

## 2.0 YOLO COUNTY OPEN SPACE & RECREATION RESOURCES

This Chapter presents an overview of the characteristics of open space lands, existing open space resources, recreation patterns and activities, and recreation opportunities in Yolo County. For additional information, please refer to the Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report.

### 2.1 What Are Open Space Lands?

Yolo County has abundant open space and numerous recreational opportunities. The open space available for recreation can be categorized into three very specific environments; (1) the grasslands of the central part of the county, (2) the Coast Range to the west, including the Blue Ridge mountains, and (3) water resources the riparian areas, including Cache Creek, Putah Creek, and the Sacramento River.

#### Physical Characteristics

The landscape of Yolo County is varied and allows for a wide range of recreational activities.

**The Delta/Sacramento River.** The Delta/Sacramento River is that section of Yolo County following the Sacramento River and Yolo Bypass. The majority of visitor-serving businesses in this area can be found in one of three communities: Knights Landing, West Sacramento and Clarksburg, with West Sacramento by far the largest. Four County parks are located in this area, serving the three communities: Knights Landing Boat Launch, Elkhorn Boat Launch (near West Sacramento), Clarksburg Boat Launch, and Helvetia Oak Grove. Recreational opportunities in the Delta region include boating, fishing, cycling, wine tasting, bird watching, and sightseeing.

**Grasslands.** The Grasslands area of Yolo County is the relatively flat terrain making up the majority of the county. Most of this area is productive agricultural land. Regional parks make up the majority of the recreational opportunity space and include Grasslands Regional Park. The Cache Creek Nature Preserve is also located in the Grasslands area. The majority of visitor-serving businesses for this Grasslands area are found in Woodland and Davis. Recreational opportunities, besides those commonly associated with park visitation, include cycling, wine tasting, equestrian activities, fishing, bird watching and agricultural tourism.

**Blue Ridge Mountains.** The Blue Ridge Mountains are within the Putah and Cache Creek drainage and part of the Blue Ridge/Berryessa Natural Area. Bordering Napa, Lake and Solano counties, the Blue Ridge range runs along the west side of the county, with Highway 16 running parallel and through the Capay Valley. Within this area, recreational opportunities include mountain biking, fishing, white water rafting, hiking, camping, hunting, gambling, horseback riding, agricultural tourism and sightseeing along the scenic valley. Most visitor-serving businesses in this area are found in Esparto and Winters, with additional services in Guinda,

Brooks and Capay. County parks in the area include Nichols, Cache Creek Canyon, Esparto and Putah Creek Fishing Access.

## Biological Resources

### Habitat & Natural Vegetation

Yolo County is currently pursuing a Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) to mitigate the loss of biological resources (26 covered species and their habitats) from future urban development. Five primary habitat types were identified for planning purposes, based on the physical and biological descriptions of locations where target species presently occur or are known to occur in Yolo County (see Section 2.2 for additional discussion of the NCCP and the habitat conservation planning process).

- **Riparian.** Riparian habitat includes the entire range of vegetation types and other special elements such as sand or mud that are associated with the watercourses of Yolo County.
- **Wetland.** Wetland habitat types include natural wetland areas, modified creeks and drainage ways, and various artificial impoundments. The primary areas of wetland habitat are located east of Woodland, northeast of Davis, and in the Yolo Bypass.
- **Woodland.** Woodland habitats include a continuously varying series of habitat types dominated in height, if not in area/cover, by trees. Such trees occur as windrows or along roadways, as clumps of trees planted in agricultural or rangeland settings, and individual trees occurring within other non-wooded habitat types or urban areas. The primary area for existing woodland habitats in the NCCP area is between the Colusa Basin Drainage Canal and the City of Woodland.
- **Grassland.** Within Yolo County, grasslands occur almost exclusively on slopes steeper than 2 percent. Grasslands comprise the habitat type that has been most reduced in geographic extent across the Yolo County NCCP area. Grassland is overwhelmingly vegetated by newly introduced non-native annual grasses, which are primarily wild oats, ripgut brome, soft chess, and barleys. A variety of forbs are interspersed among the grasses, and are nearly all exotic species. Grassland can occur within riparian habitat and the oak savannah and occasionally is associated with cultivated lands. Isolated wetlands and widely scattered trees also occur within some grasslands.
- **Agriculture.** Agricultural habitats comprise the dominant habitat type in the NCCP area. Agricultural lands include alfalfa and pasture, annual field crops, vineyards and orchards, and rice. Agricultural lands are intensively used lands that historically supported other Great Valley habitat types. Over the last 150 years, conversion of natural lands to agriculture has steadily increased. Many habitat values of those agricultural lands overlap with those of less intensively modified lands categorized as other habitat types. For example, many of the habitat values of rice fields are similar to those of wetlands due to regular inundation. Dry-farmed or briefly flood-irrigated croplands used to grow cereal crops, tomatoes, and alfalfa share some of the habitat values of grasslands.

Figure 4-1 of the Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report (included in Appendix A of this Element) illustrates the location of the various habitat types within the NCCP area. The Background Report presents a list of the primary habitat types and subtypes identified and mapped for the NCCP, summarizes the qualitative descriptions of the habitats associated with various target species, and presents the occurrence of target species by habitat types and subtypes.

## Fish and Wildlife

According to the NCCP, riparian habitat corridors currently support or have the potential to support species such as the Valley elderberry longhorn beetle, Western pond turtle, Giant garter snake, Cooper's and Swainson's hawks, Yellow-billed cuckoo, Bank swallow, and California yellow warbler. Wetlands support a diversity of species including several grasses, fairy shrimp, California tiger salamander, Western spadefoot, Western pond turtle, Giant garter snake, and several bird species. Woodland habitats support the Valley elderberry longhorn beetle, California tiger salamander, Western spadefoot, and Loggerhead shrike, and are particularly important as nesting sites for the Swainson's hawk.

Although native plants are relatively absent from grasslands, grassland habitat is of high habitat value for many native wildlife species. For example, an important non-vegetational habitat element in grassland is the soil that burrowing wildlife species dig for thermal and visual cover and for den or nest sites. These burrows then constitute a crucial habitat element for other species that need them, but are unable to dig them. Ground squirrel burrows and pocket gopher burrows are subsequently used by and are essential for several target species, including the Western burrowing owl and the California tiger salamander.

The most important special habitat elements in agricultural lands usually are the berms and fences that bound many parcels. These edges provide valuable burrow opportunities and perches for species that feed on the insects and rodents that are found on and along the edges of some fields. The regular removal of cover through the harvesting process exposes the resident insect and rodent populations to foraging predators such as the Swainson's hawk.

The biological significance of several of the County parks is noted in the County's *Preliminary Draft Parks and Recreation Facilities Draft Master Plan* (1998). The Clarksburg Boat Launch Facility is characterized by riparian habitat. Dominant vegetation species in the canopy layer include cottonwoods, sycamores and Valley oaks, with an understory shrub layer composed of wild grape, wild rose and grasses. This riparian area is rich in the diversity of wildlife species, including ringtail, western yellow-billed cuckoo, and fish species indigenous to the Sacramento River.

Elkhorn Boat Launch Facility is an extremely important dense riparian forest that is publicly accessible. It supports a heron rookery in the tall trees north of the ramp and slough. A western yellow-billed cuckoo has been sited at the park. Helvetia Oak Grove supports oak woodland habitat and common plant species associated with this habitat type. The oak woodland has a mature upper canopy and lacks a middle canopy layer. The low growth vegetation consists

mainly of annual and perennial grass species. The park supports a wide variety of resident and migratory wildlife species.

Grasslands Regional Park supports non-native annual grassland habitat with a heavy infestation of star thistle. Left unchecked, the star thistle infestation will become very difficult to eradicate, and will pose problems as the park moves toward restoring native vegetation. Several wildlife species occupy this park, including burrowing owls and Swainson's hawk. Migrant waterfowl of the Pacific flyway frequent this park site. Another significant feature is a one-half acre vernal pool that supports Colusa grass and Crampton's tuctoria. The vernal pool is actually the extension of a pool located on the adjacent U.S. Air Force site, which supports a large vernal pool complex. Acorn plantings have also resulted in oak seedlings and young trees at the site.

