

Part I: Introduction & Background

This part of the master plan provides discussions of the plan's purpose, development process, foundations, and overall organization. It summarizes a number of background and context topics, including the relationships between this plan and other planning policies and directives. Also included are background characterizations and mapping pertaining to County geography, population, and ecology. Part I concludes with a discussion of how to use the plan; this discussion also provides a guide to the document's organization.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of This Plan

The Yolo County Parks & Open Space Master Plan has been prepared to guide County-wide parkland planning. It is intended to establish programmatic policies and guidelines for the management, use, and future development of County park properties, both individually and system-wide.

More specifically, this planning effort has been structured to:

- Provide baseline inventories and assessments of recreational uses, environmental resources, and County facilities and assets within each existing County park property;
- Provide system-wide classifications and design elements to help reinforce an overall identity and management consistency for County park properties;
- Provide support for innovative partnerships with other agencies, private landowners, and non-profit organizations to increase County-wide recreational opportunities.
- Guide appropriate future park expansions and acquisitions of County parks and open space properties;

- Assist the County in balancing the demands for recreational opportunities, while minimizing adverse effects to private property and valuable environmental resources at County park properties; and
- Facilitate the County's efforts to obtain and allocate future grant funding for parks and open space areas, including related acquisition and improvements.

1.2 Plan Timeframe

The timeframe for this master plan is both near-term and long-term. A major focus of the plan is on near-term management and improvement of existing (2005) County parks and open space units. The master plan is also intended to be a long-range plan with a 20-year horizon.

During the life of this plan, the goals, policies, recommendations, and supporting information should be reviewed (by the County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee) and renewed as appropriate on a 5-year interval to ensure that the plan continues to meet County needs. Subsequent updates to this plan may appropriately refine and re-direct the vision, policies, strategies, and recommended actions presented herein.

1.3 Plan Development Process

The Board of Supervisors approved funding to begin the County-wide master plan process in December of 2003.¹ The County’s Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee had discussed the idea in earlier meetings and submitted a letter to the Board supporting the concept of a County-wide master plan. In February 2004, the Board approved the publication of a request for proposals for the project, and the plan development work began in April.

The plan development process included background studies, resource assessments, and policy reviews (major studies are appended to this plan). As discussed below, the County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee was particularly instrumental in developing this master plan. Input from landowners, environmental organizations, interest groups, and members of the public was also essential.

An initial draft of this plan was issued for public comment in February 2005. Based on public response to that initial draft, a second draft plan was issued in November 2005. The second draft plan responded to a variety of concerns and

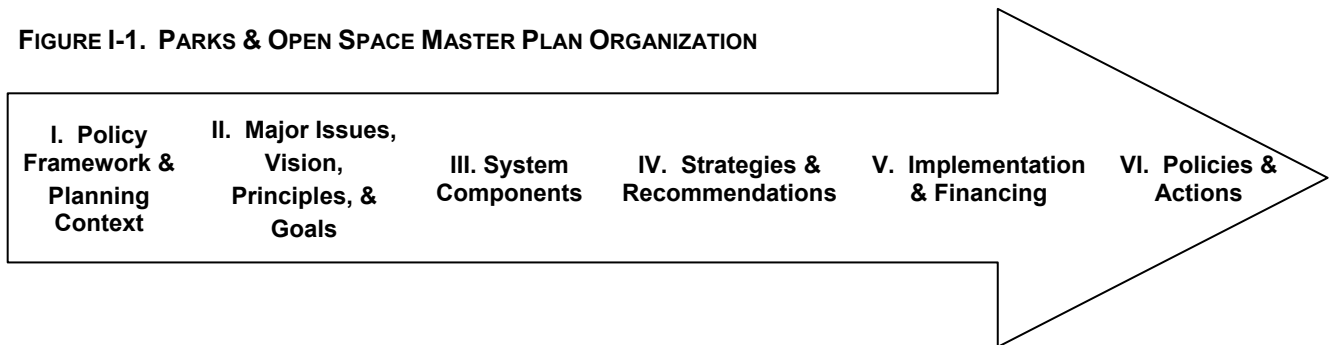
issues, including those summarized in Part II. Following review by the Parks Advisory Committee and consideration of additional public comment, the draft plan was forwarded to the County Board of Supervisors.

