

Part IV: Master Plan Recommendations

This part of the plan describes the main strategies and recommendations of the Yolo County Parks and Open Space Master Plan, beginning with the concept of building upon the existing County parks, open space areas, and resources (section 12). Following some general considerations, each park property is addressed individually. Site drawings are included for most of the park units. Following the discussions of the existing parks are some guidelines for future parkland acquisition (section 13); the part concludes with a discussion of general administration and management strategies (section 14).

12 Building on What We Have

12.1 General Considerations

The preceding Part III of this plan provided an overview of the lands, facilities, and resources that comprise the current County park and open space system as they currently exist (2005). This part provides additional information about the park system, with strategic recommendations for the parks and open space areas individually and system-wide.

A primary recommendation of this plan is to build upon this existing inventory. As noted previously in Part III (and as further addressed in Part V, Implementation and Financing), maintenance and improvement of existing County park and open space facilities is a high priority. Among other, related considerations are: the need for essential public services, the possible expansion of existing areas, and universal access compliance.

12.1.1 Maintenance & Improvement

Many public comments during this plan's development emphasized the need to improve and maintain existing County park assets. Some of those who commented suggested that no new parks or open space areas be added until deferred maintenance and other needs in existing areas were remedied.

This plan places a high priority on actions to maintain and improve existing County parks and open space areas. The underlying premise is that well-maintained parks and open space areas are an essential foundation for more long-term improvements. This helps to build an ethic of appreciation and stewardship among County residents and park users, thus helping to engender more public support and participation.

There are a variety of improvement projects needed within the County's park system, some of which stem from deferred maintenance, others that are related to undeveloped existing facilities or areas, and others that are new proposals. Maintenance and improvement projects are discussed further below on a park-specific basis.

12.1.2 Providing Essential Services

As a general rule, providing essential public services and site improvements – such as parking areas, signage, fencing and lighting if required for safety, drinking water, permanent restrooms where appropriate, and waste and recycling receptacles – should be the first priority at County park and open space areas where people gather. In general,

facilities should be developed on a site-specific basis and designed to be appropriate for the site and the level of public use.

12.1.3 Expansion of Existing Units

In building upon the existing inventory of parks and open space areas, this plan generally supports the concept of expanding the boundaries of existing park units, if appropriate and feasible, subject to the guiding principles, legal considerations, and other components of this plan.

Expansion of existing parkland areas must only occur under conditions that are amenable to all affected parties, whether the agreement involves other public agencies or private landowners. Park and open space area expansion should generally seek to accomplish identified objectives, such as to create or enhance a high-demand recreational use, or for environmental resource protection purposes. Where possible, a buffer area should be included on public land between the park unit and adjacent uses.

12.1.4 Universal Access

In the spirit of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)¹ certain County park and open space facilities need to be improved to better accommodate universal access. Among its many provisions, ADA generally prohibits state and local agencies from discriminating against persons with disabilities (broadly interpreted as a full range of disabilities from impaired mobility to visual and auditory impediments) and from excluding participation in or denying benefits of

programs, services, or facilities to persons with disabilities.

Under ADA, public agencies including state and local government programs must be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. However, the programs are typically viewed in their entirety, and public entities may not necessarily have to make each of their existing facilities accessible. Generally, for public accommodations, all new construction must be accessible to people with disabilities; for existing facilities, barriers to services must be removed if readily achievable.

12.2 Park-Specific Improvements

Background studies for this plan included investigations and assessments at each of the existing park properties. These studies, in conjunction with public input, guidance from the County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee, planning team recommendations, and comments on the initial draft plan, led to a number of park-specific recommendations for improvement, enhancement, or other change, as described below.

12.2.1 Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park

Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park, located along Highway 16 in the northwestern corner of the County approximately six miles north of Rumsey, is situated in an attractive canyon-and-mountains setting with numerous recreation options including camping. It has been called the crown jewel of the County park system.

This nearly 700-acre park, acquired in 1973, is the largest County park property. It has approximately two miles of frontage on Cache Creek. Of all the current County

¹ Pub. L. 101-336. Also see ADA Standards for Accessible Design, 36 CFR Part 36.

park properties, Cache Creek Canyon is the one that offers the widest array of regional park amenities to the County's residents; it is also the County park unit with probably the overall highest values in terms of environmental resources.

Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park Recreational Resources

Recreational uses of Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park include camping, rafting tours, swimming, picnicking, and fishing. At the three areas – the Upper, Middle, and Lower Sites – water-related day use is allowed for beach access, inner-tubing, picnicking, nature study, and general natural area enjoyment. Of the three areas, the Middle Site is currently the most developed and offers the widest range of use options.

By way of the low-water bridge (accessible only during low-water flows) at the Lower Site, the park also provides access to an extensive Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public open space area to the west and south and thus serves as a “gateway” for use of trails for hiking and horseback riding. It is also a means of access to the existing Blue Ridge Trail.

The biggest draw to this park unit in terms of the total number of visitors are the whitewater rafting tours offered by concessionaires under contractual agreements with the County. Under these agreements, the concessionaires are allowed to use specified areas for rafting tour-related staging, take-out, and camping at the Rafting Concession Area.

Concessionaires are typically allowed to use the County's Camp Haswell Park (discussed below) as a take-out point. Rafting contracts have typically been negotiated every five years. The contractors' concession is required to be

open for business generally between the end of April through the first weekend in October, including holidays, as creek conditions allow. Under the concessionaire agreements, in consideration for the use of public property, the contractors are required to pay a percentage of gross receipts to the County (see Part V).

Camping is accommodated at the Middle Site and the Lower Site, although the Lower Site area is dedicated for use by clientele of the concessionaires and, thus, not readily available for the general public.

Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park Environmental Resources

Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park provides extraordinary environmental resource values. The park presents a mosaic of habitat types, characteristic of California fire-prone landscapes. The topographic contrast is dramatic, with high ridges overlooking the creek and canyon.

The terraces near Cache Creek and the lower hillslopes near the creek provide extensive areas of foothill woodland, an important habitat type for wildlife. This park also provides a relatively intact foothill riparian corridor, which, in conjunction with Cache Creek itself, form an important biological linkage between the Central Valley and the upper Cache Creek watershed in the Interior Coast Range. The park also has areas of patchy, mixed chaparral habitat at higher elevations.

This park presents a significant diversity of wildlife species, owing to its location with other natural areas within the Interior Coast Range, as well as to its habitat diversity. Some wildlife species,

such as the bald eagle and tule elk that occur in the Cache Creek watershed, and in proximity to the County facilities, are the focus of special wildlife or ecotourism tours.

The environmental importance of the Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park is derived from its large size, its adjacency to other significant and habit-rich open space lands, from the presence of chaparral, foothill woodland, and riparian habitat types, and from the park's role in providing ecological linkages within the watershed and the Interior Coast Range.

Master Plan Recommendations

Continue to operate Cache Creek Regional Park as the premier gateway to public outdoor recreation in Yolo County.

- **This master plan promotes the continuation of Cache Creek Regional Park as the County's "Number One" park unit.**
- **The County should provide general improvements to facilities and infrastructure for all three Cache Creek sites.**
- **The County should continue to oversee concessionaire rafting activities; the oversight should include ensuring that the operators manage improvements consistent with County and general public needs, especially where joint use occurs.**
- **Consider access improvement across Cache Creek. Conduct further study to determine the best location and feasibility of a light-duty, all-season bridge for pedestrians, mountain bikers, and equestrians.**
- **Consider relocating concessionaire uses from the sensitive streamside portions of the Lower Site; relocation**

should be followed by restoration work, including invasive, non-native vegetation removal.

- **Design and develop trails linking the three Cache Creek Park sites together.**
- **Invasive non-native vegetation should be removed throughout all three sites.**
- **Signage improvements are needed throughout this park unit, including trail and interpretive signs.**



Low-water access at Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park.

12.2.2 Camp Haswell Park/Otis Ranch Open Space Area

Camp Haswell Park and the Otis Ranch Open Space Area comprise in combination a unique opportunity for the County to optimize attributes of both areas for the benefit of the public and resource conservation. They are described here as two components of an integrated facility area.

Camp Haswell Park is an easily recognized location in northwest Yolo County on State Highway 16, located in the Cache Creek Canyon, adjacent to the Blue Ridge portion of the Interior Coast Range. The remains of a stone cabin, formerly associated with a Boy Scout camping area, provide a visual focus for the site from the highway. With the

exception of the old stone cabin and the paved entrance road, the site is essentially unimproved. This 7.3-acre site was acquired by the County in 1996.

