plan will provide more discussion on the document's overall planning context and purposes, particularly with respect to consistency with the Agriculture Element and Open Space and Recreation Element of the County General Plan, the General Plan Update, County Code, and other related matters. It will better explain the intent, scope, and limitations of this plan, and indicate its role as providing general guidance. The revised plan will indicate that any follow-on projects would be subject to further public review and participation opportunities. The planning team suggests that the revised plan better explain that it is not intended to supersede or replace existing County policies or the authority of other public agencies, nor is it intended to reduce the rights inherent in private property ownership.

Document Organization and Structure. The planning team anticipates changes in the organization and structure of the document to clarify and better present the intent of the plan. As proposed, the Vision Statement will be shortened and presented separately from the Executive Summary. An Introduction may be added to provide necessary context and background. Important themes that have emerged through the public comment period may be addressed in distinct sections or subsections within the plan (e.g., the interface of agriculture and parks or public open space areas).

Agricultural Land Use. The planning team recommends that the revised plan give greater emphasis to the importance and role of agricultural land uses and heritage in Yolo County and acknowledge that agricultural practices create visual open space.

The revised plan will acknowledge the role of private land stewardship in preserving this open space, as well as in providing additional recreational opportunities such as hunting that are not available or allowed on County lands. The revised plan will also better characterize the nature of Yolo County lands; it will indicate that what some people perceive as “open space” may also be a grower’s “backyard” or place of work. It will also acknowledge that private landowners often conduct activities on their lands that reflect good stewardship of natural resources.

As applicable, the plan’s policies will reflect the agricultural policies in the Agriculture Element of the County’s General Plan (and, to the extent possible, the ongoing General Plan Update). The revised plan will acknowledge potential incompatibility issues between public outdoor recreation and agriculture. Potential adverse effects of public outdoor recreation, parks, and open space on agriculture – as expressed by a number of commenters on the draft plan – will be addressed generally; programmatic measures will be incorporated into the plan where possible to avoid or reduce these effects. A section will be added to the plan to the effect that County park system respects and is not intended to create conflicts with agricultural endeavors nor violate the County’s right-to-farm ordinance.

Existing County Parks. The stewardship and improvement of existing parks is a primary focus of the Master Plan. As a priority, existing parks will be given a higher profile in the revised draft plan, including in the Executive Summary and in the financing and implementation section. Recommendations for each park unit will be reassessed, as necessary.

Future County Park and Open Space Needs. The plan will be revised and clarified with respect to the discussions of future County parks needs and expansion. While the planning team recommends that future possible parkland expansion or acquisition should continue to be addressed in the revised plan as a long-range planning activity, it is also important to identify other avenues to address park, recreation, and open space needs and to create new opportunities.

The revised plan will promote a broader concept or “menu” for the “expansion of outdoor recreation opportunities,” which may or may not necessarily require acquisition of land. This was the principle behind the “Gateway” concept that primarily focused on increased recreational access and use of existing public lands. While the revised plan will continue to allow for County acquisition of new parkland by purchase or donation, other means to expand opportunities will be recognized, including partnerships with landowners or encouragement of landowners to provide limited public access. Additional means to accomplish park and open space improvements may include conservation easements and access easements involving willing participants and mutually beneficial arrangements.

Any proposals involving private lands will emphasize the intent to engage willing participants only. The revised plan will avoid targeting for possible acquisition or other public use specific lands that are currently in private ownership. The System Map will be revised accordingly. The revised plan will also indicate that the creation of new County parkland areas would involve environmental review, permitting and approval requirements, and further public involvement opportunities.

The planning team recommends that statements be included to the effect that the plan is not intended to be used as the basis or justification for public agencies to take private land, nor is it intended that the County will use its powers of eminent domain for the sole purpose of park and open space acquisition. As commenters have suggested, the revised plan will state clearly that implementation of the plan will not be dependent on eminent domain.

County's Roles in Providing and Facilitating Parks, Recreation, & Open Space.

The revised draft plan will better define the County's roles as a provider of facilities for outdoor recreation in primarily natural settings and as assisting unincorporated communities meet their recreation needs. It will also acknowledge that the County does not provide recreation-type programs.

While the County's primary role is to provide facilities for Yolo County residents, the revised plan will acknowledge that the County also plays a role as a regional provider of outdoor recreation opportunities. This secondary role should be encouraged, as it is consistent with goals to increase tourism opportunities within the County.

The revised plan will also address the County's role in providing support for parks in unincorporated communities through such means as residential development projects, special districts, and partnerships.

Financing & Implementation. The revised plan will take a closer look at financing and implementation mechanisms. Discussions of partnerships in the revised plan will explicitly include partnerships with private landowners.