The Putah Creek Fishing Access Areas are situated in some of the most pristine riparian habitat in California, due in part to the year-round water flow in the creek coming from Monticello Dam. Many species commonly found in riparian areas are present in the park, as well as otters, beavers and muskrats. Recent discoveries of Chinook salmon have been documented. The park supports many perennial plant species, including a wide variety of wildflowers in the spring. The Knights Landing Boat Launch Facility contains 800 feet of riverfront access and is situated in dense riparian habitat.

Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park is considered culturally, historically, geologically, biologically and recreationally significant. It contains important wildlife features, including bald eagles, deer, and other birds and animals. The park also supports several habitat types, including grasslands, riparian, mixed chaparral, chamise-redshank chaparral, and oak woodlands. Many individuals and organizations have documented and preserved the historical resources of the area.

### **Streams and Riparian Corridors**

Riparian habitat includes the entire range of vegetation types and other species elements such as sand or mud that are associated with the watercourses of Yolo County. Key riparian habitat corridors in the county include Cache Creek, Putah Creek, Willow Slough/Willow Slough Bypass, Union School Slough, Dry Slough, Chikahominy Slough, the Colusa Basin Drain, the Sacramento River, Oat Creek, Sycamore Slough and Buckeye Creek. Enhancement of these key riparian corridors that connect important habitats in the county will facilitate the movement of small mammals and provide for genetic interchange between species populations to ensure their long-term viability. Potential riparian corridors are illustrated in Figure 4-2 of Appendix A.

### **Other Environmental Factors**

#### **Areas Required for Ecologic & Scientific Study Purposes**

The Draft NCCP identifies ecological features in the NCCP plan area that were identified by local Yolo County conservationists during the community involvement process. These ecological features, shown in Figure 4-3 of Appendix A, are considered important to an understanding of the ecology of Yolo County.

## Rivers, Streams, & Other Watercourses

Clear Lake is the source of water for Cache Creek. According to the *Interim Report Cache Creek Investigation* (Department of Water Resources Bulletin No. 20, April 1958), the major portion of the water supply from the main stem of Cache Creek originates as rainfall in the Upper Clear Lake-Cache Creek Basin:

Since runoff is largely from rainfall, it is closely allied with the duration and intensity of storms during the winter period. The seasonal runoff pattern is varied, with large flows occurring in the winter and early spring, meager flows occurring in the summer and fall, and both supplemented by limited flow from perennial springs. In addition to variations within the season, runoff fluctuates widely from season to season...Under the present method of operation, runoff from the Clear Lake Basin is partially regulated by Clear Lake Impounding Dam, located on Cache Creek about 5 miles below the natural outlet of Clear Lake. The Grigsby Riffle, a natural restriction in the channel about 2 miles below the natural lake outlet, limits, under certain conditions, the regulating effect of the dam.

According to the *Cache Creek Area Plan*, Cache Creek has changed extensively over the past 100 years, generally becoming narrower, faster, deeper, and carrying higher volumes of water. Overall, the area of Cache Creek has decreased by over two-thirds, from 5,000 acres in 1905 to just under 1,600 acres today. The factors leading to this condition are detailed in the Plan, but generally relate to removal of large areas of native riparian vegetation, expansion of farmland onto former floodplains, water diversions for irrigation, construction of levees for flood protection, construction of bridges, and gravel mining.

The Indian Valley Reservoir, completed in the early 1970s, is located just north of the Yolo County line at the source of Cache Creek. Although its primary function is to serve as a water storage facility for irrigation, it also collects much of the runoff water from the northern end of the valley that would normally run into Cache Creek, thus limiting flooding in the region. The Tehama-Colusa Canal starts in Red Bluff in Tehama County and carries water from the Shasta Dam area through Colusa County and into Bird Creek in Yolo County for irrigation purposes.

## Wetlands, Sloughs & Vernal Pools

Many examples have been provided elsewhere in this Open Space and Recreation Element of public and private lands characterized by wetlands and riparian areas. Babel Slough extends between Road E-9 – the South River Road (at the Sacramento River) and the Deep Water Ship Channel. Chickahominy Slough is located in the southwestern and south central portion of Yolo County.

A portion of Yolo County is within the Solano-Colusa Vernal Pool Region, as described by the California Wetlands Information System, and as shown on Figure 4-4 of Appendix A. According to the California Wetlands Information System, The Solano-Colusa Vernal Pool Region is a relatively large area covering the majority of Solano County and ranging northward

from the low lying plains adjacent to the Suisun Marsh and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta through the Colusa Basin of western Sacramento Valley to the vicinity of Princeton, Glenn County. According to the System's website:

Vernal pools are seasonally flooded depressions found on ancient soils with an impermeable layer such as a hardpan, claypan, or volcanic basalt. The impermeable layer allows the pools to retain water much longer than the surrounding uplands; nonetheless, the pools are shallow enough to dry up each season. Vernal pools often fill and empty several times during the rainy season. Only plants and animals that are adapted to this cycle of wetting and drying can survive in vernal pools over time.

These specialized plants and animals are what make vernal pools unique. As winter rains fill the pools, freshwater invertebrates, crustaceans, and amphibians emerge. Vernal pool plants sprout underwater, some using special floating leaves and air-filled stems to stay afloat. Some of these plants even flower underwater! Birds arrive to feed on the vernal pool plants and animals.

[The Solano-Colusa Vernal Pool Region] is best known for its excellent examples of Northern Claypan pools between Highway 113 and Travis Airforce Base... This is the only known region to contain the Federal threatened Delta green ground beetle and the grass *Tuctoria mucronata*, both serve to distinguish it biologically from any other region...

The website notes that, within Yolo County, some protection is afforded to vernal pools on Department of Defense (Air Force) land south of Davis. Grasslands Park, which abuts the Air Force site, contains vernal pools that mingle with or start near the boundary with the Air Force property. The Air Force site is anticipated to become a County park property. A cooperative vernal pool protection project with the Air Force is being developed through the County Parks and Resource Management Division. The website also notes that the City of Woodland has agreed with The Nature Conservancy to protect some rare plant populations, although these are not naturally occurring vernal pool sites (old rice fields).

### **Watersheds & Groundwater Recharge Areas**

Cache Creek, Putah Creek, and the Sacramento River are the main watersheds in Yolo County. The principal watersheds in the county, their subbasins and the acreage for each are shown on Figure 4-5 of Appendix A. These watersheds are exceptional natural resources in Yolo County, which lend themselves to a combination of habitat, preserved open space and interpretive recreational uses. The upper northwest end of Cache Creek is adjacent to 50,000 acres of BLM wilderness with access through existing County park property. According to the *Cache Creek Area Plan*, Cache Creek is located in a groundwater basin that is generally defined by the Coast Range to the west, the Sacramento River to the east, the Colusa Basin watershed to the north, and the Putah Creek watershed to the south (see Figures 4-5 and 4-6 of Appendix A). This Plan reports that the availability of groundwater data, especially with regard to water quality, is poorly developed and unorganized.

According to the *Clear Lake-Cache Creek Basin Investigation* (Department of Water Resources Bulletin No. 90, March 1961):

The valley floor lands in the Clear Lake-Cache Creek Basin are underlain by water-bearing materials of considerable storage capacity, particularly in the Cache Creek Service Area. Water pumped from underground storage serves nearly all the lands irrigated within the Clear Lake Basin, and meets a substantial portion of the water requirements for irrigation and domestic uses within the Cache Creek Basin...Percolation of precipitation and stream flow are the most important sources of ground water replenishment, while percolation of the unconsumed portion of applied irrigation water and of losses from canals and laterals constitutes a secondary, although significant, source of replenishment...Ground water in the Cache Creek Service Area is, for the most part, free or unconfined, but many deep wells show "semiconfined" effects...The Cache Creek Basin is underlain by folded and faulted consolidated sedimentary rocks of Cretaceous and Tertiary age which contain little useable ground water. These older rocks are overlain by the following water-bearing formations: Tehama formation and related continental sediments of Plio-Pleistocene age; older alluvium and terraces of Pleistocene age; and stream channel, terrace, flood plain, and other alluvial deposits of Recent age.