1.3.1 County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee

Overall guidance and direction for this plan was provided by the Yolo County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee. The Committee serves in an advisory capacity to the Yolo County Board of Supervisors; members of the committee are appointed by members of the Board on a per district basis. During plan development, a series of public workshop meetings was held with the Committee. Summaries for four of the meetings are provided in an appendix to this plan.

The Committee addressed the future of individual parks, as well as a vision for the park system as a whole. Their meetings also served as a forum for public comments. Many of the general and specific ideas embodied in this master plan are derived in whole or part from Committee meetings and public input; this Committee should continue to serve in an advisory capacity and as a forum for public input on parks, recreation, and wildlife matters.

FIGURE I-1. PARKS & OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN ORGANIZATION



¹ Board Resolution 03-157.11; December 9, 2003.

1.3.2 Public Participation

The planning team began developing the public outreach process in May 2004. A stakeholder list was developed of potentially interested agencies, organizations, citizen groups, and individuals; this list, with additions, was used throughout the process. Two initial public workshop meetings were held in July 2004, early in the planning process; summaries for these public meetings are provided in an appendix to this plan.

Nearly 100 individuals submitted approximately 50 written comments on the initial draft of the master plan in February 2005. Additional meetings were also held in March with rural landowners, the County Farm Bureau, and environmental organizations to exchange ideas on the plan and to gain additional perspectives. In total, including the Parks Advisory Committee meetings and landowner sessions, more than 15 public meetings were held at which the County Parks & Open Space Master Plan was discussed.

Throughout the process, the County maintained a website related to the master plan where background reports, working papers, meeting summaries, and draft plan documents were posted. In addition, comments related to County parks, the master plan, and related matters were accepted by email throughout the plan development process. All comments and preferences expressed by members of the public were reviewed, weighed, and considered. The challenge in creating this master plan was to incorporate divergent views, to balance public and private interests, and to find an appropriate middle ground.

1.4 How to Use This Plan

This master plan is meant to serve as an actively used, County-wide planning tool. As potential park and open space projects and proposals are identified for potential funding or implementation, they should be reviewed by staff, advisory boards, decision makers, and the public using this plan as a guide.

Various ways in which the plan is meant to be used are described in the subsections below, which also provide an introduction to how the plan is organized. The order of presentation of the plan's contents generally reflects the overall plan-making process.

In using this plan it is essential that all aspects of parks-related decision making, including possible future park and open space expansion, are conducted as part of an open, public process with ample opportunities for meaningful public involvement.

1.4.1 A Decision-Making Guide, Based on Recommendations & Policies

The main function of the master plan is as a policy guide for decision making related to the Yolo County parks and open space system. Primary direction is provided in policies and actions (*Part VI*), as supported by the principles and goals (*Part II*), system components and identity elements (*Part III*), and the recommendations (*Part IV*).

The plan is intended to be used by County staff, commissions, Board of Supervisors, and the public to help identify appropriate park and resources projects. It can be used to help establish priorities, such as for improvements in existing park units. It may also be used in discussions of possible expansions of the County's inventory of parks, recreation opportunities, and open space lands.

1.4.2 A Record of County Issues, Vision, Principles & Goals

The plan (*Part II*) serves as a record – and a reminder – of the underlying values of Yolo County, expressed in terms of major issues, a vision statement, a set of principles, and a set of goals. These components comprise a broader level of guidance in decision making, compared with the more specific recommendations, policies, and actions.

The issues raised by the public were a major influence in the planning process; they have been summarized in this plan so that they may be remembered and applied during implementation. Approaches to address those issues have been incorporated throughout this plan.

The plan is intended to provide ideas and inspiration for long-range possibilities. Such ideas are expressed in the vision statement, an idealized view of the long-range future. The plan also articulates a number of core values in terms of guiding principles and goals, which provide a foundation for the identified recommendations and policies, as well as a broader guide to park and open space functions in the County.