The much larger, approximately 587-acre Otis Ranch property, located adjacent to the Camp Haswell site, includes lands on both sides of Cache Creek and the State Highway. Acquired by the County in 2002, the property provides nearly continuous County ownership along Cache Creek for nearly two miles in the upper canyon area.

Camp Haswell is heavily used by rafters as a parking and take-out site for rafting trips. Currently, rafting use and associated concessionaire customer parking predominate at this site. This park unit is also used on an incidental basis for picnicking, swimming and wading, and fishing.

Camp Haswell Park provides habitat values similar to those available in the Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park and especially in combination with the Otis Open Space Park, with which this park unit is closely associated geographically. The small size of the Haswell unit limits the overall intrinsic environmental value of the park, and vegetation has been removed and degraded from high visitor use.

Camp Haswell occupies a broad river terrace between Cache Creek and Highway 16, much of which is used for parking. The residual terrace habitat is open foothill woodland that has manzanita, toyon, and other chaparral species intermixed with blue oak, interior live oak, and foothill pine. The principal habitat value in Camp Haswell Park is associated with the valley foothill riparian habitat corridor located near Cache Creek and on low terraces near the creek.

Currently there are no existing improvements at the Otis Ranch property. Existing parking occurs along Highway 16, presumably within the state highway right-of-way. There are informal trails on the property, but no developed access into the interior and upper elevations of the property.

The Otis Ranch Open Space Park property shares many of the ecological values identified previously for the Cache Creek Canyon Park. However, the Otis property covers a greater elevation range than occurs in the Cache Creek Canyon Park, potentially increasing the range of habitats present. The large size of this property and the linkage that it provides to natural habitats on public lands both north and south of Cache Creek enhances its environmental resource value.



This plan recommends treating Camp Haswell Park (small area on right) and Otis Ranch Open Space Area (larger boundary) as a combined and integrated facility for management purposes.

Master Plan Recommendations

Manage Camp Haswell and Otis Ranch as an integrated park unit for hiking and trail adventures, as well as a multi-functional day-use site, with an information hub for the northwest Yolo County parks.

- A site plan should be developed for this tandem park unit through a public process that defines an appropriate mix of uses.
- Consider developing a trailhead in conjunction with the Camp Haswell site or adjacent to Highway 16 on the Otis Ranch property side.



Old stone cabin at Camp Haswell Park.

- The Otis Ranch property should be kept primarily in its natural condition; however, with volunteer support and cooperation from interested organizations, a trail system should be developed.
- Provide a trail link through the “panhandle” to the adjoining BLM land and the Blue Ridge Trail (all located on public lands).
- Provide benches along trails at scenic vista points.
- Trailhead facilities should include a trail map, directional signage, and public safety and environmental interpretive information.
- Provide trash receptacles and chemical toilet facilities at the trailhead.

- The County should manage the Camp Haswell area for multiple uses, and clearly distinguish areas that are intended for public versus concessionaire parking.
- Assess the old stone cabin structure (structural integrity and potential historical significance) and, if feasible, renovate the structure for possible uses, including as an information kiosk.
- Consider establishing a caretaker / park host for this site.
- Consider recruiting a support group such as a “Friends of Yolo Parks” organization for care of the kiosk facility.
- Emphasize improvements in day-use functions for the Camp Haswell area.

12.2.3 Capay Open Space Park

Capay Open Space Park, dedicated in 2004, is a 41-acre park and natural area on both sides of Cache Creek, near the community of Capay. Public use and environmental restoration activities are expected to be implemented according to an approved master plan for the site.

Capay Open Space Park will provide public access to Cache Creek, as well as picnic areas, trails, environmental education features, and other amenities. The park includes areas that have been restored for recreational use and wildlife habitat. The habitat values in this park will increase through time as the site’s biological communities develop.

Master Plan Recommendations

Implement the Capay Park master plan, ensuring that there are provisions for accommodating basic day-use needs of the public.