The depletion of groundwater resources has been a major concern in the county. According to the *Agricultural and Tourism Targeted Industry Analysis Final Report* (agAccess Information Service, 1996), in the past, the overdraft of groundwater has been a severe problem in the Upper Cache Creek watershed and the Dunnigan Hills region. According to the EIR for the Yolo County General Plan (1983), recharge to groundwater in Yolo County is by deep percolation of rainfall, irrigation, return waters, and leakage from irrigation canals. The EIR states that this overdraft results from increased pumping for agriculture, combined with restricted opportunities for recharge. The importing of surface waters by canals such as the Hungry Hollow canal and the Tehama-Colusa canal has helped to relieve the problem. Furthermore, the above-cited sources report that groundwater in the entire county is adequately recharged during the wet years to offset drought period overdrafts.

### **Areas of Outstanding Scenic, Historic & Cultural Value**

Yolo County has several transportation routes that are considered scenic highways and corridors due to the natural and agricultural settings in their immediate vicinities. Sections of Highway 16 and 128 are located alongside chaparral, woodland, and grassland areas. Furthermore, unusual rock formations are evident among canyon walls located along these scenic highways. County Roads 16, 116, and 117 make up what is known as the Sacramento Northern River Scenic Route. The Sacramento South River Scenic Route runs from Barge Canal to Sutter Slough. Both routes offer extensive views of the Sacramento River and adjacent agricultural lands.

According to the *Yolo County General Plan*, there are several areas of cultural and historical significance. The Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report provides a brief

description of these cultural and historical areas. In addition, Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park has been described in the *Draft Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan* as “culturally, historically, geologically, biologically and recreationally significant.”

### Identification of Areas with Hazardous or Special Conditions

**Geologic Hazards.** According to the *Yolo County General Plan*, Part I, there are two major fault zones within Yolo County, the Midland Fault Zone and the area surrounding Capay Valley. The maximum expected earthquake intensity for Yolo County ranges from moderate to high. No serious earth movements have been generated in Yolo County, although one of the ten most severe earthquakes in California had its epicenter in the vicinity of Berryessa Dam. The 1891 shock was serious and caused damage to the towns of Winters, Davis, and Woodland.

The Midland Fault Zone is located between the City of Winters and the Coast Range in the southwestern portion of the County. Two concealed faults lie within this zone. It was in this zone that the 1891 quake was centered.

Two major faults border the valley in the Capay Hills. The Sweitzer Fault is located just below the ridgeline of the Capay Hills, paralleling the valley. The Eisner Fault is located at the upper end of the Capay Valley just below the Sweitzer Fault. The existence of the Eisner Thrust Fault and Sweitzer Fault make western Yolo County a seismically hazardous area; otherwise, the county is geologically quite stable.

The remainder of the known faults are located in the vicinity of the western and northwestern border of Yolo County, in the Blue Ridge and Rocky Ridge Hills. Subsurface faults of varying significance are discovered in the logs of gas wells drilled in the county. No known faults are located under any of the major inhabited areas of the county.

Major faults lie to the west along the Pacific Coast in the San Andreas Fault Zone, whose movement could affect Yolo County. Other faults are to the east along the Sierra Nevadas in the Bear Mountain and Melones Fault Zones.

Other seismic type activity occurs from seiches, which are earthquake induced waves in contained bodies of water. They would most likely occur in the Yolo Bypass (when filled), Lake Berryessa, the Sacramento River, and the Sacramento Deep Water Ship Channel.

The major populated areas within Yolo County, including the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Woodland, and Winters, are located on the Valley floor. While this area is less susceptible to seismic activity than the hills, as evidenced by the 1891 earthquake, significant groundshaking and associated damage can occur in the valley. However, except within the small unincorporated communities, the County generally does not allow urban development in the unincorporated area, therefore not subjecting large numbers of people and property to potential seismic damage.

**Flooding Hazards.** Flooding is the most significant natural hazard in Yolo County. Areas most subject to periodic flooding are the Sacramento River and Cache Creek. The Yolo Bypass, which runs parallel to the Sacramento River, is a flood basin that receives water from both the



Sacramento River and Cache Creek. At Clarksburg, channels of the river create islands in the Delta. Merritt Island in Yolo County is created by Elk and Sutter Sloughs. According to the *Cache Creek Area Plan*, Cache Creek is a violent watercourse, subject to severe flood events. Changes in the capacity of the creek over the last 50 years have created new flooding problems for the community of Yolo and the City of Woodland. The technical studies performed for that Plan estimate that the creek may meander as much as 700 feet in a single flood event, threatening to erode levees and significantly changing the geomorphology of the Creek. Flooding is minimized by a dam on Putah Creek (Monticello) and two on Cache Creek (Indian Valley on the north fork and the Clear Lake Dam.)

Levees have been constructed along the western bank of the Sacramento River throughout Yolo County. A breach of the levee system, depending upon where it occurred, could cause serious damage to people and property in the county. The most widespread damage would occur if the breach affected populated area of the City of West Sacramento.

**High Wildland Fire Hazard Areas.** According to the Natural Hazard Disclosure Map for Yolo County, the western portion of the county west of Esparto and Winters is designated as a wildland area that may contain substantial forest fire risks and hazards (see Figure 7-2 of Appendix A). This area includes the unincorporated communities of Guinda and Rumsey. There are no Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone areas in Yolo County.

**Areas Needed to Maintain Air Quality.** Yolo County is in the Sacramento Valley Air Basin. Yolo County and the northeast area of Solano County make up the Yolo-Solano Air Pollution Control District. The District has its own regulations applying to all stationary sources to control pollution emissions. These regulations have to coincide or coordinate with the regulations of the State and federal governments in addition to the requirements of the Sacramento Valley Air Pollution Coordinating Council. The local district has primary responsibility for controlling stationary emission sources.

The major sources of air pollutants in Yolo County are: motor vehicle emissions, other hydrocarbon sources, agricultural activities, and related industries. Each new industry or subdivision is reviewed for its impact on air quality and all existing emission sources are being brought into compliance with the regulations. Recent changes in agricultural burning practices and regulations, along with public demand, have brought about an improvement in air quality throughout the county.

No areas have been identified in Yolo County that are necessary for the maintenance of air quality; however, it is important for Yolo County to continue to maintain and create development patterns that minimize impacts to air quality. Development patterns that are beneficial to air quality also assist in the preservation of open space and recreational opportunities.

**Contaminated Sites.** Due to its quantity, concentration, or physical, chemical or infectious characteristics, hazardous waste may do either of the following: cause, or significantly contribute to, an increase in mortality or an increase in serious irreversible, or incapacitating reversible, illness; and/or pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or environment when improperly treated, stored, transported, or disposed of, or otherwise managed.

Hazardous waste includes products commonly used in residences and local businesses. Hazardous waste includes, but is not limited to pesticides, herbicides, paints, lacquers, varnishes, motor oil and fluids, household cleaning supplies, photographic chemicals, and certain building materials.

Aside from minimizing the use and exposure to hazardous materials, it is essential to identify contaminated sites. In some sites in the unincorporated area of Yolo County, hazardous wastes have been improperly disposed of or surface impoundments have possibly contaminated groundwater supplies. Contaminated sites have been identified within the unincorporated area during a search of the Leaking Underground Storage Tank Information System (LUSTIS) database. The Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report lists the site name, location, and contaminating substance.

### Legal Context

#### **State General Plan Guidelines for Open Space & Recreation Elements and Related Statutory Requirements**

Government Code Section 65560 et seq., outlines the relevant issues to be addressed in an Open Space Element including, but not limited to, open space for the preservation of natural resources, managed production of resources, recreational use, and public health and safety. The Open Space Element overlaps with the Land Use, Conservation and Safety Elements. State law mandates an ambitious and detailed planning effort for open space, comparable only to the requirements for the Housing Element (*California Land Use and Planning Law, Fifth Edition*, Daniel J. Curtin, Jr., 1995).

