

**Plan to Minimize Impacts on Adjacent Landowners
Floodway Expansion and Ecosystem Restoration at Dos Rios Ranch Project -
Hidden Valley Ranch Acquisition
Stanislaus County California**

Program Background

The Flood Corridor Program (FCP) was created by the “Safe Drinking Water, Clean Water, Watershed Protection and Flood Protection Act of 2000” (Proposition 13). Current funding comes from voter approved Proposition 1E, the “Disaster Preparedness and Flood Prevention Bond Act of 2006” (Public Resources Code Section 5096.800 et seq, Division 5, Chapter 1.699, Article 4, specifically Public Resources Code 5096.825). FCP is authorized to fund projects providing non-structural approaches to flood management, including the acquisition and restoration of wildlife habitat and agricultural land preservation. FCP guidelines require the applicant, in conjunction with the Department of Water Resources (DWR); develop a plan to minimize the impacts on adjacent landowners prior to acquiring any interest in land.

Water Code Section 79041 states: “Prior to acquiring an easement or other interest in land pursuant to this article, the project shall include a plan to minimize the impacts on adjacent landowners. The plan shall include but not be limited to, an evaluation of the impact on floodwaters, the structural integrity of affected levees, diversion facilities, customary agricultural husbandry practices and timber extraction operations, and an evaluation with regard to the maintenance required for any facilities that are proposed to be constructed or altered.”

DWR Plans to Provide Funds to River Partners to Acquire the Hidden Valley Ranch Property

FCP plans to amend its funding agreement with River Partners for the Floodway Expansion and Ecosystem Restoration at Dos Rios Ranch Project to add \$2,400,000 to the total budget. This \$2,400,000 will be allocated towards the acquisition of the full fee title of the 497-acre Hidden Valley Ranch located immediately south of the Dos Rios Ranch at the confluence of the Tuolumne River and San Joaquin River in Stanislaus County. Other contributing partners include the California Wildlife Conservation Board and DWR’s FloodSAFE Environmental Stewardship and Statewide Resources Office. As required by Water Code Section 79041, River Partners has prepared this Plan for DWR approval prior to the acquisition of the Hidden Valley Ranch property. A water control structure study that will include a hydrologic and hydraulic analysis will be prepared later in the Dos Rios Ranch 2 Project schedule and when it is complete, a Final Plan to Minimize Impacts to Adjacent Landowners will be prepared.

The property will be held by River Partners for subsequent wildlife-friendly farming activities. Long term management of the property may be transferred to a state or federal land management agency. The project will advance the goals of FCP in two key areas: flood damage reduction and wildlife enhancement. Through acquisition of real property the project provides a nonstructural solution to flood management and enhances wildlife habitat in a flood corridor. The specific objective of this project is to purchase the full fee title of Hidden Valley Ranch and place a permanent conservation easement over the property.

River Partners and a project collaborator, the Tuolumne River Trust, have worked together since 2005 to secure funds to purchase Hidden Valley Ranch. To date, the project team has taken the following actions towards closing the Hidden Valley Ranch purchase:

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- Negotiated and signed a purchase agreement with the landowner
- Opened escrow with First American Title Company
- Completed an independent appraisal of the property- which complies with the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice of the Appraisal Foundation (USPAP), the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions, and the Standards of Professional Practice of the Appraisal Institute and received approval from state and federal reviewers
- Completed the Preliminary Title report
- Completed and approved Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Assessments
- Completed a Hydraulic Analysis by MBK Engineers, Joseph D. Countryman PE, D. WRE
- Secured grant funds for the balance of the purchase price to supplement DWR's contribution
- Received letters of support from a broad range of elected officials and community groups

The acquisition of the Hidden Valley Ranch, coupled with the adjacent Dos Rios Ranch can provide up to 10,000 acre-feet (ac-ft) of floodwater attenuation at the confluence of the Tuolumne River and San Joaquin River. The transient water storage capacity of the properties provides the opportunity to reduce peak flow flood risk on upstream and downstream reaches of the Tuolumne River and San Joaquin River. Additionally, acquiring the Hidden Valley property is the second step in putting together a project that would absorb the peak of large flood events, and potentially allow for beneficial operational changes at Don Pedro Reservoir.

By expanding the flood protection corridor and providing approximately 10,000 ac-ft of transitory floodplain storage, potential taxpayer liability will be reduced as a result of decreased pressure on surrounding levees and riverbanks. Downstream infrastructure, most notably the State Highway 132 Bridge (the main transportation corridor between Modesto and the Bay Area) and the Hetch Hetchy water and power systems will be subjected to less pressure during large flood events. Also, the land will no longer be eligible for federal or State emergency disaster relief to repair any damages on the property itself. Following the acquisition of Hidden Valley Ranch by River Partners, the property will be managed through wildlife-friendly farming.

