



Yolo Basin Foundation Proposal to Create a Yolo Bypass Conservation Measure for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan

The Yolo Bypass consists of a diverse mix of agriculture and wetland habitats in the North Delta. It is the location of the Department of Fish and Game's 16,000-acre Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, which utilizes agriculture to help provide wildlife habitat for thousands of animals in a way that is compatible with the flood control function of the Bypass. It is home to many threatened and endangered species and provides a wildlife viewing, environmental education, and waterfowl hunting destination, as well as simply a peaceful place to enjoy open space, all within sight of the State Capitol.

Yolo Basin Foundation believes that a key Habitat Conservation Measure as currently described in the Bay Delta Conservation Plan will have adverse impacts on this outstanding regional treasure.

The proposed measure is Floodplain Habitat Restoration Conservation Measure (FLOO1.1): "Modify the Fremont Weir and the Yolo Bypass to provide for a higher frequency and duration of inundation." The stated goal is to create an operable gate to sustain flood flows into the Bypass for 30-45 days between December 1 and May 15 to create flood plain habitat for Chinook salmon and Sacramento splittail.

This measure would seriously affect the ability of Fish and Game personnel to manage the Wildlife Area in accordance with the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Land Management Plan adopted in 2008 and other foundational agreements, including the US Army Corps of Engineers Operation and Maintenance Manual and MOUs signed by flood control and wildlife agencies in 1994. It would:

- effectively eliminate the current agricultural activities in the Wildlife Area which provide thousands of acres of wintering waterfowl habitat while generating an important income stream for the management of the Wildlife Area;
- curtail all public use on the Wildlife Area when the Fremont Weir is spilling, including the elimination of access for the thousands of school children in the spring who annually participate in the Yolo Basin Foundation's *Discover the Flyway* school program; and
- prevent the wetland management practices that maintain the Wildlife Area in a flood neutral state.

The development of this BDCP does create an opportunity to look for alternatives that avoid the effects described above while achieving realistic fisheries goals. The Yolo Basin Foundation proposes an alternative that would create a Yolo Bypass Conservation measure in place of the proposed Fremont Weir modification. This new measure would incorporate the five actions that are described in "Yolo Bypass Conceptual Aquatic Restoration Opportunities" approved by the Yolo Bypass Interagency Working Group in 2006. Known as the "Five Step Proposal," the actions are:

- **Putah Creek**—Implement Lower Putah Creek stream realignment and floodplain restoration for fish passage improvement and multi-species habitat development on existing public lands.
- **Lisbon Weir**—Modify or replace the weir to improve the agriculture and habitat water control structure for fish, wildlife, and agriculture.
- **Additional Multi-species Habitat Development**—Provide for controlled, localized seasonal inundation on more frequent intervals; identify areas of opportunity only on: the Yolo Wildlife Area, other existing public lands, and private lands where cooperative agreements with willing landowners provide mutual benefits.
- **Tule Canal Connectivity**—Identify passage impediments (e.g. road crossings and impoundments), work with landowners to develop the best options for improving fish passage and insuring water diversion capability.
- **Multi-species Fish Passage Structure on the Fremont Weir**—Investigate the redesign of the existing fish ladder, evaluate the feasibility of constructing a new fish passage structure operated to insure continued maintenance of flood capacity, no substantial changes in timing, volume, and/or duration of flow and minimal disturbance to existing land use and agricultural practices.

These actions were developed in a formal collaboration with CA Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, CA Department of Water Resources, and National Marine Fisheries Service with the co-equal goals of improving aquatic habitat and keeping Yolo Bypass users whole. These five actions are included in the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Land Management Plan. They are also part of the Bypass-wide package of actions that make up the Yolo Bypass Integrated Project within the Yolo County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan. This plan was crafted by a long standing group of stakeholders representing the Yolo Bypass.

Since the Five Step Proposal focuses on Putah Creek and Yolo Bypass infrastructure, an action to increase the frequency and duration of spring flooding from the Sacramento River could also be included. This approach would more directly benefit Sacramento River salmon.

Finally, any change in inundation patterns in the Yolo Bypass would have to protect the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and be developed in conjunction with the Central Valley Flood Protection Board.

The Lower Yolo Bypass Planning Forum, a formal collaboration co-sponsored by Yolo Basin Foundation and the Delta Protection Commission, provides a means for stakeholders to develop an ecosystem-based set of actions to improve fish habitat while protecting existing uses. We encourage the BDCP Steering Committee to collaborate with this group.

The Yolo Basin Foundation has twenty years of experience in maintaining the partnerships needed to successfully improve fish and wildlife habitat in the Wildlife Area, and the larger Yolo Bypass. Foundation staff and board members look forward to working with BDCP Steering Committee members and staff to address the goals of the BDCP in the Yolo Bypass.