1.4.3 Park System Management Tools

The master plan sets out a framework and a language for describing and managing the County-wide park system. The plan (*Part III*) defines County sub-areas, classifications, and management designations. These system components should be used in future system management to promote consistency.

1.4.4 A Guide to Basic Design Ideas

The master plan (*Part III*) is also intended to provide guidance on some basic elements of park system design, such as signage, suggested plant species, and park structures. The guidance is general; further guides are anticipated. These initial discussions are intended to help foster system consistencies, without limiting creativity or needs in specific applications.

1.4.5 A Guide to Funding

The master plan is intended to be used as a summary guide to possible funding mechanisms and strategies (*Part V*). With updates as needed in the future, the plan can be used to help match projects to potential funding sources. The “Funding Strategy Matrix” (Part V, Section 16) should be reviewed and updated for categories of projects; a “cluster” concept (Section 15) can also be used to help organize and manage sets of similar projects.

1.4.6 An Information Source for the Parks System

The master plan and the accompanying background reports (including the Existing Conditions and Resources Assessment report) are intended to serve as reference documents. The plan and the background reports provide considerable information on existing park facilities, environmental resources, underlying policy issues, the geographic context, potential funding sources and mechanisms, and other such topics. This information should be updated periodically to keep it current.

2 Policy Foundation

This section is a discussion of existing policy topics related to the master plan. Relevant topics in County plans and other directives are briefly summarized; the purpose is to acknowledge relationships between parks planning and other important functions of County government involving land use compatibility, resources management, and other issues.

2.1 Relationship to Plans & Directives

Past and current County-related plans and directives that address parks, recreation, open space, and conservation in Yolo County established much of the policy foundation for this master plan. To the extent possible, this plan is intended to not conflict with applicable, adopted County policies and directives, including those in the Yolo County General Plan. It is not intended to supersede or replace existing policies, nor grant additional powers to other agencies, nor to reduce the rights and responsibilities inherent in private property ownership.

As part of this planning process, the planning team conducted a review of the relevant planning documents to identify past and current goals, policies, ordinance provisions, and other directives potentially relevant to the management of County park and open space properties. The results of this review are contained in a background reports (Appendices B and C). Highlights are addressed below.

2.2 Yolo County General Plan

During the time that this Parks and Open Space Master Plan was under preparation, Yolo County was also conducting a comprehensive update of its General Plan. In its required and optional elements, the General Plan addresses a much broader range of issues than this plan.

Two of the existing elements of the County General Plan, the Agricultural

Element and the Open Space and Recreation Element, were both adopted in 2002. These two elements provide relevant policy background for the Parks and Open Space Master Plan and are discussed below. Applicable excerpts and policies from these elements are also included in Appendix B to this plan.

2.2.1 General Plan Agricultural Element

The fact that Yolo County's General Plan includes an adopted (2002) Agricultural Element – an optional element in general plans under state law – is a statement in itself of the importance County decision makers attach to agriculture in the County.

The Yolo County General Plan Agricultural Element documents the County's agricultural heritage, the County's long-term commitment to preserving agricultural lands, and the support for the local agricultural industry in the face of changing market factors and the pressures of urban growth. It also acknowledges that changes in the form and types of agriculture in the County are inevitable. The Element supports traditional agricultural land preservation as well as new innovations.

The Agricultural Element covers many relevant issues and sets policies for decision making in many areas. Among the eighteen issues in the element are some with particular relevance for this

Parks and Open Space Master Plan, as follows.

“Recreation and Agricultural Compatibility.” This section of the Agricultural Element mainly addresses various aspects of agri-tourism. In this discussion, the entrepreneurial and financial benefits of “working” vacations, winery tasting rooms, farm trails, and direct marketing of produce are balanced against the limitations and potentially undesirable effects of agri-tourism, such as increased traffic on rural roads, trespassing, vandalism, and unintentional spread of agricultural pests and diseases. The document recognizes the need to establish policies that “ensure land use compatibility while providing opportunities for recreation, tourism and associated support services in appropriate locations.”