- **Manage this site as the first of a string of recreation nodes along Cache Creek, as a part of the Cache Creek Resources Management Plan.**
- **Support enhancement of the site's day use functions and ecological values, as prescribed in the adopted master plan.**
- **Consider acquisition of high-value adjacent lands (including those identified in the plan), if available.**

12.2.4 Clarksburg River Access Site

The Clarksburg River Access and Boat Launch, is located on an elevated terrace surface between a levee road and the Sacramento River. The site is approximately 4 acres in size, and is located approximately 1.5 miles south of Clarksburg and County Road E-9. Because of its riverside location in the eastern County near the Sacramento metropolitan area, Clarksburg River Access Site receives a high level of visitor use from within and outside the County.

This site, like Knights Landing Boat Launch and the Putah Creek Access Sites, is operated and maintained by the County under an Operating Agreement with the property owner, the State of California, through the Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Conservation Board. The County has operated and maintained the Clarksburg Boat Launch site under agreement with the State since 1958. There is currently no park host at this site, and no use fees are currently charged.

The main improvements at this site are the boat ramp and the adjacent asphalt parking area, which were upgraded in 2002 through Wildlife Conservation Board funds. Portable toilets are provided onsite. There is no electrical power, phone, or water system. The site has a

history of public safety and public health problems, including vandalism, transient activity, and vagrancy.

This site is an intensively used boat access and river-fishing facility. The levee slope and the terrace surface provide limited habitat value. The structure of the existing valley foothill riparian habitat at this site has been reduced and simplified to a narrow longitudinal corridor, often little more than one tree wide, near the water's edge for most of the site.



Fishing from the shore and from boats are both popular activities at Clarksburg River Access & Boat Launch.

Master Plan Recommendations

Make the Clarksburg River Access Park a safe and pleasant destination for water-related recreation and relaxation, enhanced with restored riparian habitat.

Like other County park areas, Clarksburg Public River Access Site receives considerable use and has great potential. It is in a good location to receive much use from the eastern County population areas.

However, the more urgent need here is an improved level of security and – an important counterpart – an ethic of stewardship by its users. Current public safety issues and demands on day-to-day operations and maintenance warrant some changes in how the park is managed, as addressed further below.

- **Establish a patrolling park host through a Friends of Yolo Parks-type organization.**
- **Gates to restrict nighttime use should be installed.**
- **With the above security measures in place, essential public services should be upgraded, including potable water supply and permanent restrooms.**
- **Restoration of riparian habitat is recommended, including native grass and shrub plantings on levee slope.**

12.2.5 Dunnigan Park

This 0.5-acre community park, completed in 2005, is located on County Road 89A near Main Street in the unincorporated community of Dunnigan. The site was the location of the former Dunnigan Town Hall, which was demolished. The property is across the street from the historic Union Church of Dunnigan.

The park was made possible through a partnership that included the County, First Five Yolo County Children and Families Commission, community action groups, and the local fire district. Improvements in this community facility include a play equipment area, a half-court basketball court, a barbeque and picnic area, parking, and ADA-compliant portable restrooms. Potable water is supplied through a connection with the local Fire Department water supply. The

park includes a perimeter fence and drip irrigation system.



Play equipment in the center of Dunnigan Community Park.

Master Plan Recommendations

Building a community park helps build the community. Participating entities should follow through with a long-term operations and maintenance arrangement.

- **Develop a long-term operations and maintenance (O&M) arrangement, which could include transferring some or all O&M responsibilities to a local entity.**

12.2.6 Elkhorn Regional Park

Elkhorn Regional Park is located on Old River Road between the levee and the Sacramento River, approximately 1.75 miles south of where Interstate 5 crosses the Sacramento River.

This park unit is approximately 49 acres in size; of which about 10 acres are developed. The park has a boat ramp, paved parking lot, picnic area with barbeques, and a permanent restroom building with flush toilets. A substantial portion of this park is a long and linear riparian zone between the river and the railroad, which has high habitat value with minimal infrastructure and thus

receives limited public use. A park host resides onsite.

Recreational opportunities at Elkhorn Regional Park include fishing, boating, picnicking, and bird watching. Currently, however, the principal users of the park are recreational boaters using the launch and parking facilities. The site is open for day-use only; overnight camping is prohibited. The park is also used as a stopping point for tourist excursion train rides offered by a local short-line railroad, operating out of Woodland.

