



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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December 16, 2013

Phillip J. Pogledich
Senior Deputy
County of Yolo
625 Court Street, Room 201
Woodland, California 95695

Yolo Bypass Drainage and Water Infrastructure Improvement Study Comments

Dear Mr. Pogledich,

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Yolo Bypass Drainage and Water Infrastructure Improvement Study (Water Infrastructure Study). Our agencies value collaboration with Yolo County and we look forward to continuing this positive relationship. Like you, we support a balanced approach to habitat restoration, flood protection, and other beneficial uses of our state's water resources, such as agriculture and wildlife. Your synthesis of information from local land and water managers helps to deepen and broaden our understanding of the Yolo Bypass and to identify opportunities to improve the system.

We commend Yolo County for its proactive efforts to identify improvement opportunities and increase our practical understanding of the Yolo Bypass and its vicinity. The Water Infrastructure Study identifies recommended studies and improvement projects, information which will continue to be especially valuable as the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) Conservation Measure 2 (CM2) is refined, the 2009 National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion¹ (NMFS BiOp) compliance process begins to develop and analyze alternatives for the Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage (YBSHRFP) EIS/EIR, and as DWR's Agricultural Land Stewardship program is launched. DWR also has a number of grant programs such as the Flood Corridor program, the Urban Streams Restoration program, and Integrated Regional Water Management Grant programs for which some of the drainage and water infrastructure improvements identified may qualify. We support moving forward with projects that help to accomplish multiple benefits in the Yolo Bypass, including better water management, and we look forward to continued coordination with the County to create efficiencies among efforts.

¹ The full title of the NMFS BiOp is the "Biological Opinion and Conference Opinion on the Long-term Operation of the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project". Details may be found at the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region website (<http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/>).

The approach of Yolo County and the team that developed the Water Infrastructure Study is also a model for effective public outreach and involvement. We recognize the significant amount of work this study product represents and appreciate the resulting synthesis of feedback you received from landowners, farmers, water managers, wetland managers, and others with extensive knowledge of and experience with Yolo Bypass. The maps have especially enduring value as an atlas of Yolo Bypass water management patterns.

Regarding Yolo County recommendations stemming from the Water Infrastructure Study, we are happy to report that the modeling recommendations for the westside tributaries (pp 7 – 9 and 11) have already been incorporated into the model that will be used for the next round of project definition-refining and alternative analysis modeling for YBSHRFP. Several actions identified in the Water Infrastructure Study are common to DWR or joint DWR-U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) planning efforts, such as installation of additional flow and stage monitoring stations, replacement of existing agricultural crossings, and improvements at Lisbon Weir; these actions could improve water supply and drainage for farming and managed wetlands, while also allowing for enhanced fish passage. In addition, improvements to water infrastructure that prevent straying into the Colusa Basin Drain via the Knights Landing Ridge Cut are also warranted; however, these modifications could be made at other locations within the Yolo Bypass and not necessarily at Wallace Weir. Other actions, such as road improvements for the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, have not been explicitly named in DWR or DWR-USBR efforts yet, but are likely to be included as we develop more refined project descriptions; these improvements, which will allow for increased access for maintenance and operations, are expected to directly benefit agriculture, wildlife management, hunting, and environmental education. We appreciate that the Water Infrastructure Study offers planners a preview of what types of refinements local stakeholders are likely to support.

We encourage continued collaboration in developing a better understanding of how the Yolo Bypass currently functions, and we will continue to seek guidance on identifying and refining improvement actions such that the most efficient and effective projects are developed and implemented. For example, improving the agricultural crossings, which is an action specifically identified in the Water Infrastructure Study, is expected to contribute benefits to fisheries and is currently being considered as an action under BDCP's CM2 as well as the YBSHRFP. As landowners express willingness to update their agricultural crossings independently, we will want to work through considerations of private ownership, opportunities to expedite implementation, requirements for environmental compliance, and design and operation features for water management, fish passage, and vehicular access. Ensuring modifications to these agricultural crossings meet the needs of the landowners and managers, while also providing for fisheries benefits consistent with any further Yolo Bypass projects that may be implemented, are key considerations as we move forward in development. As another example of continuing to develop shared knowledge of the system, we are optimistic

that modeling results from YBSHRFP planning will contribute to our understanding of phenomena such as areas that commonly experience scour (e.g. the earthen berm on the south side of the Conaway Cross Canal).

We would like to call attention to an error of fact from a referenced document within the Water Infrastructure Study: the Agricultural and Economic Impacts of Yolo Bypass Fish Habitat Proposals Report (Agricultural and Economics Impacts Report) of April 2013. The tool developed and exercised in the Agricultural and Economics Impacts Report is a valuable one, and the YBSHRFP organizers have arranged to employ it in an economic analysis for the EIS/EIR. However, the scenarios analyzed in the Agricultural and Economics Impacts Report do not represent YBSHRFP, BDCP CM2 or any other of our conceptual operations, even to the degree to which they have been developed. In fact, the single analysis result set selected is highly misleading because the scenario selected was one that Central Valley hydrology could not support (flooding of the Yolo Bypass annually, every year, through May 15). While not fully representative of State and other governmental proposals, the scenarios labeled "BiOp" in the Agricultural and Economics Impacts report were more representative in that they factored in availability of Sacramento River water for gravity diversion through time. The language in both reports regarding what your independent early impact analysis represents is somewhat ambiguous and could benefit from clarification. Please also note that an impacts analysis will be undertaken by the project proponents during development of project-specific CEQA/NEPA documentation.

The development of Yolo Bypass fishery enhancements has been a highly collaborative effort that has included, in large part, landowners in the Yolo Bypass, Ducks Unlimited, as well as Yolo County representatives in an effort to create operational procedures that are consistent with fisheries needs, while also lessening potentially negative impacts to other beneficial uses in the bypass, including agriculture and duck hunting. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with Yolo County and other interested stakeholders to develop an approach to Yolo Bypass fisheries enhancements that is fully responsive to other land use needs and regulatory requirements, informed by scientific research, and consistent with BDCP CM2 and NMFS BiOp requirements.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Karen Enstrom at 916-376-9778 (Karen.Enstrom@water.ca.gov) or Jason Roberts at 916-445-0970 (Jason.Roberts@wildlife.ca.gov).

Sincerely,



Dean F. Messer, Chief
Division of Environmental Services
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Carl Wilcox
Policy Advisor to the Director for the Delta
California Department of Fish & Wildlife