“Conservation Easements and Land Acquisition by Public Agencies.” The Element generally supports the “purchase of agricultural conservation easements,” as described by the American Farmland Trust. These programs pay property owners to keep land available for agricultural use, help to prevent non-agricultural development, and maintain lower property value to reduce development potential.

“The Role of Land Trusts.” This section of the Agricultural Element discusses the role of Land Trusts. Land trusts are private, nonprofit corporations that can assist in the permanent preservation of agricultural lands, open space, and wildlife habitat.

“Agricultural Lands Conversion Ordinance.” This section describes provisions in the County zoning code, including requirements for agricultural

mitigation for zone changes from an agricultural zoning classification to a non-agricultural classification.

“Nuisance Factors.” The Agricultural Element includes policies intended to ensure the compatibility of land uses adjacent to agricultural operations, so that agricultural productivity is not adversely affected. Accordingly, Yolo County adopted a “Right to Farm” ordinance in 1991 to protect agricultural operations from nuisance claims.

The discussion in this section is directed mainly toward potential sources of conflicts between agriculture and residential uses. According to this section of the Agricultural Element: “Potential sources of conflict include noise from agricultural operations (including farm equipment and crop dusting), drift of agricultural chemicals, restrictions on application of agricultural chemicals due to nearby residences, dust, odors, and vandalism of farms. Nearby residents may resent the intrusion of farm operations, and farmers may resent limitations imposed on their operations by encroaching development.”

“Agricultural Buffers.” The Agricultural Element supports the use of “appropriate buffers” between new, non-agricultural urban uses and agricultural lands. The Element supports a zoning standard to require a 300-foot buffer on the non-agricultural property; the standard could be adjusted “to address unusual circumstances.”

“Safe Harbor Provisions for Adjoining Habitat.” The Agricultural Element calls for use of “safe harbor” provisions for agricultural lands involved in habitat enhancement programs. Under the

federal Safe Harbor Program, farmers can enter into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game to carry out and maintain specific habitat enhancements on portions of their property for a defined period of time.

2.2.2 General Plan Open Space & Recreation Element

The Open Space & Recreation Element of the Yolo County General Plan, adopted in 2002, consists of a “policy” document and a related “background” report. Under state law and the State General Plan Guidelines, “Open Space” is one of the required elements of a General Plan; “Recreation” is an optional element.

The purpose of the Open Space and Recreation Element is to be a “foundation policy document enabling the County to further establish and preserve open space areas,” as well as “to develop further opportunities for recreation tourism” and for “active and passive open space and recreation areas.”

The Open Space and Recreation Element covers many relevant issues and sets policies for decision making. Among the seventeen issues addressed in the element are the following.

“Growth Pressure and Demand for Open Space and Recreation Lands.” The Open Space and Recreation Element presents a number of “recommendations” for acquisition of open space acreage in Yolo County. Specifically mentioned are acquisitions in “wooded areas adjacent to the Blue Ridge Mountains,” as well as expanded outdoor recreational activities through enhanced public access to the Sacramento River, Cache Creek, and Putah Creek.

The Open Space and Recreation Element provides for the County to establish and/or maintain partnerships with non-profit organizations and conservancies. It also “calls for the County to encourage and support efforts by State and federal agencies, cities, special districts, and nonprofit and conservation organizations to protect lands containing open space resources... .”

The element supports partnerships with private businesses; it also “provides for the County to work with the cities of Yolo County to facilitate development of a regional sports park at an appropriate location between population centers.” It promotes cooperative efforts with the Cache Creek Casino Resort.

“Open Space Recreation and Agricultural Compatibility”(and related sections). The Open Space and Recreation Element acknowledges that open space in Yolo County is closely tied to the future of agriculture. From this perspective, it addresses various aspects of agricultural tourism and related marketing concepts, including cooperation with organic farmers and U.C. Davis.