Managing the Hidden Valley Ranch using wildlife-friendly farming will make a significant contribution to the aggregate habitat area available in the San Joaquin Valley. The new habitat will benefit a number of threatened and endangered species, including but not limited to the Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*, ST), valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*, FT), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*, FT, ST) and steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*, FT). The 497-acre Hidden Valley property is located immediately south of the Dos Rios Ranch which was recently acquired (April 2012) for the purposes of wildlife management and enhanced flood management. Both properties are directly across the river from the 6,950-acre San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. Combined, these properties will create one of the largest contiguous riparian and floodplain conservation areas in the Central Valley.

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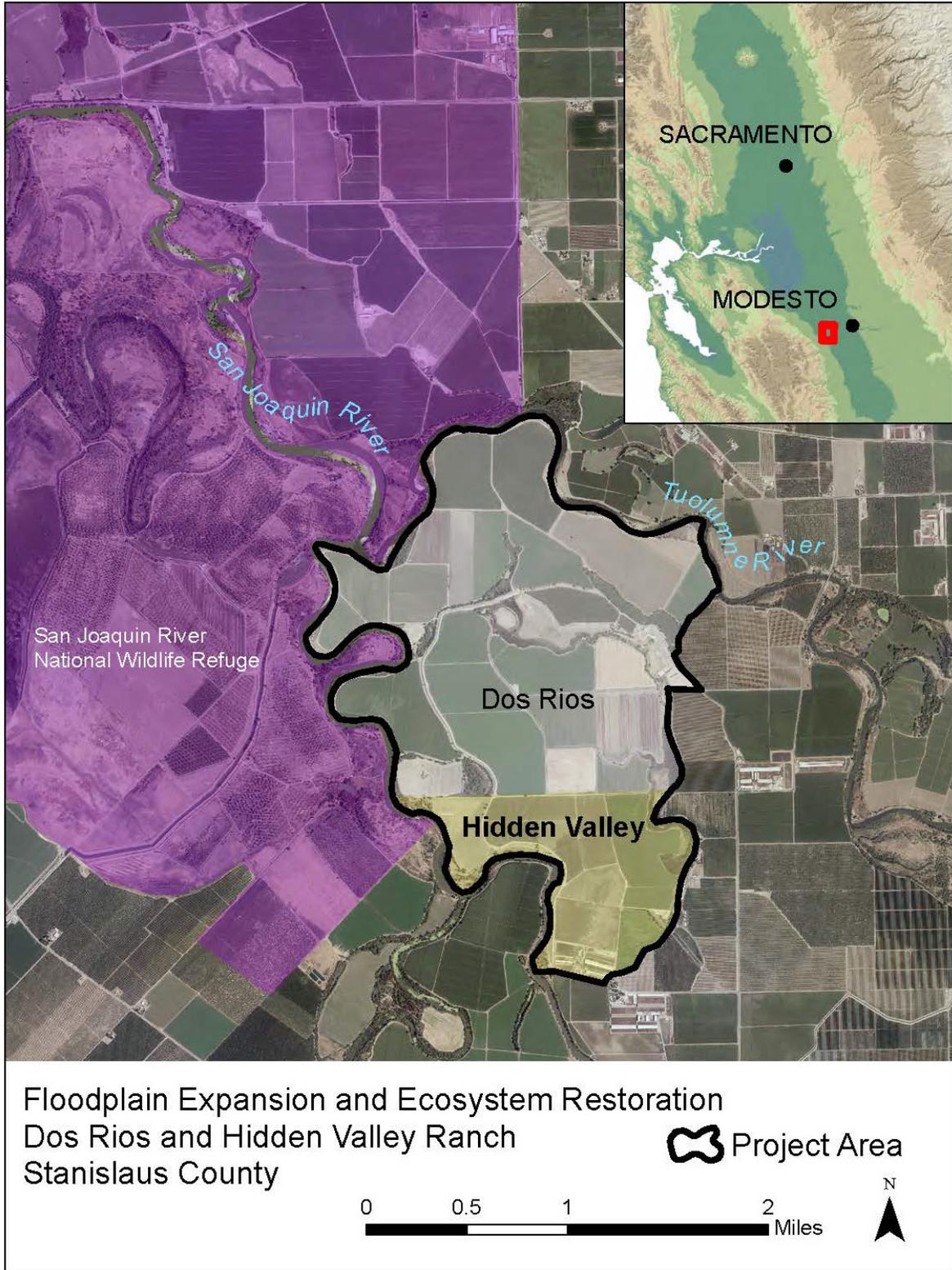