The assessment district strategy discussion will likely be modified, with consideration given to other methods of financing possible park expansions and open space protection, including those that might also provide potential advantages for agricultural land preservation. A multi-purpose district supported by a minimal sales tax may be a worthwhile consideration; such a district could provide benefits for the County in many areas, including agricultural preservation, open space and greenbelts, recreation opportunities, and wildlife habitat conservation.

3 Itemized Possible Revisions to the Draft Plan

In addition to changes based on the major issues and general themes described above, the planning team is considering a number of more detailed and specific changes, as listed below. Many of these possible revisions are suggestions that were stated or implied in comments on the draft plan (see separate document, "Compiled Comments on the Draft Plan – Issues by Category"). Other proposed revisions, marked with an asterisk, are recommended primarily by the planning team.

| Suggested / Possible Revision | Responses & Recommendations |
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| 1. Specify that this is a 10-year or 15-year plan; provide benchmarks at three or four-year intervals | Discuss, but leave timeframe general; plan is long-term; accomplishments cannot be specified realistically by date |
| 2. Include policies from the County General Plan that protect farming and agriculture | Accept change; the plan is intended to be consistent with policies in the County General Plan, including the Agriculture Element and Open Space and Recreation Element |
| 3. Explain the relationship of the Parks Master Plan to the County General Plan, including existing policies in the Agriculture Element and Open Space Element * | This is suggested based on comments as well as to provide additional planning context and help explain origin of certain derived policies |
| 4. Quantify recreational demand in Yolo County; a formal parks needs assessment should be conducted | Beyond scope of this effort; additional public surveys could be part of plan implementation and future updates |
| 5. Consider negative effects of injecting an urban use (trails, staging areas, gateways) into rural, agricultural areas | Discuss potential ways to address issues that may occur in the recreation/agriculture interface |
| 6. Avoid use of state-wide data that is not representative of local trends | Review data and revise if appropriate; however, using general trends as a basis of policy is expected to remain |
| 7. Identify hunting and fishing, as important local use preferences | Indicate that BLM, DFG, and private lands provide hunting opportunities near proposed gateways. Plan should indicate that hunting is prohibited in County parks. Review treatment of fishing as important local activity |
| 8. Park System Map: Modify map to remove any reference to potential park sites, trails or open space lands on private property | Accept change |
| 9. Park System Map: Remove the dotted line referencing the Blue Ridge Trail. | Accept change |
| 10. Park System Map: Remove references to Conaway Ranch as future potential park or open space area | Accept change |
| 11. Park System Map: Remove or simplify base map; represent park system in a more general, less site-specific way * | Planning team is developing a new System Map that will be less site-specific. |
| 12. Plan should include goals of the County parks program | Plan could explain that the Vision Statement serves to articulate a desired future; the policies also express intent and preferences; and park-per-capita standards were considered but rejected |
| 13. Vision Statement: change to “mission statement” | “Vision statement” is the correct term and should be retained. County parks management has not defined a mission statement |

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| 14. Vision Statement & Guiding Principles: make these conform to General Plan policies protecting agricultural land | Accept change. Vision will be revised and shortened. Revision of Principles may not be necessary; explanations may be added (also see above general themes and specific items 2 and 3) |
| 15. Guiding Principles should mention that the County promotes protection of wildlife habitat. | Accept change |
| 16. Guiding Principle 5: remove phrase “that are currently landlocked.” | Accept change |
| 17. Guiding Principle 6: add statement “Where any change is made or proposed to the use of Park lands the County Zoning Ordinance must be followed.” | Accept change in the context that any pertinent local, State, or Federal regulations be followed, as is the County’s current practice. |
| 18. Guiding Principle 7: remove or clarify phrase “farm trails” because it sounds like an endorsement of [foot]trails across private property. | Plan will explain that “farm trails” refers to motor routes on public roads that interested parties can follow to places sponsored by willing participants in agricultural tourism (as in existing “Napa Yolo Harvest Trails”) |
| 19. Remove all discussion of access and acquisition from the Vision Statement. | All such statements will be reviewed. The Vision Statement will be revised; however, public access to public lands concept is likely to be retained. “Acquisition” should become a part of potential “expansion of opportunities,” which may not necessarily require land acquisition (also see above) |
| 20. Add discussions to the effect that the Parks Master Plan does not prescribe or endorse the use of eminent domain action by the County or other public agencies to take private property for public parks and open space areas. | Clarification will be provided that it is not intended that the implementation of the plan be dependent on eminent domain acquisition (also see above) |
| 21. In discussions of existing Yolo setting and regional recreation opportunities, add descriptions of BLM Berryessa Blue Ridge Natural Area, Lake Berryessa, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, and other resources. | Accept change. Also point out that use of other jurisdiction land does not automatically remove the County’s obligation to provide recreational facilities or places for its own residents |
| 22. Add general descriptions about recreational opportunities in the incorporated cities. | Accept change, without detail and within context of various provider roles for recreation; however, County plan cannot impose requirements on, nor presume support from, incorporated cities |