According to the *State General Plan Guidelines*, the open space element guides the comprehensive and long-range preservation and conservation of “open space land”, defined as any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to open space use. In addition to the subject areas listed above, the Open Space Element must address demands for trail-oriented recreational use, retention of all publicly-owned corridors for future use (i.e., abandoned rail line, utility corridors, or easements), and the feasibility of integrating city and county trail routes with appropriate segments of the California Recreational Trails System. According to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, information on the California Recreational Trails System dates from the 1970s and is in the process of being updated. No map or description of the system is currently available that would allow the County to determine the feasibility of linkages (Ken McKowen, State Department of Parks and Recreation, pers. comm., June 2001).

According to the *General Plan Guidelines*, the subjects covered in a parks and recreation element and the level of detail at which they are addressed vary greatly among jurisdictions. This variation can be attributed to the size of the jurisdiction, its level of urbanization, location, and funding base, as well as the user base and the demands on park and recreation facilities. County issues often include regional parks, open space or habitat preserves, watershed management, trail systems, and river parkways. Cities tend to focus more on neighborhood parks and playgrounds, and recreational facilities and programs, although such issues also apply to the county's unincorporated communities.

### Definition of Open Space

The following definitions are provided as background and legal context for the Open Space and Recreation Element:

**Open Space Land.** As defined in Section 65560(b) of the Government Code, "open space land" is any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use. State law provides that the Open Space Element must address the following topics, to the extent that they are locally relevant:

- Open Space for the preservation of natural resources including, but not limited to, areas required for the preservation of plant and animal life, including habitat for fish and wildlife species; areas required for ecological and other scientific study purposes; rivers, streams, bays and estuaries; and coastal beaches, lakeshores, banks of rivers and streams, and watershed lands.
- Open space used for the managed production of resources, including but not limited to, forest lands, rangeland, agricultural lands and areas of economic importance for the production of food or fiber; areas required for recharge of ground water basins; bays, estuaries, marshes, rivers and streams which are important for the management of commercial fisheries; and areas containing major mineral deposits, including those in short supply.
- Open space for outdoor recreation, including but not limited to, areas which require special management or regulation because of hazardous or special conditions such as earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas, floodplains, watersheds, areas presenting high fire risks, areas required for the protection of water quality and water reservoirs and areas required for the protection and enhancement of air quality.
- Open space for public health and safety, including, but not limited to:
  - Areas that require special management or regulation because of hazardous or special conditions such as earthquake fault zones, unstable soil areas, floodplains, watersheds, areas presenting high fire risks, areas required for the protection of water quality and water reservoirs and areas required for the protection and enhancement of air quality.
  - Open space areas designed for fuel break and fuel reduction zones, helispots, and fire access. Open space fire safety standards and policies can be implemented by the adoption of open space zoning regulations. Such regulations would help eliminate the

owner-by-owner agreements and public agency financing now necessary for construction and maintenance.

- Identify location of historic natural hazards boundaries such as, inundation areas, landslide paths, debris flows, past wildfires, and earthquake faults.
- Demands for trail-oriented recreational use (Public Resources Code §5076). Cities and counties must consider such demands in developing specific open space programs.
- Retention of all publicly-owned corridors for the future use: i.e., abandoned rail line, utility corridors, or easements.
- The feasibility of integrating city and county trail routes with appropriate segments of the California Recreational Trails System (Public Resources Code §5076. See the California Recreational Trails Act, commencing with Public Resources Code §5070.)

## 2.2 Existing Open Space Resources

Figure 2-1 of Appendix A is a composite of public and private open space lands in Yolo County. It includes County lands and easements, Yolo Land Trust and other private easements, California Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands and easements, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and other federal lands and easements. It also includes the Yolo Bypass, County parks, City of Davis acquisitions and the Cache Creek Nature Preserve.

### Public Lands

Section 2.4 of this Element includes an inventory of park and recreation lands. The lower park site of the County's Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park is adjacent to 50,000 acres of BLM property which supports recreational opportunities that include hiking, biking, fishing and horseback riding. The County has a cooperative Memorandum of Understanding with the BLM, in which both agencies work to expand recreational and interpretive experiences of the area.

### Private Open Space/Agricultural Lands

By far the largest areas of open space for managed production of resources in Yolo County are the agricultural areas. The California Department of Conservation has classified Important Farmland in Yolo County by the following categories:

- Prime Farmland – Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops.
- Farmland of Statewide Importance – Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or with less ability to hold and store moisture.
- Unique Farmland – Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops.

- Farmland of Local Importance – Land of importance to the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county’s board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.
- Grazing Land – Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.
- Urban and Built-up Land – Land occupied by structures with a building density of at least one unit to one and one-half acres, or approximately six structures to a ten-acre parcel.

The categories are shown in Figure 5-1 of Appendix A. The Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report shows a loss in total net acreage from 1996 to 1998 of 6,982 acres. During that same period Urban and Built-Up Land showed a total net increase of 1,114 acres.

The Background Report presents Important Farmland conversion figures for Yolo County compiled by the Department of Conservation for 1996-1998. Given the zoning patterns in Yolo County, some of this conversion may be related to development in the four incorporated cities. The relatively high conversion figure for 1996-1998 is primarily attributed to the establishment of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, which is classified by the Department of Conservation as almost 4,000 acres of “Other Land.” The “Other” category includes wetlands not used for grazing, grazing lands less than 40 acres in area, lands used for surface mining, regional parks, rural residential areas, steep slopes and other miscellaneous uses.

The Department of Conservation defines Prime Farmland as farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term production of agricultural crops. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields.

Yolo County has approximately 270,403 acres of prime agricultural land (Class I, II and selected Class III), which account for 48 percent of the agricultural land in the county (Farmland Conversion Report). Yolo County has the lowest absolute loss in prime farmland compared to other counties in the state, and is second lowest to Kings County for percentage loss of prime farmland. A number of factors allow Yolo County to withstand the pressures of urbanization, which can threaten agriculture, including restrictive land use policies, the high amount of land enrolled in the Williamson Act, and the natural barrier of the Yolo Causeway.

Figure 5-2 of Appendix A shows the location and extent of the various agricultural zones in Yolo County. The Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report presents approximate acreages within each zone. As shown in the figure, A-P is the most extensively applied zone in the county, encompassing 477,218 acres, followed by 128,336 acres in the A-1 zone. Figure 5-3 of Appendix A shows the areas within the A-P zone that are also in contracted California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) agricultural preserves. Approximately 449,621 acres are in contracted agricultural preserves in Yolo County. Owners of approximately 21,142 acres have filed notices of nonrenewal, a 10-year process by which parcels are removed from the Williamson Act. Although some of these parcels are in proximity to cities, there is no readily apparent trend or conclusion to be drawn regarding the reasons the nonrenewals were filed, except in the Cache Creek area, where cancellations are largely attributable to mining operations.

## Non Profit Organizations and Public/Private Partnerships

In 1988, the Yolo Land Trust was established in Yolo County. The Yolo Land Trust is a private, nonprofit corporation whose stated purpose and function is to:

- Acquire land or conservation easements on land of agricultural, habitat, historical, recreational, educational, scenic, ecological, or other environmental value within and surrounding Yolo County in a manner designed to assist in the preservation of such land for the benefit of the public.
- Provide education and disseminate information concerning the values and benefits of land conservation.
- To encourage the benefits of sound land use planning for Yolo County.

The Yolo Land Trust has assisted in the permanent preservation of over 3,512 acres of prime agricultural land in the county.

The Land Trust is responsible for the creation of the following land trust easements in Yolo County as of October 2000:

- Rumsey Rancheria Easement – 84 acres located northwest of Woodland
- John Williamson Easement – 403 acres located northeast of Davis
- Davis Golf Course Easement – 75 acres located west of Davis
- Los Rios Farms Easement – 780 acres located southeast of Davis
- Delta Sugar Easement – 61 acres located north of Clarksburg
- Longview Ranch Easement – 113 acres west of Winters
- Cache Creek Easements – 1,997 acres north of Woodland

The three easements in the vicinity of Davis were created in partnership with the City of Davis, which provided local matching funds.