The element generally supports “sustainable” tourism, including eco-tourism and agri-tourism. It favorably discusses “farm trails” (vehicle routes on public roads that connect agricultural and historical points of interest), branding of agricultural products, and other initiatives to increase tourism. In drawing visitors to outdoor recreation areas and ecotourism opportunities in the County, the document states that the “County should promote access to public land without infringing on private property rights.”

Other issues. Other topics addressed in the Open Space and Recreation Element include support for implementation of the Bicycle Transportation Plan, expanded public access to the Yolo Bypass, property acquisition along Putah Creek, master planning for Grasslands Regional Park, support for implementation of the Sacramento River Greenway Project,² and support for adoption of the Yolo County Natural Communities Conservation Plan.

2.3 Other Relevant Plans & Directives

Yolo County has a history of parks and recreation planning that covers several decades preceding this Parks & Open Space Master Plan. A County Recreation Element was adopted in 1968 and an Open Space and Recreation Element in 2002; other parks-related documents exist as unofficial drafts. Other plans include the following.

2.3.1 Cache Creek Resources Management Plan

The Cache Creek Resources Management Plan for Lower Cache Creek (CCRMP) was adopted in 1996; the plan was revised in 2002. The CCRMP and a companion document, the Off-Channel Mining Plan, provide guidance for the integrated management of the natural, social, and economic benefits and resources of the lower reaches of Cache Creek.

The Open Space and Recreation Element of the CCRMP recommends that the County pursue “an integrated system of trails and recreational areas along Cache Creek....” In this context, the CCRMP

² A 1992 agreement among Yolo County, the City of West Sacramento, City of Sacramento, and County of Sacramento to protect and preserve the Sacramento River Corridor.

designates six general locations,³ or “nodes,” for recreational use. These nodes are located at regular intervals of approximately two miles along Cache Creek, in order to “function as trailheads or staging areas for a possible system of bicycle, pedestrian, and/or horse paths.” The plan proposes that the County or a non-profit entity acquire these sites; the statement is made that one primary goal is “to manage future public access” to creek-side areas. The plan prohibits off-highway vehicle use on public property covered by the plan.

2.3.2 Master Plans for Capay Open Space Park & Grasslands Regional Park

Two plans have been prepared recently for two of the park units addressed in this master plan: the Capay Open Space Park Master Plan (2004) and the Grasslands Park Master Plan (2005). This Yolo County Parks & Open Space Master Plan generally supports the implementation of the provisions in those plans.

More broadly, this master plan also supports the preparation of site-specific plans such as these two plans for other County parks and open space areas, as needed.

2.3.3 Yolo County Natural Community Conservation Plan

The County, through a Joint Powers Agency, is participating in the development of a Yolo County Habitat Conservation Plan / Natural Community Conservation Plan, which currently is proposed to address some 7 plants,⁵ 5 invertebrates, 4 amphibians, 1 snake, and

³ These locations are depicted on the Parks and Open Space System Map; see Part IV of this plan.

11 birds. Among the natural communities to be considered in the conservation plan are: riparian, wetland, woodland, grasslands, and agriculture. This Parks & Open Space Master Plan generally supports the coordination of conservation efforts at County parks and open spaces with the Yolo HCP/NCCP Joint Powers Agency.

2.3.4 Yolo County Code

The Yolo County Code contains all the codified regulatory, penal, and administrative laws for the County. Among the various provisions of the County Code with potential application to parks and open space facilities are the following (for more information, see the relevant excerpts from the County Code in Appendix B):

- Prohibition of weapons in parks and other areas of the County;
- Restrictions on camping, except as permitted in public parks;
- Restrictions on campfires, except as permitted in public parks;
- Review of plans and Tentative Subdivision Maps;
- Zoning regulations for rural recreation, parks and recreation zones, public open space, and other open space;
- Requirements for boating safety and operation;
- Authority for County parks staff to designate uses of park facilities;
- Restrictions or prohibitions on certain activities, including camping, fires, use of motor vehicles, bicycles, horseback riding, and firearms; and
- Authority to charge fees for park use.

