

## Plan to Minimize Impacts to Adjacent Landowners Knaggs Ranch Acquisition, Yolo County, California

### **Program Background**

The Flood Protection Corridor Program (FPCP) 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 84, the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006.” The Program is authorized to fund projects providing non-structural approaches to flood management, including the acquisition and restoration of wildlife habitat and agricultural land preservation. Program 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.

The Water Code Section states:

*”Water Code Section 79041: 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.”*

### **Project Overview**

The Flood Protection Corridor Program (FPCP) in partnership with the Sacramento Valley Conservancy (SVC) and the Yolo Land Trust (YLT) will be contributing approximately \$4.5 million to acquire 847 acres of property along the Sacramento River, known as the Knaggs Ranch Hershey Woods parcel, in the Elkhorn Basin in eastern Yolo County. These 847 acres are identified on the map accompanying this plan. The land is characterized as orchard, row crops, and fallow fields. The project proposes to purchase this acreage and achieve the overall goals of conserving agricultural land, enhancing wildlife habitat, and reducing flood risk by acquiring property that can not be made safe from flooding.

Specific objectives for this project include:

1. Convey conservation and floodplain easements on the property so the property stays in open space, continues to be used for agricultural production, and is not developed with additional structures susceptible to flood damage.
2. Permanently protect agriculture and open space on the site in a way that will not preclude future potential restoration, and enhancement of the site.
3. Make available to DWR a conservation easement and at DWR's later election restore approximately 350 acres of marginal agricultural land to native riparian vegetation, creating a large contiguous block of new riparian habitat that can be used as mitigation for DWR activities associated with maintenance of the existing State flood control system.
4. Enhance existing riparian vegetation on the site and along the Sacramento River through control of invasive plants and revegetation activities.
5. Continue agricultural production, including grazing, orchard, or row crop production compatible with Swainson's hawk foraging needs.

### **Evaluation of Impact of Acquisition on Floodwaters**

Knaggs Ranch which lies in the Elkhorn Basin between the Yolo Bypass and the Sacramento River is located in a floodplain protected by levees on all sides. The Elkhorn Basin comprises Reclamation District 1600 (RD 1600) and is susceptible to flooding in a flood larger than the design standards for the levees on the Sacramento River. Because the operation of Knaggs Ranch will continue in the present agricultural uses with some habitat restoration, and the levees will be maintained to current standards, there will be no change in the levee maintenance practices or elevation other than for RD 1600 to improve the levees to current standards as deficiencies are identified and as funding becomes available. SVC proposes to acquire the property and keep it in agricultural use and to maintain the levees, the drainage system and the irrigation works. Because the Elkhorn Basin will be neither no more nor less likely to flood than it does now, adjoining flood elevations should not change, and there will be no change in the risk of flooding to either Knaggs Ranch or adjoining properties within the Basin. In the event the Elkhorn Basin floods during a major storm event, the agricultural operators would be expected to pump the standing water back into the adjoining waterways to the best of their ability subject to resource limitations and return the basin to agricultural production.

### **Evaluation of Impacts on Structural Integrity of Affected Levees**

The levees surrounding the Elkhorn Basin have been maintained by the property owners or managers, through RD 1600, and will continue to be maintained by the reclamation district. SVC or purchasers of any rights to agricultural uses of the property would vote as landowners on matters related to RD 1600 and may be directly represented on the district board for RD 1600.

### **Evaluation of Impacts on Diversion Facilities**

The existing agricultural improvements of the Elkhorn Basin include irrigation diversion and drainage facilities that are sized to meet crop production needs. Because Knaggs Ranch would continue to be farmed, there would be no need to make significant changes in the diversion and drainage works for continued agricultural use, habitat restoration, and or other routine maintenance. However, there may be a need for rehabilitation or replacement of facilities from time to time.

### **Evaluation of Impacts on Customary Agricultural Husbandry Practices**

One of the justifications for DWR funding acquisition of Knaggs Ranch by SVC is that the northern portion of the basin already contains habitat mitigation areas in conjunction with wildlife-friendly farming. It is the intention of DWR, SVC and YLT to maintain most of the agricultural husbandry practices in their existing form. The funding agreements and conservation easement require the continuation of wildlife-friendly farming. Neighboring landowners may be concerned that continuing these wildlife-friendly agricultural practices may benefit populations of wildlife that have nuisance value, or interfere with customary agriculture. However, recent research of habitat enhancement areas adjoining agricultural operations along the Sacramento River suggest there may actually be benefits to agricultural pest control from adjacent riparian habitat<sup>1</sup>. Under the conservation easement and funding agreements, DWR and the Resources Agency must approve any significant change in operations. SVC has an outstanding reputation for being a good neighbor and regularly consults with adjacent property owners to explore different interests and work out measures that will avoid substantial conflicts. Any decision to use the 350 acres for mitigation will be subject to completion, adoption, and certification of environmental documents that would evaluate any potential new impacts.

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<sup>1</sup>Colusa Subreach Planning Pest and Regulatory Effects Study Public Draft Project Report, November 2007

### **Evaluation of Impacts on Timber Extraction Operations**

At this time, there are no timber extraction operations in the Elkhorn Basin, and it is unlikely that there would be any. In the event the agricultural practices were to convert to a fuel wood, woodlot, wood-chip or even less likely, a hardwood production use, there would not be any likely conflict with the use of the basin for agricultural practices or habitat restoration efforts. Any conflict, and its resolution, would be addressed in future plans for the use of the basin if it materializes. At this time any such issues would be speculative.

### **Evaluation of Impacts on Maintenance of Any Facilities Proposed to be Altered or Constructed**

The Elkhorn Basin presently has a number of structures and improvements that are part of the ongoing agricultural operations. Because the intention of all parties is to continue the agricultural uses of the property relatively unchanged, those structures and improvements that are part of the operation will be maintained. SVC will be applying to Yolo County for a permit to remove or demolish the double-wide mobile home currently on the Hershey Woods site. If any other buildings are no longer needed, their upkeep and alternative uses for them would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. If such buildings had no alternative use, or constituted an attractive nuisance, an eyesore, or a liability, they would be removed, but only after the approval of DWR and the Resources Agency. After completion of other studies, the drainage works might be altered to permit execution of a plan for flood protection, environmental restoration and operation in the interest of all parties. Until all parties were are satisfied with the plan of improvement, any unplanned damage to or breaks in the basin levee and drainage system would will be repaired and restored to their previous functioning condition.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the project and its subsequent maintenance will not have significant adverse impacts on existing adjoining property owners, land use practices, or flood control facilities. In addition to conserving agricultural land and providing habitat to mitigate for flood maintenance activities the proposed project removes future development pressure from property that can not feasibly be made safe from flooding.

### **Attachment:**

Exhibit A, Map of Proposed Acquisition