In February 2000, the Yolo Land Trust received the largest State grant for agricultural protection ever awarded. The Trust received \$1.5 million to purchase nine conservation easements covering 1,997 acres of prime farmland owned by six landowners. In a report posted on the Land Trust Alliance website, the land has some of the "...highest quality of agricultural soil seen in the world," noted Yolo Land Trust Executive Director Kathryn Kelly. "The land has a history of family farming and some has been in the ownership of these families for many generations." In addition, the easement area includes more than three miles of frontage along Cache Creek. Each landowner donated a portion of the value of the easements to provide the necessary monetary match for the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Conservation Program grant.

In addition, Yolo County owns and/or holds easements on a number of lands along Lower Cache Creek, as follows:

- Solano Concrete Easement, 60 acres
- Teichert Construction Easement, 121 acres

- Correll Preserve, 30 acres
- Millsap Preserve, 17 acres
- Cache Creek Nature Preserve, 130 acres

As various mine reclamation projects are completed along Lower Cache Creek, new land and wetland habitat will be dedicated to Yolo County, adding another 600 acres of public open space. Although the County does not currently maintain a land trust, future consideration may be given to the creation of a “Legacy” trust to assist other groups in the preservation of open space along Lower Cache Creek and other similar areas, including Putah Creek.

Other nonprofit organizations in Yolo County with missions related to the preservation of open space include the Putah Creek Council, the Sierra Club Yolano Chapter, the Yolo County Audubon Society, the Cache Creek Conservancy, and the Yolo Basin Foundation (described below).

### Wildlife Preserves

The Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area is located on I-80 at the Yolo Causeway between Davis and Sacramento. It is the largest public/private restoration project west of the Florida Everglades, in which 3,700 acres in the Yolo Bypass floodway have been restored to wetlands and other associated habitats. Recently, an additional 12,808 acres was added to Wildlife Area as a result of a purchase by the State Department of Fish and Game. The original area was dedicated in November 1997. The approximate 25,500-acre area is managed by the Department of Fish and Game to promote an increase in waterfowl and other bird populations. It is considered a model of a public-private partnership that shows that wildlife, flood control and agriculture can co-exist in a largely urban setting. According to the Yolo Basin Foundation website:

The establishment of the Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area and the work of the Foundation have been widely regarded as a model for planning and completion of other wetland projects in the Yolo Bypass. The bypass is a key component of the habitat restoration planned as part of the Cal/Fed Bay Delta Accord process now underway, and is a vital element of the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture’s habitat restoration goals.

The Yolo Basin Foundation (YBF) was founded in 1990 as a community-based organization to assist in the establishment of the Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area. A principal goal of the Foundation is facilitating environmental education within the Wildlife Area in cooperation with the Department of Fish and Game. YBF provides the interpretation and education programs in the Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area. The YBF concentrates its work in two areas: education and restoration of the Yolo Bypass region of the North Delta and the Pacific Flyway. The YBF is currently working with other organizations to plan the building and operation of a Pacific Flyway Visitor Center near the Wildlife Area.

The Cache Creek Nature Preserve is also shown on Figure 2-1 of Appendix A. The 130-acre property includes a former mining pit that has been turned into a wetlands area, a portion of Cache Creek, and forest. It was dedicated by A. Teichert and Son Inc. and is managed by the

Cache Creek Conservancy. The site represents one of the least-disturbed areas along Lower Cache Creek. The Preserve also includes the Cache Creek Ag History Center. The stated mission of the Cache Creek Nature Preserve is to provide a natural environment where children and adults can explore and discover the relationships between humans and the historical, natural, agricultural and industrial uses of the area. The Cache Creek Conservancy is funded, in part, by a fee from four aggregate companies based on tons of gravel sold. This funding source is secured for 30 years through development agreements with Yolo County.

Although not commonly thought of as a wildlife preserve, Grasslands Regional Park (Figure 2-1 of Appendix A) consists of 320 acres, most of which are undeveloped. The park possesses considerable wildlife habitat value, hosts burrowing owls and harrier hawks, and provides foraging habitat for Swainson's hawks.

Other preserves exist within the incorporated cities and on the campus of the University of California, Davis, including the City of Davis South Fork Preserve and Davis Wetlands.

### **Open Space for Flood Control**

Figure 7-1 of Appendix A shows 100-year and 500-year flood zones in Yolo County, as delineated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM).

Flooding is the most significant natural hazard in Yolo County. Areas most subject to periodic flooding are the Sacramento River and Cache Creek. The Yolo Bypass, which runs parallel to the Sacramento River, is a flood basin that receives water from both the Sacramento River and Cache Creek. At Clarksburg, channels of the river create islands in the Delta. Merritt Island in Yolo County is created by Elk and Sutter Sloughs. According to the *Cache Creek Area Plan*, Cache Creek is a violent watercourse, subject to severe flood events. Changes in the capacity of the creek over the last 50 years have created new flooding problems for the community of Yolo and the City of Woodland. The technical studies performed for that Plan estimate that the creek may meander as much as 700 feet in a single flood event, threatening to erode levees and significantly changing the geomorphology of the Creek. Flooding is minimized by a dam on Putah Creek (Monticello) and two on Cache Creek (Indian Valley on the north fork and the Clear Lake Dam.)

Levees have been constructed along the western bank of the Sacramento River throughout Yolo County. Levees have also been built along much of the Yolo Bypass and a portion of Lower Cache Creek. A breach of the levee system, depending upon where it occurred, could cause serious damage to people and property in the county. The most widespread damage would occur if the breach affected populated area of the City of West Sacramento.

### **Yolo Bypass**

According to California Flood Management: *An Evaluation of Flood Damage Prevention Programs* (Department of Water Resources Bulletin 199, September 1980):



A bypass is an auxiliary channel used to pass floodwaters. Bypass systems are used in flood protection projects when the potential high flow is larger than the capacity of the existing river channel and a reasonable amount of leveed flood plain...The bypass is usually leveed in whole or in part. Its major purpose is to carry enough floodwater so that the normal stream channel capacity is not exceeded...Larger bypass systems may be as complicated as that in the Sacramento River Flood Control Project...As the Sacramento River flows southward from Shasta Dam near Redding, natural overflow areas and two fixed weirs, Moulton and Colusa, permit floodwater to escape from the river into the Butte Basin. This basin is a natural flowage area that has not been drained and developed, as have similar basins to the west and south. Waters in the Butte Basin move into the upstream end of the Sutter Bypass. At Tisdale Weir, additional water can be diverted from the Sacramento River directly into the Sutter Bypass. The Feather River system, which drains the east side of the Sacramento Valley, enters the Sutter Bypass directly. The Sutter Bypass and the Sacramento River join just above the Fremont Weir. This weir divides the joint flow of the river-bypass system, limiting flow into the Sacramento River channel to its capacity and permitting the excess flow to cross the river and enter the Yolo Bypass. It is the only weir in the system with gates that can be operated to vary the ratio of water leaving the river and the amount staying in the river. This enables management of water levels in the river at Sacramento, thereby giving added protection to the city and adjacent areas. The overflow area is used for agriculture during the summer and fall months and is valuable wetland during the flood season, supporting a significant waterfowl population.

Although restricted by flood easements, lands reserved for the bypass system can be used for agriculture, wildlife management, recreation (including hunting and fishing), and other compatible uses at non-flood season times, as they are in Yolo County. It is important that areas such as the Yolo Bypass and Sacramento Bypass remain designated as open space areas rather than designated for future development due to the flooding hazards they may pose. These and other open space areas along Yolo County waterways work as buffer areas to prevent flooding from endangering the public.

### **State & Federal Open Space & Conservation Programs**

In 1995, the Yolo County Draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), a voluntary plan, was initially prepared for local, State and Federal agencies including the Cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and Woodland, Yolo County, California Department of Fish and Game, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The HCP plan area included all of Yolo County east of Highway 16 from Winters and Dunnigan westward. Based on a recent presentation to the "Gaining Ground" Committee by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the County is now pursuing a Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) for the same area, a program with a broader biological/habitat approach than an HCP alone.

The purpose of the Yolo County NCCP is to mitigate impacts of urban development on the 26 covered species by conserving and enhancing the habitat value of these species in Yolo County.