Figure 1. Location Map: Hidden Valley and Dos Rios Ranch, Stanislaus County

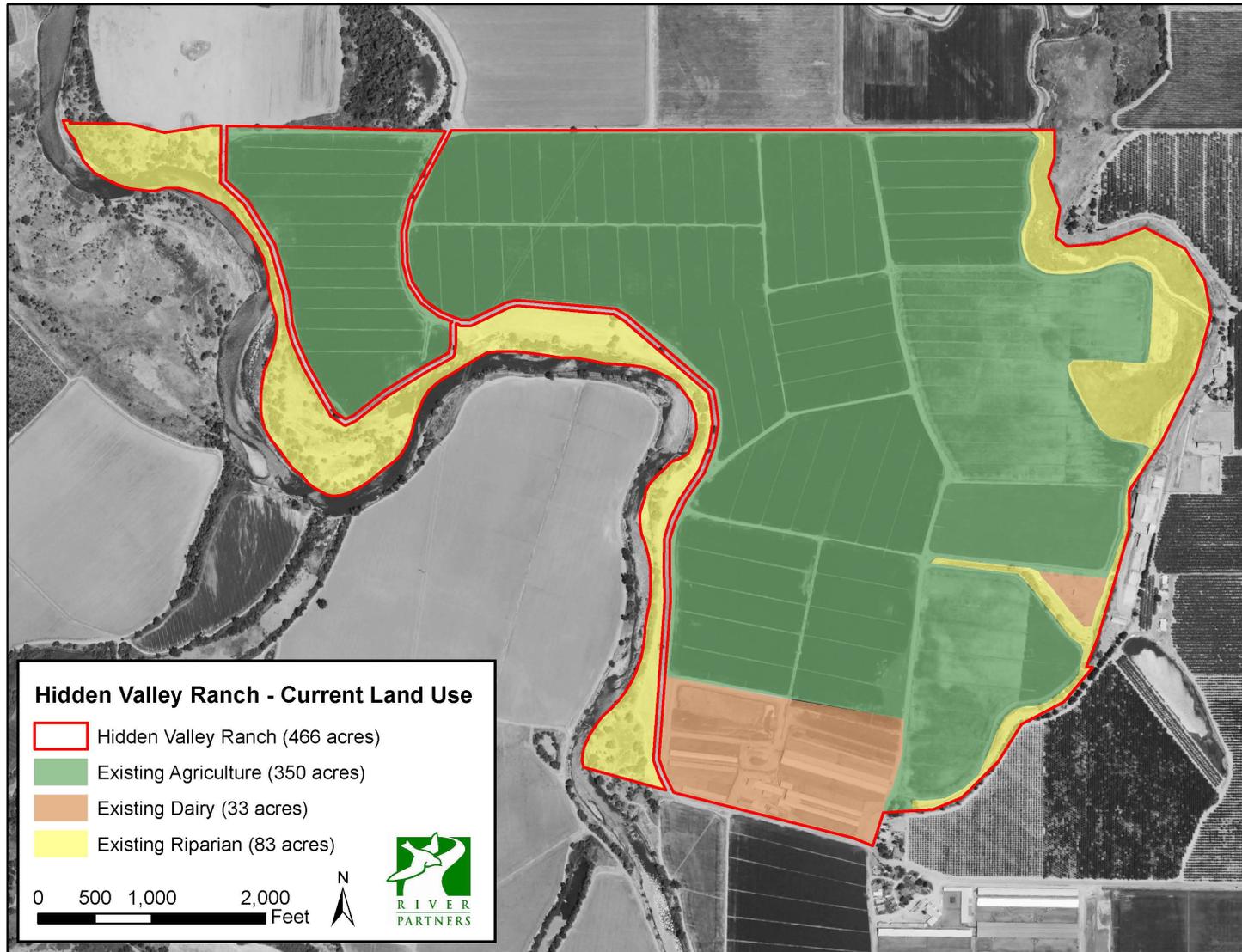


Figure 2. Existing Conditions Hidden Valley Ranch

Evaluation of Impact of Project on Floodwaters

Planning documents associated with this project include the preparation of:

- CEQA documentation (Notice of Exemption filed 2013),
- Plan to Minimize Impacts to Adjacent Landowners, and
- Preliminary Hydraulic Analysis.

In the past 28 years (between 1983 and 2011), Hidden Valley Ranch has experienced flooding seven times, about once every 4 years. The Ranch flooded in 1983, 1986, 1995, 1997, 2005, 2006, and 2011. According to the current owner, the Hidden Valley Ranch starts to flood when water levels on the San Joaquin River reach 8,000 cfs. The current owner reports that, historical floodwaters have remained on the Ranch from between 5 to 60 days.

