

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FROM
FLOOD PROTECTION CORRIDOR PROGRAM
PUBLIC HEARING ON
KNAGGS RANCH ACQUISITION
Elkhorn Fire Station
7:00 PM, Wednesday, May 28, 2008**

Attendees: 14 in addition to Earl Nelson, Chief of Flood Corridor Grants Section and David Martasian Chief of Flood Protection Corridor Program Unit for the State Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Earl Nelson, gave an overview of the purpose of the Flood Protection Corridor Program (FPCP), the criteria for project selection, and clarified that one of the goals of the program is to secure land from development that can not feasibly be made safe from flooding. Mr. Nelson stated that the FPCP Project Evaluation Team found this project to be one of the 8 best projects to be funded out of 23 applications and requests for \$74M worth of projects submitted for competitive evaluation. The Sacramento Valley Conservancy (SVC) requested and the Project Evaluation Team recommended a grant in the amount of \$5M. Mr. Nelson explained the purpose of the hearing was to determine whether DWR should move forward and execute a funding agreement with SVC, and if so, should there be conditions attached to the funding approval.

Aimee Rutledge, Executive Director of the Sacramento Valley Conservancy (SVC) then provided a project overview of the planned acquisition. She described the Knaggs Ranch, Hershey Woods parcel as being located between Woodland and Sacramento and more specifically between the Yolo Bypass and the Sacramento River in the northern part of the Elkhorn Basin. Ms. Rutledge noted three key reasons for the proposed acquisition: 1. It is critical to prevent development in the Elkhorn Basin because the cost to provide a 200 year level of protection makes it infeasible. 2. Protection and preservation of local agriculture. 3. Preservation and enhancement of existing wildlife habitat. After acquisition SVC will be the fee title owners the property will have both agricultural conservation and habitat conservation easements placed on it and the Yolo Land Trust (YLT) will be the easement holders. SAFCA and DWR are both providing funds to make this acquisition possible. A noted side benefit that Ms. Rutledge pointed out is the fact this project has developed a point of conversation between SAFCA and Yolo County providing a level of cooperation that has previously not existed. The hope is that the levees surrounding the Elkhorn Basin can be improved to a better state than their current condition up to the 1957 design profile and provide an example of the opportunities for local, regional, and state agencies working together.

Earl Nelson opened the meeting to comments and questions. Yolo County Supervisor Matt Rexroad began the comment portion of the meeting by stating most Yolo County residents' vision of the Elkhorn Basin is to maintain it in agriculture. Supervisor Rexroad has concerns about habitat easements or any type of flood easements. He asked what is the purpose of the DWR dollars that are being used for this project? Is it for an agricultural easement or flood easement? Earl Nelson responded by saying one of the provisions of the FPCP is to preserve land that is not suitable for development and should not be developed because the cost of providing flood protection is not feasible relative to the development potential in combination with a goal of agricultural protection, habitat protection or both. DWR would like to use some of this acquisition for mitigation of levee maintenance activities. We prefer to not take prime agricultural land out of production and our understanding is there is marginal agricultural land included in this acquisition. In summary DWR's interest is in prohibiting development and providing opportunities for mitigation in the future.

Supervisor Rexroad asked if our analysis is that the Elkhorn Basin is facing development pressure and what facts make us believe it is under development pressure? Earl Nelson pointed out that development pressure in other areas suggest that it is likely the Elkhorn basin could face development pressure in the future. He

noted locations such as Tracy and Lathrop where developers have been creative at finding ways to build in at risk areas.

Another attendee asked what preserving habitat is going to mean to the neighbors and what impacts it will have on them? What will be different? Earl Nelson and Aimee Rutledge suggested that the management will not be all that different. Levee protection and maintenance of the irrigation system will still take priority. Only portions of the property not suitable for agriculture will be converted to habitat.

Another concern was that the land will be devalued as habitat instead of agriculture. Aimee Rutledge pointed out that there are several parts of the property that are not suitable for walnuts. The SVC plans to use income from the walnuts to manage the property so they would cheat themselves out of that income if they remove suitable orchard from production.

Several meeting attendees expressed concern the plans do not seem very clear about beginning, middle, and end. Aimee Rutledge pointed out that the funding partners for phase two have not all been identified because of this it is hard to say exactly how the other property will be treated.

Are there other motives other than preserving open space? Why does SAFCA want to buy agricultural land in Yolo County on the west side of the Sacramento River? If SAFCA has control over the eastern side of the river what is the incentive to preserve ag land on the western side of the river? Mick Klasson, consultant for SAFCA, identified SAFCA's interest is in the functioning of the overall flood control system. He noted, "Our incentive is to have the system work." About a year ago SAFCA produced a white paper that advertised improvements that should be made to the system. SAFCA feels standards should be identified for rural levees and urban levees. SAFCA's incentive is to have the system work. They believe urban areas should have a higher standard but both urban and rural levees need improvements.

Matt Rexroad asked, "Wouldn't SAFCA have the advantage?" The equation is fine as long as the level of flood protection on one side of the river is better than the other. So the levees on the western side of the river have to be of a lower quality than the levees on the eastern side. Aimee Rutledge pointed out it is that way now and with SAFCA's involvement there is a chance that the levees will be better maintained.

Why not just buy an easement? Aimee Rutledge pointed out that the Knaggs family is not interested in selling an easement. They are only interested in a fee title sale. Also from a standpoint of wanting to manage the site with wildlife friendly agriculture and creating a mosaic of agriculture and habitat enhancement fee title purchase is the best option.

Some meeting attendees expressed distrust for DWR. "DWR has made a whole lot of promises, provided letters and said what they were going to do when they repaired levees in front of our home and not one promise was true." "We don't feel we can trust DWR." Attendees also said they did not like the idea of multiple agencies coming together to do this now at a time that it doesn't need to happen. Fear was expressed that someone is going to want to flood the Elkhorn Basin. Aimee Rutledge, Earl Nelson, Mick Klasson and the president of Reclamation District 1600 clarified that there is not a plan to intentionally flood the Elkhorn Basin no one is acquiring a flood easement and if the basin were to flood it would create problems for the Sacramento Weir, Interstate 5 and the city of Sacramento.

What type of habitat will be out there? Aimee Rutledge and Earl Nelson pointed out it could be a mix of shaded riverine aquatic, giant garter snake habitat, upland riparian, seasonal wetland or perennial wetland. Will the habitat affect agriculture at all? Aimee Rutledge said it was not likely to negatively impact agriculture and recent studies along the Sacramento River suggest that increased riparian bird populations may actually help control insects.

One member of the audience presented his compliments to the SVC and the YLT for stimulating the positive discussions between Yolo County and SAFCA.

Finally Supervisor Rexroad stated that it causes him a great deal of concern to go before the Yolo Board of Supervisors to make this project move forward as an agricultural preservation project and then have a

member of SAFCA make a statement about flooding the basin. Aimee Rutledge, Earl Nelson, and Mick Klasson all stated the intentions of this project are not to flood the basin.
No written or phone questions or comments were received during the open comment period.