In addition, the NCCP will establish a long-range strategy or framework for habitat conservation and enhancement to occur at a countywide level. In assuming buildout of the general plans for Woodland, Winters, West Sacramento, and Davis, and the community plans for Knights Landing, Esparto, Dunnigan and Clarksburg, urban development would result in the loss of approximately 11,672 acres of habitat to be mitigated by the NCCP. This acreage includes a small amount of development associated with agricultural operations of up to 1,000 acres on agricultural land in unspecified locations in the unincorporated area that is also covered by the NCCP.

In most cases, the NCCP will require that 1 acre of mitigation land be acquired for each acre of impact (1-to-1 habitat mitigation ratio). However, there are several habitat types (e.g., riparian forest) for which higher mitigation ratios have been established, with compensation ranging from 2:1 to 3:1. The majority (approximately 79 percent) of mitigation habitat will be agricultural conservation easements that maintain existing agricultural and biological values for the species of concern, with the remainder associated with riparian, wetland, grassland and woodland habitats.

Please refer to the above description of wildlife preserves for additional information on State and federal open space and conservation programs.

## **2.3 Recreation Patterns and Activities**

### **Recreation Providers**

Most recreation programs and opportunities in the unincorporated area of Yolo County are organized by private, nonprofit entities such as the Yolo Audubon Society and the Yolo Basin Foundation. Many are also educational in nature. Other popular programs, such as rafting, are operated by private concessionaires. Informal programs, such as hikes described on the Yolo Hiker website, are also prevalent. Most of what would be regarded as “traditional” recreation programs (sports, day camps, etc.) operate in the cities of Yolo County.

Other less formal “traditional” recreation operating in the unincorporated area includes hunting and fishing occurring on both private and public lands. Hunting clubs for waterfowl and upland game are especially prominent in rice land and field crop areas of the County, including lands within the Yolo Bypass. Much of this type of hunting is fee based and generates additional income for farmers. Fishing enthusiasts are attracted to waters within and adjacent to the County, including Putah Creek, the Sacramento River and Lake Berryessa.

Bird watching (“birding”) is an important activity in Yolo County, enjoyed by both County residents and those from outside the area. The Yolo Audubon Society, a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, conducts outings on almost a weekly basis. They also host two special events each year: California Duck Days in February, and the Christmas Bird Count every December.

The Yolo Basin Foundation offers weekend field trips for the general public led by experienced Yolo Audubon members or other wildlife experts. They focus primarily on the natural history of

the area. The Yolo Basin Foundation is currently working with other organizations to plan the building and operation of a Pacific Flyway Visitor Center near the Vic Fazio Wildlife Area.

People who take advantage of parks, trails, bikeways, open space and Yolo County's other recreational opportunities do not limit their visits to those activities alone. They also eat, sleep, shop and buy gas while they are undertaking these primary activities. Therefore, the category of recreation providers must include more than primary attractions typically listed. Visitor serving industry categories in particular also include accommodations, restaurants, retail, drinking places, attractions of many types, and transportation and travel services (the California Division of Tourism list includes over 225 different types of establishments considered to be wholly or partially tourist-serving businesses). In addition, local residents using local attractions frequent these establishments. There are 1,270 establishments in the county that wholly or partially serve visitors.

## 2.4 Recreation Opportunities

### County Parks

The *Draft Yolo County Parks and Facilities Master Plan* (1998) classified parks in Yolo County as follows:

**Neighborhood Parks:** Neighborhood parks are generally 2 to 10 acres in size and primarily serve children walk-to and bike-to recreation needs. Facilities include children's play equipment, turf areas, casual ball fields and limited picnic facilities.

**Community Parks:** Community parks are generally 10 to 30 acres and provide a focal point and gathering place for the whole community. Facilities are for all sectors and age groups and may include tennis courts, community centers, group picnic areas, and lighted ball fields.

**Regional Parks:** Regional parks generally range from 30 up to 10,000 acres and incorporate natural resources such as lakes and hills that serve a region involving more than one community. Facilities can include marinas, swimming beaches, aquatic centers, sports centers, museums, golf courses, tennis complexes, major group picnic sites, camping and hiking, biking, and equestrian trails.

**State and National Parks, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Lands:** Generally several hundred to several thousand acres, these parks are natural resource-based and often include a high amount of undeveloped open space. Activities include camping, fishing, boating, hiking, equestrian trail use, or mountain climbing.

### Inventory of Park & Recreation Lands

Yolo County owns and maintains eleven park/recreation facilities covering approximately 1,320 acres, with 25 percent of these parks considered to be fully developed. The location of these parks is shown on Figure 2-1 of Appendix A. An inventory and general description of these facilities

follows (excerpted from the *County of Yolo Parks and Recreation Facilities Draft Master Plan, 1998*):

- **Clarksburg Boat Launch Facility**, 3.95 acres (approx.)
- **Elkhorn Regional Park**, 48 acres
- **Helvetia Oak Grove**, 11 acres
- **Yolo County Grasslands Regional Park**, 320 acres
- **Airport Park**, 1.6 acres
- **Camp Haswell Park**, 5 acres
- **Esparto Community Park**, 4 acres
- **Knights Landing Boat Launch**, 5 acres
- **Vernon A. Nichols Park**, 25 acres
- **Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park**, 752 acres
- **Putah Creek Fishing Access Areas**, 83 acres

The Clarksburg Boat Launch Facility, owned by the State Department of Fish and Game, is located approximately 18 miles south of Sacramento and 2.6 miles south of Clarksburg near the Sacramento River. The County Parks Department provides operation and maintenance through a cooperative agreement with the State that expires in 2003. The facility provides access for boats and other recreational watercraft, and also contains areas designated for public fishing. The majority of its users are from Clarksburg, Hood, Isleton and south Sacramento vicinity. In 1997, annual visitor days were estimated to be fewer than 25,000. According to the Draft Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan, the acute alignment of the ramp in relationship to the river causes heavy siltation every year. Boat ramp facilities are anticipated to be upgraded to reduce siltation problems. The park also has a documented history of public safety problems (vandalism, transient activity, vagrancy) and environmental health concerns (illegal refuse dumping). Use of the park is generally limited to sport fishing, jet skiing, and water skiing.

Elkhorn Regional Park, owned and operated by Yolo County, is located directly east of Woodland near the Sacramento River. The park is situated in a riparian forest between the riverbank and the levee on the Sacramento River, and contains picnic areas and a boat ramp. The park is predominantly used for public fishing and watersports and as a mitigation site for Split-Tail. In 1995, annual visitor days were estimated to be 31,000.

Helvetia Oak Grove is located just 2.5 miles south of Elkhorn Regional Park near the Sacramento River on an undeveloped oak preserve. Access to the park is no longer available. Public access to the park once acquired may allow the site to be developed as a natural park use area. The site contains no improvements or amenities. Current management practices include harvesting fallen oak limbs for sale as firewood at Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park. The site is patrolled monthly by the Parks Department for litter, refuse collection and monitoring.

Grasslands Regional Park, owned and operated by Yolo County, is located approximately 3.5 miles south of Interstate 80. Its main access is from Mace Boulevard/County Road 104 south of the City of Davis. At the present time, only the 52-acre area leased by the Yolo Bowmen Club is developed and maintained by the County (the current lease expires in 2004 and is renewable). Very little development exists outside the lease area. The Park is home to a variety of birds,

raptors and owls, plus several vernal pools. The major portion of the park is being returned to oak trees and native grasses. The current predominant uses of the site are archery, horseshoe pitching, flying model gliders (The Sacramento Valley Soaring Society also has a lease on the site expiring in 2004), birding, and hiking. In 1996, annual visitor days were estimated to be 1,500.

Airport Park, owned and operated by Yolo County, is located at the Yolo County Airport (County Road 95 and County Road 29). The park consists of open grassland and several oak species, and is considered a passive open space area intended to be a day use facility for general aviators visiting the airport. Annual visitor days are estimated at less than 50.