2.4 Relationship to CEQA

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)⁴ requires California public agencies to identify and disclose the potential environmental effects of discretionary projects and to avoid or reduce those effects by implementing feasible alternatives or mitigation measures. Procedures established by CEQA and the related CEQA Guidelines⁵ provide for various levels of environmental review and documentation, depending on the type of project and its potential to result in significant effects. For planning projects, a phased approach may be used in compliance with CEQA.

Adoption of the County Parks and Open Space Master Plan and subsequent activities to implement the plan are generally subject to review under CEQA. In making a decision related to this master plan, the County will consider the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared in conjunction with this plan.⁶

The “project” addressed in the Initial Study included the direct and indirect effects associated with implementing the plan, to the extent that the likely potential environmental consequences could be predicted. A broad range of possible implementation activities may be associated with this plan. Subsequent CEQA reviews may be required for parks, recreation, and open space projects.

⁴ Public Resources Code, Division 13, section 21000 et seq.

⁵ California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15000 et seq.

⁶ Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Adoption and General Implementation of the Yolo County Parks & Open Space Master Plan. Preliminary draft by Roberts, Kemp & Associates LLC; Jan. 2006.

3 Planning Background & Context

Also part of the relevant planning context is a consideration of state-wide and regional trends in parks and recreation, as well as characterizations of the geographical and ecological setting of Yolo County within the region. Accordingly, in preparing this plan, related background studies included review of trends, a characterization of ecological subregions, a population-access model, and a compilation of existing open space and recreation resources. The maps based on these analyses are discussed further below (Figures I-1, I-2, and I-3).

3.1 Geographical Setting

Yolo County is located at the southern end of the Sacramento Valley, in the Great Central Valley of California. Situated in terms of the interstate highway system between the rapidly growing metropolitan areas of Sacramento and the greater Bay Area, Yolo County is distinguished by the open space and agricultural lands that surround our relatively compact cities and communities.

On the northwest, the Cache Creek watershed extends from Yolo County into Lake and Colusa Counties. The creek is a major landscape feature across Yolo County, flowing through the Capay Valley, across the lands north of Esparto, south of the Dunnigan Hills, and then north of Woodland, into its settling basin on the Yolo Bypass.

On the east, the County shares a river boundary along the Sacramento River with Sacramento County and Sutter County. The open floodway of the Yolo Bypass separates Yolo County from the City of West Sacramento. The southeast arm of the County reaches down into the top of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

On the west, the County shares a ridgeline boundary with Napa County, along the Blue Ridge and Rocky Ridge mountains. Water released from nearby Lake Berryessa in Napa County flows into Putah Creek, which forms part of the

southern boundary between Yolo County and neighboring Solano County.

3.2 County- & State-wide Trends

Broad trends and general public preferences in outdoor recreation are recorded and tracked by state and federal agencies, as well as by professional associations and related non-profit organizations interested in outdoor recreation. These state-wide trends and preferences can be considered as part of the background for recreation planning in Yolo County (see Appendix C); it is recognized that state-wide trends and preferences may not match up exactly with those of local residents.

3.2.1 Population & Demographics

A major influence and challenge to recreation planning in California is the robust pace of growth in the state – not just in cities or metropolitan areas, but essentially in all regions.

Today's statewide population of 35 million residents is expected to reach 52 million by 2040. Growth in the Central Valley (Sacramento Valley and San Joaquin Valley) is expected to surpass growth on the coast by 20 to 25 percent.⁷ People are also moving to historically less

⁷ State Department of Parks and Recreation; CA Department of Finance.

crowded, less expensive areas and away from high-density, high-cost areas.

The state population is becoming increasingly diverse and multi-cultural so that, currently, there is no ethnic majority in California. Hispanic and Asian/Pacific populations account for much of the change. In addition, large segments of the population are aging, as more Californians of the mid-20th century generations become senior citizens and continue to be active in their later years. By 2010, one person in five in California will be older than 60 years old.