Elkhorn Regional Park provides substantial environmental values; the park contains high-quality riparian forested habitat along the Sacramento River, representative of pre-settlement times. This park includes a remnant of the Sacramento River floodplain outside the levee that is formed by the railroad and roadway berm southwest of the site.

This remnant floodplain and other lands within the park are vegetated with very large riparian tree species, including a number of California sycamores greater than 30 meters tall and many large Fremont cottonwoods and valley oaks. The overstory canopy is generally not fully closed, and there is generally a lower tree stratum of willows, black walnut trees, box elders, and other species. The



Boat launch area at Elkhorn Regional Park.

ground and most of the other vegetation is covered with a dense growth of epiphytic wild grape. Dense stands of button bush occupy the marginal strips separating land and water.

The developed portion of Elkhorn Regional Park is a comparatively well-used County park; however, the primary use of the site is limited to its water-related functions, especially the boat launch facility. Over the years, this park has been operated nearly exclusively for the purpose of boating-related activities. On weekends, it is not uncommon for waiting lines to form at the boat ramp. And yet, as described above, the overall park includes extraordinary habitat resources and represents an important conservation node in the riparian corridor along the Sacramento River.

The County, the City of West Sacramento, and the West Sacramento Redevelopment Agency, in a 2005 amendment and restatement of the agencies' pass-through agreement, agreed to reasonably cooperate to pursue a County-City regional park involving County land in this general area (see Helvetia Oak Grove, section 12.2.9).

Master Plan Recommendations

Enhanced boating, birding, and interpretation, while preserving the legacy of a rich remnant of Sacramento River riparian forest.

Resource sensitivity should be a critical, governing factor for any future expanded public use of this site. That said, there are significant values that would be of great benefit to the public in the form of low-impact and sensitively designed and interpreted trails.

- **Develop appropriate and compatible multiple uses with emphasis on**

- opportunities for experiencing “nearby nature” environment.
- **Continue to operate and maintain the boat ramp function.**
- **Consider a sensitively designed and sited interpretive trail for wildlife viewing. Evaluate seasonal sensitivities and manage public access as needed, with respect to wildlife disturbance thresholds (i.e., trail closures during nesting periods).**
- **Develop education-related improvements that could include an interpretive kiosk, signage, bird-viewing platforms or blinds, and possibly docent-led tours. Through such outreach, encourage an ethic of appreciation for this rich natural habitat.**
- **Enhance picnicking and day-use components.**
- **Seek support from non-profit organizations for the conceptual planning and interpretive content of a non-intrusive nature trail.**
- **Consider this site as a candidate for an environmental education program to be managed by an appropriate school, academic, or non-profit organization.**
- **A Class I bicycle trail could be constructed to the east of the railroad track for partial or the full extent of the property, if other linkages are made to this site.**

12.2.7 Esparto Community Park

Esparto Community Park is a 1.1-acre site located along State Highway 16 (Yolo Avenue) in the central business area of the unincorporated community of Esparto. This community park is furnished with picnic tables, a barbecue pit, large shade trees, a turf area, a play equipment area, and portable restrooms.

Esparto Community Park functions as a town commons, visual center, and gathering place for family and community events in Esparto. Esparto Community Park is also the venue for the Capay Almond Festival, and it serves as a place for information displays and event activities. A portion of the park is used for the Esparto Farmers Market under an agreement between the County and Capay Valley Vision. The park is also a popular site for family and community parties and gatherings. This park receives considerable daily use and serves important functions in maintaining community cohesiveness and identity.



Esparto Community Park.

Master Plan Recommendations

Esparto Community Park should continue to be an enjoyable place to celebrate community.

- **Continue and enhance the park’s community-building functions.**
- **Maintain the park’s tree canopy for natural shade; consider compatible shade structures.**
- **Consider building a permanent restroom facility.**
- **Events such as the Farmers Market and the Almond Festival should be accommodated to the extent possible.**

- **Event accommodations should not exceed park and infrastructure capacities (e.g., consider traffic and pedestrian needs and potential effects on adjacent properties and uses).**
- **Special event activities should be coordinated through the guidance of a local citizen committee and the County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee.**
- **Solicit a local “friends of” type organization as a means for guiding ongoing operations and maintenance and future improvements.**
- **For the longer term, consider the development of an operations and maintenance (O&M) arrangement that transfers O&M responsibilities to a local entity, such as a special district.**

12.2.8 Grasslands Regional Park

Grasslands Regional Park is located on Mace Boulevard approximately 3.5 miles south of Davis, between County Road 35 and County Road 36. The park, acquired from the federal government, currently consists of approximately 313 acres; approximately 50 acres are developed. Virtually the entire site has been affected by past human activities. The adjacent 315-acre half section on the east is still retained by the federal government; however, County acquisition of this property is anticipated.

