

4/3/06
SCB meeting

General meeting and lecture from Mark Schwartz on Yolo Co. Habitat conservation plan (HCP)

Mark Schwartz

This is the second attempt at Yolo Co. getting an HCP going – last attempt was somewhere in the 90s that was presented to Yolo Co. by developers. Failed because Fish and Wildlife Service was ready to approve HCP (outlet of ESA – deal with listed or candidate species). HCP would deal with preapproving future development programs. Dealt with vernal pool species and Swainson's Hawk. Problem was you could trade out developing land with any kind of habitat inside or outside of Yolo Co. So you could destroy vernal pools by buying Swainson's trees in Yuba or Sutter co. Rick Grosberg and Fraser Schilling worked in opposition (Schilling had a letter in science).

Yolo Co. is looking at a lot of different open space programs right now. NCCP (Natural Community Conservation Program) – eg. Southern California NCCP (state legislation that doesn't require endangered species, so you can deal with unlisted species. That nuanced distinction is often lost on the counties. Now several counties around the state are going through an NCCP or NCCP/HCP process – Yuba, Sutter, Yolo. The county now is initiating the process. Harvey and Ass. Are doing a biological assessment, then there is a science advisory group that commented on that BA. Now the county will develop a plan with Harvey and Ass. They made many maps (examples shown) with open space and easements. They also looked at the different kinds of agricultural lands and maps with element occurrences. The end of their phase one was to say that these are the resources present, and the scientific assessment team recommends what to do with those resources.

The county wants the committee to redo parts of it – the lawyers want them to excise fish and the bypass that have separate management programs. There's only so much Yolo Co. can do. The committee recommends that the best NCCP would view all of the resources.

The Yuba Sutter NCCP/HCP is driven by transportation corridors. Natomas NCCP comes up towards that area through Sacramento co.

Wayne Spencer at Conservation Biology International (CBI) is putting together a team to review Jones and Stokes Biological Assessment. Many of the same team put together the Yuba/ Sutter plan. The principal suggestion was to expand the boundary. The airports have sound level designations and the military just reduced the sound rating there that has opened up new habitat. Only the Sutter buttes would be managed independently. Yuba Sutter might not go forward with their plan – currently tabled.

These are long processes and the scientific assessment team recommended that multiple plans be made. Eg. Tree management strategies for Swainson's hawks, rice field management for giant garter snakes. Need different strategies for large open spaces that are publicly owned, privately owned, and small areas of patchy habitat. First value rare elements, then build connectivity, then recognize larger elements. But here you have to also manage for different crop placement – the county doesn't have control over that, so management plans have to take those changes into account.

The team mostly identifies the problems, doesn't offer solutions per se. Harvey and Ass. Did a simplistic habitat model which made the whole county a habitat. The team suggested more specific mapping and modeling. Also made suggestions talking about connectivity and management practices, as well as taking invertebrate surveys.

The county now decides (Yolo County joint powers agency). They then come up with a specific plan that will go to public comment and the scientific assessment team.

The team was only responding to Harvey and Ass. Assessment – the county is the body that plans. The team was given no info about development pressures – they only addressed the biological issues.

This process is gaining momentum. There are 2 or 3 consulting firms specializing in NCCP. Now looking towards Santa Clara co.

The team drove around the county to get the lay of the land and then went back and discussed the report – the consulting firm defended their report, and the second day the team sketched out an outline and then worked on it from their respective locations.

The scientific assessment team gets into the process at a very accessible point where there are still many options – the next step will be narrowed down.

Mark would like to use grad students to write an opinion like legal aides write for judges. The group has agreed to that and Mark will pay them. Provides students an opportunity to see what's being done and provide an input.

So it's basically it's writing an opinion on the consulting company's report.

The team's report is incorporated to varying degrees.

The team doesn't comment on ratios – they do comment on the pros and cons of mitigation.

It's likely that the models used by the consulting firm will get better based upon the team's recommendations. The model they used was a screening model, that isn't very sensitive.

ECL290 starts tomorrow 2:30 to 4pm. Will be reviewing documents and engage the county to give feedback on open space planning. The course will be located in the Dolores Dumont library (2133 Wickson Hall). The class size will be 10 to 20 people. Plan to invite the county in to talk and then take the 3 county documents and the HCP and discuss each for two weeks. Provide feedback on the HCP maybe – depends on peoples interest. Might also do a synthesis of how to look at conservation practice for county planning.

What about the biological borders versus political borders? The plan didn't speak about Putah creek that much. Did look to draw the plan boundary lines to encompass floodplains.

General meeting:

Votes:

- Funding for sending journals – do we want to? How much \$\$? Potentially sending to university in Mexico and our sister chapter in Bolivia? \$250? \$500?

Majority in favor of sending funds.

We now have \$6000 in our account.

- Rodd emailed the Berkeley co-president but International SCB might give matching funds.

What's the upper end that we'll spend?

Could check to see if a shipping company would donate shipment.

Rodd still needs help inventorying.

Might want to think about journal donation being an annual thing.

Check and make sure that we're not mailing journals that have online access.

Vote is for \$750 if matching funds are provided, \$1000 without matching funds.

We'd prefer to give the money if they are presenting.

- Travel for our sister chapter representatives (\$1500 and ask SCB to match - Ingrid has asked Alan Thornhill and is waiting for a reply). \$1500 would cover 1 person.

- The other money item is reimbursement for members for the upcoming conference. People who will present, people who'll volunteer.

Vote for \$500 – 11, 1 vote for \$250.

Conf. reg is \$110. Half for volunteers.

Reimbursement for chapter volunteers only.

550 total for reimbursement for volunteers.

- We need at least 5 people for each day. We're going to try and have a mug designed and selling as a fundraiser.

- We also need volunteers to help design the booth. We're thinking to put together a contact board some individuals from the same area could meet up, a pictures board of chapters from around the world or a chapter binder, which would showcase chapter activities from around the world. Also sell coffee mugs for our chapter activities with funds going to journals or Bolivia.

We're also having a banner made.

Shiny new website!

Volunteer opportunities:

We need volunteers for Picnic Day.

Upcoming: BBQ Sunday at Pete's house – look for emails!