As the population changes, another trend is toward income inequality, with the number of people at the lower end of the income scale increasing at a disproportionately higher rate. Studies show that people with lower incomes rely heavily on public recreation facilities.

3.2.2 County Population Growth & Distribution

Yolo County’s population has increased from 168,000 people in 2000 to more than 184,000 in 2005. Between 2003 and 2004, total County population increased by 1.9 percent, placing Yolo County among the top 15 fastest growing counties in the state.⁸ Virtually all of that growth has occurred within the incorporated cities – primarily Winters and West Sacramento and, to a lesser extent, in the cities of Woodland and Davis. Between 2003 and 2004, the unincorporated areas of the County actually declined by approximately 200 people.

Over the next 20 years, the County’s growth patterns will be determined to a

major extent through implementation of the updated General Plan. Depending on future scenario, the estimated County population may be expected to almost double by 2050 to approximately 407,700.⁹ West Sacramento is predicted to surpass

Table I-1. Yolo County at a Glance

County population (2005)	184,348
Estimated County pop. (2025)	266,000
County land area in square miles (and acres)	1,013 sq. mi. (648,320 acres)
Percentage of total area within incorporated cities	4%
Percentage of population in incorporated cities	86%
Overall population density (people per square mile; 2005)	182 people per sq. mi.
Population density in cities	3,912 per sq. mi.
Population density, unincorporated County	27 per sq. mi.
Percentage of County in agricultural use	80%
Percentage of County under Williamson Act contracts	69%
Percentage of government ownership (total: federal, state, & county)	6%
Percentage of land in public open space	8%
Total workforce (est. 2005)	110,000
Employment of work force in agriculture (2003)	4,200 (4%)
Total County taxable sales (est. 2005)	\$2.92 billion
Yolo County rank among all CA counties in tourism by Transient Occupancy Tax (2004)	58 (last)

Sources: Yolo County, SACOG, US Census Bureau, CA Dept. of Finance, Yolo County General Plan Update

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau data; California Department of Finance.

Davis and Woodland as the largest city in Yolo County. By percentage, the population of unincorporated lands in the County seem likely to remain relatively stable at about 14% of the total. These population and growth numbers suggest an increasingly urban population may be placing increased demand on outdoor recreational opportunities – not only in the cities, but also in the unincorporated areas as well.

The demographic composition is also expected to change. By 2030 Hispanics will make up nearly half of the County population, with Whites and Asians making up the other half. The age distribution will also shift, with a decline in the percentage of school children and young adults and an increase in older adults and seniors. Implications of these trends are relevant considerations for park system management.

3.2.3. Recreation Trends

The population, demographic, and cultural changes briefly outlined above are likely to be reflected in terms of future recreational demand in Yolo County. As the population of the Yolo County region increases, predictably, the overall recreational demand will also increase, and this demand will likely reflect the regional demography. Accordingly, the types of recreation opportunities made available by recreation providers will need to accommodate proportionally more opportunities for those in lower-income and older-age brackets.

Most traditional and perennially high-demand activities (such as walking for recreation, use of picnic areas and beaches, boating and water-related sports, and

nature study) are likely to continue to be popular. While some state-wide studies indicate that some traditional activities like hunting and fishing are generally decreasing, Yolo County may not fit this general trend. Other activities such as birdwatching, “extreme” sports, and recreational off-highway vehicle use generally appear to be increasing state-wide.

3.2.4 Livable Cities & Sustainable Development

Parks and recreation can play a key role in helping to fulfill the “livable community” agenda, as expressed in the County General Plan. Enhanced living environments combined with stewardship of natural and cultural resources are vital to the revitalization and economic development of our communities.

This connection between parks and quality of life is increasing in importance, according to recent polls. Recreation and open space areas are critical components in creating livable communities and in meeting smart growth objectives.

Transportation also plays a significant role in creating livable communities. Traffic patterns and roadways define distinct areas within the County by either providing or restricting access. Bike trail links within the County, between communities, and multi-modal connections with County and regional systems can create greater mobility with reduced reliance on personal vehicles.