A master plan for Grasslands Park ² was approved in 2005 through a planning effort that was separate from, but generally coordinated with, the Countywide parks planning effort.

² Grasslands Park Master Plan. 2005. Questa Engineering Corporation and Environmental Science Associates.

The purposes of the Grasslands plan are generally to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to management, recreational uses, habitat protection and enhancement, and design. The Plan also recognizes the need to control exotic and invasive weeds, protect sensitive species, and help restructure agreements associated with leases for the specialty recreational activities that currently take place on portions of the site.

Grasslands Regional Park Recreational Resources

Grasslands Park provides a regional venue for a variety of specialty recreational uses, including archery, remote-controlled model sail plane and electric glider flying, and horseshoe pitching. Archery activities are conducted under a lease agreement between the County and the Yolo County Bowmen Archery Club, which has held leases at the site since 1979. The lease agreement applies to a 40-acre archery target area plus a 100-yard buffer on three sides, for a total area of approximately 58 acres. A portion of the Archery Club’s area is used by the Yolo County



Model plane flying at Grasslands Regional Park.

Horseshoe Pitching Club under an informal sublease.

The model plane flying activity is conducted in a designated area under a lease agreement between the County and the Sacramento Valley Soaring Society.

The lease agreement applies to a 15-acre area; however, the area currently used apparently exceeds that size. The model planes are launched by catapult, and no gasoline-powered model planes are permitted. The Soaring Society maintains turf areas, sheds, a portable toilet, a shade shelter, and other facilities.

In addition to the specialty recreation uses, the park is used for several other purposes. In the northeast portion of the current park property, the City of Davis in 2004 established a 63-acre permanent conservation easement to provide a habitat reserve for western burrowing owls, as a mitigation site for impacts associated with the Mace Ranch development in the City. The agreement also provides for a 35-acre off-leash dog park, with funds committed for fencing and a parking area.

Since the early 1990s, volunteers have planted and maintained valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) trees within several areas of Grasslands Regional Park. The tree-planting was originally approved by the County Board of Supervisors in part to assure compliance with terms of the acquisition from the federal government, which required development and use of the site as a park. The primary planting area overlaps with the area designated for the off-leash dog park. Several other tree planting areas are located near the archery range area and in the northwest portion of the park. Volunteers have also planted approximately 15 acres of native grasses at the site. The site and the adjacent federal parcel are also used for environmental research, particularly for sensitive species and vernal pools.

Grasslands Regional Park Environmental Resources

Grasslands Park currently exhibits a highly variable mixture of native and non-native plants as a result of previous disturbances, turf management, landscaping, experimental oak tree- and native grasses-planting efforts, weed eradication and controlled burns, local agricultural practices, and other historical uses. Invasive, non-native weeds occupy extensive areas of the park.

A subsurface clay layer and other areas of alkaline soils may limit the diversity of native plant species; however, such conditions may also provide habitats that favor certain sensitive species. Landscaped areas include windbreaks comprised of tall shrubs and eucalyptus trees surrounding the archery area.

Within this mixed landscape, there are a number of sensitive species and habitats. As the draft Grasslands Regional Park Master Plan points out, the current park area and, to an even larger extent, the adjacent federal parcel are remnants of a historically more extensive native grasslands landscape, characterized by perennial native grasslands, shallow swales, alkali-adapted vegetation, and vernal pools with highly specialized, rare, endemic plants and invertebrates.

The uplands provide important foraging habitat for raptors, including the Swainson's hawk, northern harrier, and western burrowing owl. The designated 63-acre western burrowing owl preserve will increase the existing habitat, although it will require active management to maintain the preferred short-grass habitat and to protect the area from disturbance. The Grasslands Park Master Plan suggests a number of ways to enhance the natural resource values at Grasslands Park.