Esparto Community Park, owned and operated by the County, is located along State Highway 16 near the community of Esparto and is primarily used by residents of Esparto and the Capay Valley. Approximately 1.6 acres of the park is fully developed and contains picnic tables, playground equipment, and public restrooms. Although not owned by Yolo County, the town of Knights Landing contains a park and soccer field owned and maintained by the local school district. The County also anticipates developing plans for a playground on County owned property with the Dunnigan community.

The communities without parks include Zamora, Yolo, Rumsey.

The Putah Creek Fishing Access Areas are owned by the Wildlife Conservation Board and maintained and operated under an agreement by Yolo County. The access areas consist of five sites and seven parking lots that are located along Highway 128 near the City of Winters. These areas are situated in riparian habitat that allows for a number of recreational activities ranging from birding to fishing. The Department of Fish and Game stocks the creek annually with fish. In 1996, there were 40,000 estimated visitor days.

The Knights Landing Boat Launch Facility is another site owned by the Wildlife Conservation Board and operated by the County. It is located adjacent to State Highway 45 in the community of Knights Landing and has fishing areas, a boat ramp and parking for trailered vehicles. The facility is used for sportfishing boats, powerboats for waterskiing, and other recreational watercraft. It is known as a haven for salmon, striped bass, catfish and sturgeon. A 1995 survey estimated annual visitor days at 31,000.

Vernon A. Nichols Park, owned by the County, is located just east of the community of Guinda adjacent to Cache Creek and County Road 57. Estimated annual visitor days is 7,200. The park has been identified as a riparian area, but much of the native vegetation was removed by storm events in the 1990's. The park is primarily used for fishing, swimming, picnicking and sunbathing, and as a mitigation site for the Elderberry Bush.

Camp Haswell Park, owned by the County, is also located adjacent to Cache Creek just north of the community of Rumsey along Highway 16. With the exception of an 1,100 square foot building shell, the park is basically unimproved. The park is used as a camping site for the Boy Scouts of America, as a picnicking and day-use activities, and a take-out site for rafting concessions. During the summer months, rafting use is the predominant activity. There is

approximately one acre of beach front with various trees; the center of the property is free of vegetation.

Another park located north of Rumsey along State Highway 16 is Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park. At approximately 752 acres, Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park is the largest park in Yolo County, and includes almost two miles of Cache Creek frontage. Although the total acreage is large, 500 acres is buffer land, with only approximately 60 acres considered developed. The park is divided into three developed sites: the upper park, middle park, and lower park site. The Upper Park site contains a parking area, a public beach and a put-in point for rafters. The Middle Park site is the main center of recreational activity for the entire Yolo County park system. This site consists of 48 campsites, a mobile home for parks hosts, public beaches, a parking lot, a recreational meadow area, and a playground and picnic area. The Middle Park site heavily used for cycling, hiking and birding, in addition to overnight camping.

The Lower Park site contains a parking area, two picnic areas, and a public beach. The Lower Park is used for rafting, hiking, biking, fishing, and horseback riding. The site also provides additional recreational opportunities from hiking, biking, fishing, and horseback riding on 50,000 acres of adjacent BLM property, County trails, and Frog Pond via County Road 40. The County has a cooperative Memorandum of Understanding with the BLM in which both agencies work to expand recreation and interpretive experiences of the area. There is an equestrian facility located approximately 200 yards south of the low water bridge that stages rafting concession operations during the summer months. Adjacent to the equestrian facility is the Blue Ridge Trail, which leads to spectacular views of four neighboring counties.

In 1995, estimated annual visitor days were 61,000. Rafting activities have dominated recreational usage. County staff has marketed special recreational use programs during the week and the off-season, with some success.

As noted above, the County is responsible for providing maintenance and operations under contract to three State-owned public recreational facilities. The arrangements typically involve a long-term maintenance and operations agreement in exchange for funds for capital improvements and to offset operations costs. However, according to the Draft Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, these maintenance funds represent only approximately 20 percent of the total annual maintenance costs required; the balance is borne by the County Parks Department, or work simply does not get done. The Draft Plan has indicated that closing the revenue gap must occur if the County is to (1) meet even basic safety conditions for these sites, (2) reduce the flow of revenue from other parks and facilities to these sites, and (3) address costly capital replacements.

### **Existing and Proposed Trails**

A variety of trails exist within or partially within Yolo County. The following trails are managed cooperatively by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the California Department of Fish and Game:

- Blue Ridge Trail

- Fiske Creek Trail
- Frog Pond Trail
- Judge Davis Trail

All four trails are within the Cache Creek Recreation Area. The Cache Creek Recreation Area is managed as a primitive area to protect wildlife and rare plants. Access is limited to foot traffic, equestrian use and mountain bikes; Blue Ridge Trail is hiking only.

In addition, the Yolo Hiker website has identified the following trails/hikes in Yolo County:

- Putah Creek Trail, near Davis
- Rayhouse Road Hike

### Tourism

Yolo County’s tourism slightly decreased from 1998-1999 at a time when tourism in small counties increase 11.5 percent. In addition, Yolo’s tourism growth rate is slower than tourism growth in Solano, Sacramento and Napa counties. This includes both business and leisure travels. At 7.5 visitors per capita, Yolo County’s visitor-serving sector is less prominent than California as a whole at 8.7 visitors per capita. This information suggests the county has an opportunity to increase visitor spending.

Nevertheless, the county attracts about 1 million visitors per year on average, most of whom visit Davis, Woodland, or West Sacramento. These visitors spent \$212.6 million of the \$962.8 million total spending on accommodations, eating, drinking, food stores, retail sales, service stations and travel. For instance, spending on hotels and motels in unincorporated areas was \$983,000 in 1998, which is 7 percent of total lodging spending countywide. Tourism accounted for 2,420 jobs in 1998 countywide, most in the restaurant (760), recreation (480), retail sales (460) and lodging (380) categories. That same year tourism also brought \$310 million in direct sales, personal income for employees and value added (employee spending).

The Open Space and Recreation Element Background Report has identified the following tourism recreational opportunities and attractions for the three regions in Yolo County:

### **The Delta/Sacramento River Recreational Opportunities and Attractions**

Eating and Drinking Establishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None in Clarksburg</li> <li>• 1 Restaurant in Knights Landing</li> </ul>
Shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few stores available, mainly small, general markets</li> </ul>
Main Recreational Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boating</li> <li>• Sightseeing</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Cycling</li> </ul>
Cultural Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine tasting</li> </ul>

Lodging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No lodging available</li></ul>
Vehicle Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gas stations</li><li>• Auto Repair</li></ul>

Source: Applied Development Economics, 2000



## Grasslands Recreational Opportunities and Attractions

Eating and Drinking Establishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centered in the towns of Woodland, Davis, Madison, Dunnigan, Esparto, and Capay</li> </ul>
Shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few stores available, mainly small, general markets</li> </ul>
Main Recreational Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picnicking</li> <li>• Cycling</li> <li>• Agricultural tourism</li> <li>• Birding</li> <li>• Ballooning</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Archery</li> <li>• Model soaring</li> <li>• Parachuting</li> <li>• Horse racing</li> </ul>
Cultural Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine tasting, Festivals, Museums</li> </ul>
Lodging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited to Woodland, Davis and Dunnigan</li> </ul>
Vehicle Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several service stations located in Dunnigan and nearby cities</li> </ul>

Source: Applied Development Economics, 2000

## Blue Ridge Mountains Recreational Opportunities and Attractions

Eating and Drinking Establishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casino, few in towns</li> </ul>
Shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few stores available, mainly small, general markets</li> </ul>
Main Recreational Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picnicking</li> <li>• Mountain biking</li> <li>• Hiking</li> <li>• Birding/Wildlife viewing</li> <li>• White-water rafting</li> <li>• Swimming</li> <li>• Camping</li> <li>• Horseback riding</li> <li>• Ballooning</li> <li>• Hunting</li> <li>• Fishing</li> </ul>
Cultural Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaming</li> </ul>
Lodging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campground</li> </ul>
Vehicle Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 station near Brooks and Casino</li> </ul>

Source: Applied Development Economics, 2000

## Scenic Driving

While none of the roads in the county are designated by the State of California as scenic byways, much of the county does offer considerable opportunities for scenic driving.