| Suggested / Possible Revision | Responses & Recommendations |
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| 23. County role: Indicate that maintenance and enhancement of community parks should be priority over acquisitions for passive recreation. | See above theme, "Roles of the County." Maintenance and enhancement of existing parks should remain an important component of the revised plan; "acquisition" to be discussed more in terms of "expanded opportunities" (also see above) |
| 24. County role: Revise to indicate that County has little or no responsibility in providing parks and outdoor recreation for the surrounding region | Review the roles of the County; retain position that County should generally share in providing regional recreation opportunities; note economic benefits of visitors to parks and agri-tourism locations |
| 25. Indicate/acknowledge that agricultural landowners are the stewards of a large percentage of open space in the County | Accept change, noting that it is visual open space |
| 26. Revise policies to give higher priority to maintenance and enhancement of existing parks (i.e., addressing deferred maintenance) over initiatives to acquire new public parks and open space areas. Revise financial section to direct County to set aside funds to care for existing properties before adding more real estate | In financing section, policies and strategies for existing parks should provide additional focus on addressing deferred maintenance; expanding park, recreation & open space opportunities should be retained as a parallel function. However, in terms of priorities, the plan will retain the option of allowing for acquisition if the investment is advantageous from an availability and resource value basis. |
| 27. Hunting and shooting sports, in partnership with rural landowners, should be referenced in the plan | Accept change, but indicate these activities are not part of County parks roles or responsibilities; discuss in terms of expanding opportunities and partnerships |
| 28. Indicate that support for bond measures should precede the expansion or parks and recreation opportunity, not vice-versa | Financial section will be reviewed and revised; no change is currently recommended with respect to this suggestion |
| 29. Indicate that the highest priority should be given to improvements and acquisitions that will benefit the most residents | Revised plan will indicate that implementation project priority should be determined by population densities and other factors including: geographic location of facilities, resource values, and demand. |
| 30. Cache Creek: new bridge should be for pedestrians only, not equestrians; if low-water bridge is flooded, trails should be considered too wet for horses. Rather than build a new bridge, the existing low-water bridge should be rebuilt and made slightly higher | Further consideration/analysis of a bridge at Cache Canyon Regional Park (or at other sites) in revised plan will consider all potential uses and provide recommendations accordingly. |

| Suggested / Possible Revision | Responses & Recommendations |
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| 31. Clarksburg River Access: Plan should be more specific concerning stewardship and environmental restoration | Issues such as stewardship and environmental restoration will be given further programmatic consideration in the revised plan |
| 32. Putah Creek Access: Plan should provide greater specificity for reopening of the existing public access points that are closed and overgrown | Accept change |
| 33. Consider trail between Otis Ranch and the low-water bridge at Cache Creek Canyon Park | Accept change; consider land ownership |
| 34. Statements about ADA at Historical Museum should be deleted unless funds are definite; also could have impacts to historical structure | Any proposals at the Museum will consider ADA access, if funds are available (Most State and federal grants require that ADA access be provided to receive funds) |
| 35. Retain new park concept in vicinity of Woodland / Willow Slough because high population served | Accept change |
| 36. Improvements associated with the former Scout cabin [at Camp Haswell] should be cost-effective and consider the location in the floodplain | Accept change |
| 37. Restoration projects in the Putah Creek corridor could provide nesting habitat for obligate riparian nesting birds, and in the creek itself for salmon spawning habitat; projects could include salmon-viewing opportunities | Revised plan could mention such projects as opportunities for partnerships |
| 38. Include a policy to the effect that County should move to acquire property only if plan goals cannot be achieved by other means | The plan should provide multiple avenues for expansion of park, open space, or recreational opportunities |
| 39. Include a policy to the effect that County should approach potential sellers with a range of options, including first option, life estate, three-way exchange, conservation easement, incentives | Accept change |
| 40. Revise plan to not include support for the State Parks Central Valley Vision | Retain plan's conceptual support for bringing an appropriate State Park to Yolo County, including a possible agricultural heritage park |
| 41. Dunnigan Hills: Comments both supported and opposed the concept of a new state park in the Dunnigan Hills area | Retain plan's conceptual support for bringing an appropriate State Park to Yolo County; suggest alternatives to Dunnigan Hills. De-emphasize or omit this location on master plan map |
| 42. Include policy that would not allow or encourage easements for access because they erode private property rights | Retain provisions allowing use of easements as one tool for expanding recreational opportunities with willing participants (also see above) |
| 43. Require a feasibility study regarding proposed parks and open space acquisitions | Accept change by adding a policy that would require the County to prepare a feasibility study a new park or open space unit prior to acquisition |