Master Plan Recommendations

Implement the approved master plan and through participatory planning, create a compatible, mixed-use park facility that also protects important natural resources.

- **The County, stakeholders, lessees, user groups, and the public should continue to participate in implementation of the Grasslands Park Master Plan.**
- **Incorporate a monitoring component for tracking habitat conditions related to sensitive species such as the burrowing owls and vernal pools.**
- **Continue to pursue the acquisition of the adjacent federal land.**

12.2.9 Helvetia Oak Grove

Helvetia Oak Grove is an 11.7-acre property acquired by the County in 1989. The property is located 2.5 miles south of Elkhorn Regional Park near the Sacramento River. Access to the site is via an unimproved driveway, which also provides access to a private residence; a 30-foot easement for ingress and egress has been recorded in favor of the County.³ Currently this County-owned property contains no improvements, structures, or developed amenities.

Helvetia Oak Grove includes a number of relatively large valley oak trees; however, in a larger context, its habitat and conservation values are limited. The habitat structure near the oaks has been altered substantially, with minimal understory native vegetation. There is a mature upper canopy, but a limited middle layer.

³ The easement is described in a deed to the County recorded in Bk. 2209 O.R., Pg. 619, YCR.

The higher-value native woodland habitat area appears to be less than an acre in extent, and it is embedded in a matrix of farmland and exurban residential uses, with no physical connection to other woodland habitats or to the riparian corridor along the nearby Sacramento River.

Conservation values could be enhanced by removing invasive vegetation and by restoring native species and appropriate habitat structure.

Helvetia Oak Grove is currently (2005) not being used by the County as a recreation resource. While the site presents potential opportunities as a venue for group events, it should be considered as not suitable for a multi-functional, day-use, or overnight park facility for the general public. The site's relationship to surrounding private lands makes unsupervised general public access problematic.

The County, the City of West Sacramento, and the West Sacramento Redevelopment Agency, in a 2005 amendment and restatement of the agencies' pass-through agreement, agreed to reasonably cooperate to pursue a County-City regional park involving County land in this area.⁴

Master Plan Recommendations

Preserve and restore existing habitat values and develop minimal infrastructure to accommodate supervised group activities.

- **Verify and establish onsite property boundaries and the ingress-egress easement.**
- **Conduct habitat enhancement, including invasive weed removal.**

⁴ Adopted by Yolo County Board of Supervisors February 15, 2005; Amended and Restated Agreement No. 05-31 (Section 4.01).

- **Develop minimal site improvements and furnishings to establish a venue for supervised group activities by reservation, including overnight camping and picnics.**
- **Establish a group event reservation system, in partnership with interested non-profit or quasi-public organizations.**
- **Continue to work with the City of West Sacramento, as may be appropriate under the amended pass-through agreement.**

12.2.10 Knights Landing Boat Launch

Knights Landing Boat Launch is located on an approximately 4-acre site near the town of Knights Landing, off State Route 45, about 25 miles northwest of Sacramento. The park site adjoins Sycamore Slough, just upstream of where the slough joins the Sacramento River. There is currently no onsite park host or caretaker. The property immediately to the southwest is owned by the state, acquired through the Wildlife Conservation Board, and is managed by the Department of Fish and Game.

The main improvements at this site are the boat ramp and adjoining parking area. The parking area provides spaces for approximately 28 cars with trailers and 15



Knights Landing Boat Launch is located on a slough that flows into the Sacramento River.

single vehicle spaces. Portable sanitary facilities are also provided. Electrical power and telephone service is available onsite; however, there is no potable water.

This park provides access to the Sacramento River for boating, water-skiing, and fishing, with incidental day-use activities. The park is well-used, both on weekends and during the week. Boating-related uses including boat launching for fishing, trailer and vehicle parking are the predominate use of the site with incidental shore-fishing and day-use activities; the major activities supported by this site are powerboat-related.

A large cottonwood tree at the bottom of the parking lot is a scenic amenity; however, environmental resource values directly onsite are limited to the slough waterway and limited riparian vegetation. Adjacent areas on state lands also provide riparian and wetland habitat.