Running through the Capay Valley and next to Cache Creek, Highway 16 offers scenic beauty for any traveler. Views of local farms, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and Cache Creek, draw visitors to pass through here year after year. Stores in Esparto, Brooks, and Guinda, with fuel in Brooks, provide services to travelers who want to get away from the city, or are just passing through. Increased traffic on State Highway 16 traveling to and from the Cache Creek Casino has created problems for local residents and businesses (such as farmers moving equipment), and alternative forms of travel (bicyclists, pedestrians).

A State designated scenic highway that is adjacent to Yolo County is Highway 160, which runs through the Delta. Passing on the opposite (east) side of the Sacramento River from Clarksburg, Highway 160 is a heavily traveled road that follows the Sacramento River from Sacramento to the Bay Area. A separate and parallel roadway, South River Road (County Road E-9), exists on the west bank of the River and possesses attributes similar to Highway 160. The potential of Highway 160 is available to the Delta region as a whole, and is an asset on which Yolo County may be able to capitalize by being part of the Delta “community.” .

Elsewhere in the county, most roads are rural, and except for those interested solely in agricultural land, not suitable for scenic driving. The exception to this is Highway 128 leading up to Lake Berryessa and into Napa County. Paralleling Putah Creek, Highway 128 may attract some leisure traffic, especially those heading to view the dam or a scenic route to/from Napa County. More narrow and winding than Highway 16, Highway 128 has less potential for developing scenic use.

### **White Water Rafting**

There are three separate concessionaires operating river-rafting trips along Cache Creek. Running from late April until early September, they are the only organized outdoor recreation providers in Cache Creek/Capay Valley (equestrian facilities and horseback riding open to the public have been available in the past, but currently operate from Lake County. This is a recreational opportunity that could be expanded in Yolo County).

Very little is available to rafting participants in the form of visitor-serving businesses except what is offered by the concessionaires. At various take-out points, rafters are offered cold drinks and snacks from streamside vendors, but this is very limited.

Rafting is also located in the same area with the greatest abundance of hiking trails. The popular Blue Ridge Trail trailhead is located near the Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park, where primitive camping is also available. In addition, this area caters to mountain biking and bird and wildlife viewing.

## Wineries

Each year about 10.7 million people visit California wine growing areas, generating more than \$1.2 billion in tourism expenditures for restaurants, hotels and other retail establishments. Wineries and vineyards are the second most popular tourist destination in California after Disneyland. Wine growing also enhances the environmental beauty as it preserves its highly valued open spaces and rich agricultural heritage. The most visited wine region in the state is Napa Valley (*California Wine Industry Statistical Highlights*, Wine Institute, 2000).

Like Napa County, Yolo County is primarily agriculturally based, with a good deal of its wealth and jobs related to the thriving grape growing business. What separates Napa from Yolo is that many of the jobs are also related to wine making.

There are four wineries in Yolo County with tasting rooms. There are three designated viticulture areas with a total of 158,640 acres, centered in the Delta region and the Dunnigan Hills. The largest winery in the region, RH Phillips, is the 25<sup>th</sup> largest winery in California in terms of production. With so few wineries in a county that produces so many wine grapes, the ability to draw visitors exclusively for wine tasting is limited. Instead, those that do visit the wineries in Yolo County are either attracted there by serendipity or by making a specific winery a destination. At the larger wineries, on a typical weekend, they will host anywhere from 40 to 80 visitors a day (interviews, September 2000). Because there are few visitors to the wineries, the percentage of total sales generated through the tasting rooms is small. But since many have made the winery a destination, sales are usually large, with one winery reporting average sales of close to \$100 per person.

There are regional winery associations, generally either associated by county or appellation. While Yolo County wineries no doubt participate in some of these associations, no association exists solely for those operating in Yolo County. Like many of the attractions in Yolo County, the wineries are unknown to visitors. Attracting more wineries into Yolo County would help to bolster both Yolo County's image and attract visitors.

## Existing Market Trends

The visitor-serving market encompasses a number of uses catering to overnight leisure visitors, business travelers, and day travelers. A fully developed visitor-serving business base should include a representative mix of the following business types: lodging, recreation/amusement services, transportation services, eating and drinking places, food stores, and other retail (Dean Runyan Associates, *California Travel Impacts by County: 1992-1997*).

With its close proximity to Sacramento and other major urban areas, the County of Yolo is in an ideal position to develop visitor-serving businesses. As defined by the California Tourism Marketing Act, there are 1,270 visitor-serving businesses in Yolo County (California Government Code, Chapter 2.2, *California Tourism Marketing Act*. Number of businesses from InfoUSA Inc., businessUSA 2000, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition dataset). Currently, the majority of visitor-serving businesses exist along the two major corridors that run through and near the County, Interstates 80 and 5. Two other thoroughfares, State Routes 16 and 505, have comparatively little in the

way of visitor-serving businesses. Unfortunately, Yolo County itself has been overlooked as a destination. However, with abundant open space, close proximity to major areas of water recreation/activities and a growing winery business, Yolo County is in a position to capitalize on recreational opportunities in a growing region.

- Currently, there are three campgrounds in Yolo County. One is located in Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park and two private campgrounds are located in the West Sacramento area. There are 57 motels/hotels in Yolo County, with most centered in Davis, Woodland and West Sacramento. Only three are located in unincorporated area (InforUSA Inc., business USA 2000, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition dataset.)
- Yolo County has a growing visitor-serving economy that generated approximately \$213 million in spending in 1998, up from \$158 million in 1992 (*California Travel Impacts by County: 1992-1998*).
- Yolo County hosted approximately one million visitors in 1998, with 300,000 for business and 700,000 for leisure (*Domestic Travel Report, Year End 1998*, California, prepared for California Tourism, D.K. Shifflet & Associates, June 1999.)
- While the number of visitors has not increased in Yolo County over the past several years, visitor spending has increased 4.3 percent annually.
- Yolo County's existing visitor-serving businesses are clustered near the major interstates in Davis, Woodland and West Sacramento, with only a small percentage located in unincorporated areas.

### Numbers of Visitors

Yolo County hosted approximately 900,000 visitors in 1999, with 200,000 for business and 700,000 for leisure (*Domestic Travel Report, Year End 1998, California*, prepared for California Tourism, D.K. Shifflet & Associates, June 1999). Small county visitation in California showed an increase of 11.5 percent from 1998 to 1999, but Yolo County is estimated to have had a small decrease (small counties, as defined by D.K. Shifflet & Associates, include: Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, San Benito, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Tuolumne, Yolo and Yuba). For the years 1996-1998, Yolo County averaged 1.1 million visitors. This is on par with other small counties, matching Tuolumne and Placer (*California Domestic Travel Report, Year End 1999*, D.K. Shifflet & Associates, 2000). With the Yolo County population estimated at 133,311, this represents 7.5 visitors per capita. For California as a whole the count is 8.7 per capita, which means that Yolo County's visitor-serving sector is less prominent than the industry as a whole throughout the rest of the state. Yolo County's visitations, although volatile from year to year, have remained fairly constant between 900,000 and 1,300,000 person-trips per year since 1994. This is in contrast to the state as a whole, which has seen a total increase in visitations of approximately 8.5 percent.

While Yolo County has seen visitation remain constant for the 1994-1999 period, visitation in surrounding areas has increased. The three surrounding counties of Sacramento, Solano and Napa have similar recreational opportunities and are potential sources of visitors to Yolo County.

Sacramento County, with a 1994 high of 15.4 million visitors, has had a steady increase in visitation from 1995 to 1998, increasing 5 percent annually (Frequently Requested County Visitor Volumes, <http://gocalif.ca.gov/research/countyvolume.html>). Sacramento County is considered part of the Gold Country region of California by the California Trade and Commerce Agency, along with Sierra County and portions of Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, Mariposa, and Madera counties. Together, this region receives approximately 5.4 percent of all travel volume for California.

Napa County, drawing double what Yolo County does, has seen an annual increase in visitation from 1995 of about 1 percent. The Bay Area as a whole, which includes Napa and western Solano counties, represents about 10 percent of total visitor volume for California.