| Suggested / Possible Revision | Responses & Recommendations |
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| 44. Indicate that the County should only encourage voluntary arrangements with landowners | Accept adding words to this effect (also see above) |
| 45. Indicate that people from urban areas typically have their own local parks and recreation program and should rely on their own park systems | Cities provide for different services and facilities should not be counted as duplicative to what the county provides. However, financing mechanisms should consider ways to share costs County-wide, through user fees, partnerships, sales tax, etc. |
| 46. Plan should indicate that the County or specific user groups will need to pay for access and use privileges if occurring on private lands | Accept change |
| 47. Plan should define “good-neighbor policy” | Accept change |
| 48. Plan should be modified to indicate that protection of surrounding agriculture is a Guiding Principle, a Management and Operations Policy and Action, and a Resource Management and Interpretation Policy and Action | Accept change |
| 49. Include a conceptual bike path through Capay Valley in Esparto/Capay/Guinda areas or a bike, foot, rollerblade trail from one end of Capay Valley to the other | Accept change; concept should be considered at a programmatic level; however, landowners’ concerns must be addressed in any specific proposal |
| 50. Retain the Dam-to-Dam connector multi-use trail concept from Monticello Dam, connecting all five Putah Creek access points, to the Youth Area Campground | Accept change; concept should be considered at a programmatic level; however, landowners’ concerns must be addressed in any specific proposal |
| 51. All-terrain vehicles / Off-road vehicles: Plan needs to provide reference to strategic planning for an ORV park; the use of former gravel mining areas is a great opportunity. Revised plan should support reuse of former gravel mining areas for recreation | Accept change, as consistent with the Cache Creek Area Plan and Off Channel Mining Plan. Revised plan should address OHV use at a programmatic level, while recognizing a variety of potential issues |
| 52. Use of motorized vehicles in Cache Creek channel corridor should be discouraged by the plan | Accept change |
| 53. Plan should offer more than developer fees as a significant source of parks funding in unincorporated areas | Accept change (see also “Financing and Implementation” above) |
| 54. Plan should indicate that concessionaires should be financially beneficial to the County | Accept change |
| 55. Plan should indicate that Casino impact mitigation funds should not be used for parks | All potential funding mechanisms should be considered |
| 56. Local tax increase should not be considered for parks | All potential funding mechanisms should be considered, including multi-purpose district (agriculture preservation, open space / greenbelts, recreation areas, habitat conservation) supported by sales tax |

| Suggested / Possible Revision | Responses & Recommendations |
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| 57. In the description of species at Grasslands Park include burrowing owls | Accept change |
| 58. Include a “Guest Farms & Ranches” Program – a network of farms and ranches under voluntary contract with County to help provide outdoor recreation activities | Give strong consideration to all proposals that promote Yolo County Agri-tourism |
| 59. Indicate that some landowners already provide seasonal recreational opportunities to the public through hunting clubs that are accountable to the landowners and provide a small income to them | Accept change as part of general descriptions or recreational activities |
| 60. Revise the plan to promote the intermediary role of non-profit organizations with respect to parks and private lands (e.g., the model of the Middle Mountain Foundation in the Sutter Buttes area) | Accept change |
| 61. Include additional language concerning agri-tourism; plan could note that public-private partnerships formed when public visit local farms, purchase produce, learn about agriculture “Yolo Grown” brands | Accept change |
| 62. Indicate that agri-tourism is a result of regional product identity, define Farm Trails as a motorized access concept, and indicate that outdoor recreation activities can be offered as an extension of farm management and marketing | Accept change |
| 63. Include a policy that promotes the establishment of a database of landowners who would be willing to offer outdoor recreation activities | Accept change |
| 64. Include a policy in support of willing landowner participants offering a “Berryessa Peak Hiking Days” | Accept change |
| 65. Include a policy in support of willing landowners contracting with local hiking clubs | Accept change |
| 66. Plan should support providing incentives for landowners to allow limited public access; these may include “super” Williamson Act contracts, access to more irrigation water, strengthened regulations against future development, fee waivers for agri-tourism projects, financing assistance for conservation easements | Support incentives to private land owners for providing public use of their land as consistent with other County policies and regulations. |
| 67. Strengthen support in plan for “Friends of Yolo Parks” type of foundation for County parks and open spaces | Accept change |
| 68. Include an action item in support of a separate Dam-to-Dam Corridor Master Plan in collaboration with Solano County | Consider future opportunities to support concept, taking into consideration landowner concerns. |

* Indicates a possible revision proposed primarily by the planning team; may have arisen in response to public comments, through meetings with landowners, or through further consideration of plan-development process and documentation.