3.3 Ecological Model

The geography of Yolo County varies considerably by region – from mountains and foothills, to grasslands, to the creeks and river, and to the Delta. Within these settings, a variety of ecological types or

⁹ Yolo County data.

units can be described and mapped, based on systems of classifying associations of biotic and environmental factors, such as elevation, geology and geomorphology, hydrology, soils, natural communities, and other factors.

One interpretation of ecological subregions¹⁰ on a regional scale is shown in Figure I-1. This interpretation paints a version of County's ecological diversity on a broad scale, defined by characteristic biophysical units.

In this interpretation, the County includes parts of the Northern California Interior Coast Ranges and the Great Valley sections. The Northern California Interior Coast Ranges section includes the Western Foothills and Dunnigan Hills subsections. The Great Valley section includes the Winters Terraces, Yolo Alluvial Fans, and the Yolo-American Basins subsections.

Environmental resources and conservation opportunities are further described in Part III and in a background report to this master plan (Appendix E).

3.4 Population-Access Model

Figure I-2 is a composite population-access model for the County, based on distance and time relationships. As would be expected, the map shows that most of the County's population is concentrated in and around the incorporated cities of West Sacramento, Woodland, Davis, and Winters. Unincorporated communities in the County include Dunnigan, Capay, Esparto, Guinda, Madison, Knights

Landing, Clarksburg, Rumsey, Zamora, Brooks, Yolo, and Monument Hills. This model shows the relative convenience versus impediment for people in the County to visit existing park and open space areas; it is also informative for choosing new areas where future park sites may be appropriate. The model is useful for framing discussions of differing park uses as they relate to Yolo County's population and its concentrations of residential areas.

For example, west County areas are generally the furthest in distance and time from most residents, which makes these locations relatively remote – a good thing if you are seeking wilderness adventures and remote camping opportunities, but not such a good thing if you are seeking a nearby place to simply go for walk outdoors. The model also shows that relatively few, large County park resources are located close to the major population concentration.

3.5 Regional Open Space & Recreation Framework

This master plan is focused on County-owned or -managed parks and open space areas located within the unincorporated portions of Yolo County. The plan, however, also recognizes that private landowners, Tribal groups, and non-County public agencies – including the incorporated cities, school districts, the University, and state and federal governments – also provide many recreational opportunities in and around Yolo County.

Some of these components are shown in Figure I-3 in the context of the existing County park units and urban communities. Among the existing open space and recreational components of Yolo

¹⁰ Based on Miles, S. R., and C. B. Goudey. 1997. Ecological Subregions of California. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, San Francisco.

County are designated bikeways, city parks and recreation programs, state lands, federal lands, and the Cache Creek Casino Resort.

Publicly owned federal, state, and local government lands in Yolo County account for approximately 6 percent of the entire land area. Federal holdings within the County boundary include approximately 23,774 acres. Much of this federal land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and is located in non-contiguous parcels along the spine of the western mountains and in northwestern Yolo County. BLM lands include thousands of acres in neighboring Napa County and Lake County.

State lands within the County comprise about 12,328 acres. Probably the most significant state site for open space and recreation purposes in Yolo County is the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, a 15,830-acre area managed by the Department of Fish and Game. This area provides important wetland habitat within the Pacific Flyway, adjacent to the Sacramento River. Like the Yolo Bypass in general, the Wildlife Area also provides flood protection, agricultural use, waterfowl hunting and other recreation activities, and open space.

The cities of Davis, Woodland, West Sacramento have active parks and recreation programs. The City of Davis also has acquired a number of open space parcels within a broad area around the city. Lands managed by the University of California, Davis provide outdoor recreation opportunities. The City of West Sacramento is currently planning and developing a wide variety of city, neighborhood, and waterfront parks.

Among the other notable regional recreation and open space areas are the Lake Berryessa Recreation Area in Napa County and the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area (BRBNA), which includes a portion of western Yolo County as well as four other counties. The BRBNA encompasses more than 785,000 acres from south of Lake Berryessa to the Mendocino National Forest. Approximately 38 percent of the BRBNA is in public ownership.