This acquisition will provide the opportunity to reduce the volume of floodwater flowing in the main river channels and thus lower the stage of the Tuolumne River and San Joaquin River during floods both upstream and downstream. During typical flood seasons, the 10,000 acre feet of transient storage could, for example, attenuate 1,000 cfs during a 5-day peak flow period, a flow reduction of about 2.2 percent; or 5,000cfs during a one-day peak flow period, a reduction of about 11 percent of the 45,000 cfs design flow in the San Joaquin River. The acquisition site also functions as a sediment trap which will reduce sediment deposition in the channel thereby slowing future reductions in channel capacity and deferring the potential need for future sediment removal from the channel.

Evaluation of Impact on Structural Integrity of Affected Levees

Hidden Valley Ranch and the adjacent Dos Rios Ranch host approximately 3.5 miles of US Army Corps of Engineer (USACE) certified levees. The acquisition of Hidden Valley Ranch will not affect the structural integrity of these levees. As the landowner, River Partners will take on maintenance responsibilities for these levees. Dos Rios Ranch and Hidden Valley Ranch make up the Dos Rios Ranch Reclamation District (RD 2092). Upon completion of the Acquisition of Hidden Valley Ranch, River Partners will own fee-title to all lands protected from flooding by the RD 2092 levee.

Evaluation of Impacts on Diversion Facilities

The project is approximately 2 miles south of the point of diversion for the 2-mile intake canal for the West Stanislaus Irrigation District (WSID) which provides San Joaquin River water to over 24,000 acres of irrigated farmlands between the Delta Mendota Canal and the San Joaquin River. The WSID pump house is located west of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge, approximately 4 miles from Hidden Valley Ranch. The pump house has been retrofitted with retaining walls to protect the facility from flooding (1% exceedance probability) as part of the USACE Non-Structural Alternative Flood Control Project in this region following the 1997 floods. The acquisition of Hidden Valley Ranch will not jeopardize this facility.

Evaluation of Impacts on Current and Historic Agricultural Practices on the Project Site and in the Vicinity

This acquisition project will modify agricultural practices slightly to promote wildlife-friendly farming including modified irrigation scheduling, modified harvest scheduling, and retention of

corn stubble as forage for waterfowl. Immediately following property acquisition River Partners will contract with a lessee to continue wildlife friendly farming operations. The existing dairy cows will be removed from the site as soon as feasible for the current owner. Dairy operations will not be continued on the site and immediately following acquisition, River Partners will work to retire the existing dairy facilities in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Evaluation of Impacts on Timber Extraction Operations

This project will not impact any timber extraction operations.

Evaluation of Impacts with Regard to Maintenance

Upon acquisition, River Partners will own the site in fee title and the Tuolumne River Trust will hold a perpetual conservation easement over the 497-acre ranch. River Partners will be responsible for maintenance of the site. In the distant future, River Partners may transfer the Ranch to an appropriate State or federal agency for perpetual protection.

Maintenance activities proposed during River Partners' tenure as property owner include:

1. The property will be patrolled and inspected by River Partners staff and tenants, California Department of Fish and Wildlife wildlife wardens, and other law enforcement as possible on an ongoing basis (at least weekly) to ensure damage is not done to the lands by illegal dumping of garbage, off-road vehicle use, illegal hunting, etc. Fencing and signage may be provided on an as-needed basis.
2. Exotic weeds will be managed on the property to minimize the potential for infestations establishing from the spread of weeds from or to adjacent properties. Depending on the location, this will be accomplished using an approved herbicide, along with hand-pulling, and disking. Herbicides will be applied in accordance with county, State, and federal regulations. All vegetation will be managed in a manner consistent with wildlife-friendly farming practices and protecting and enhancing populations of sensitive biological resources, including avoidance of take of all federal- and state-listed species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and California Endangered Species Act (CESA).
3. River Partners will ensure that vegetation on the project site is thinned sufficiently to minimize impacts to adjacent landowners while retaining conveyance capacity sufficient to pass a 1 in 100-year flood or as permitted by the Central Valley Flood Protection Board. Management standards will be based upon hydraulic models to be developed in the planning phase for restoration.

4. Maintenance of the property will be conducted by River Partners, as landowner.

All costs for maintenance will be paid by the project partners including River Partners and other agencies and funding programs yet to be determined.

Conclusion

The acquisition of Hidden Valley Ranch by River Partners will not adversely impact adjacent landowners, facilities, or impact adjacent landowners' agricultural productivity. Immediately upon closing of the acquisition, River Partners will assume maintenance responsibilities for the

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property including securing the property from theft, vandalism and trespassing; and managing agricultural activities for the benefit of wildlife, while maintaining flood conveyance capacity. A detailed assessment of considerations to minimize impacts to adjacent landowners will be undertaken and will be incorporated into a future revision of this plan before any physical changes are made to the existing property other than normal and customary farming operations.

References

For more information, please refer to the following documents

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