The Knights Landing Boat Launch site is principally occupied by the parking area and the boat ramp, uses that have little environmental resource value. This site does, however, have a narrow vegetated strip between the parking lot and the adjacent County roadway, and the site immediately adjoins an area of state-owned land with substantial valley foothill riparian habitat; the quality of the habitat on the state-owned land and the proximity of the vegetation within the two adjoining parcels thus augments the habitat value on the County-owned land.

Any further development or additional use of the site is constrained by the extensive amount of area already allocated to the boating-related infrastructure.

The riparian forest on the state-owned land has a multi-layered vegetation structure, with an overstory dominated by

Fremont cottonwoods, valley oaks, black walnuts, and large Goodding willows. Epiphytic wild grape is abundant. A second tree stratum includes Oregon ash and box elder. A shrub layer exists in areas with a canopy open enough to allow light to reach the ground; Himalayan blackberry, grape, and blue elderberry are the predominant species present. The habitat structure on the adjacent CDFG-managed lands are presumed to support a variety of riparian-associated songbirds and other wildlife.

Master Plan Recommendations

Knights Landing should be a place for boating of various kinds, with supporting day-use areas on shore.

- **Management of this facility should be expanded to serve a wider range of users, including non-motorized boats.**
- **Consider developing a permanent restroom facility with running water.**
- **An onsite park host facility should be provided near the parking area entry.**
- **Consider developing improved picnic and shore-fishing facilities for day use.**
- **Consider constructing a fish-cleaning station as an amenity for fishermen and to improve the appearance and cleanliness of the water edge.**
- **Investigate possible expansion of usable area at Knight's Landing Park to provide additional public uses such as picnicking and day use.**
- **Consider and implement, if feasible, planting additional native tree species, to increase the tree canopy in and around the parking lot.**
- **Adjacent areas with significant habitat value should be retained in natural conditions.**

- **A gateway trailhead could be located in the parking area for a potential nature trail located on the adjoining state lands for wildlife-viewing and nature appreciation.**

12.2.11 Putah Creek Access Parks

The five access locations that collectively make up the Putah Creek Fishing Access Parks are located on approximately 87 acres, along a 3.25-mile stretch of Putah Creek and State Highway 128, seven miles west of the town of Winters.

The sites are operated and maintained by the County under an Operating Agreement with the State of California, Wildlife Conservation Board, which owns these sites. The Operating Agreement with the state indicates that the two primary uses of the site are public access and wildlife habitat preservation. The County has also historically held agreements with the Bureau of Reclamation for adjacent properties.

Improvements at the five Putah Creek Access Parks consist primarily of seven parking areas. Unplanned foot trails have resulted from use over time. Additionally, there are some picnic tables and barbecues, and Sites 1 and 3 are equipped with portable restrooms. "Iron rangers" are provided for visitors to deposit the required day-use fees at some of the entry points. A park host resides at the Access Site 3, where there is also electrical power, telephone service and a rudimentary water system that pumps water out of the creek. Use of Sites 4 and 5 is currently limited (2005).

Recreation activities at all access locations primarily consist of fishing and general access to the creek. Visitors often park their vehicles in the highway right of way outside the County sites to avoid paying

the use fees. The sites could also accommodate picnicking and nature study and enjoyment.

Overnight camping is prohibited at these locations; however, overnight camping, day-use picnicking, and a boat ramp (for non-motorized craft) are available at Solano County's Lake Solano Regional Park on Pleasants Valley Road, located approximately two miles downstream.

Putah Creek Environmental Resources

The Putah Creek Access Parks provide substantial environmental values, although not all parts of these five facilities are equally valuable. The upper access (Access 1) includes elevated terraces that are well vegetated with foothill woodland habitat, in multiple vegetation layers and a variegated structure.

Collectively, the habitat in these park units is continuous in all directions with similar habitat types throughout. The site is also wildlife-rich. For example, this area is foraging territory of the pileated woodpecker, one of the largest of the remaining American woodpecker species. The south side of the creek is less disturbed and thus more valuable environmentally.



Putah Creek Access Sites: "And if you get lost come on home to Green River...."

In addition to the shared corridor of valley foothill riparian habitat along the creek, typically there is also a nearly continuous fringe of sandbar willow immediately adjacent to the creek, with additional species diversity higher on stream banks and on low terraces near the creek channel.

Some prominent plant species present include Fremont cottonwood, Pacific or black willow, Oregon ash, black walnut, blue elderberry, and button bush. Some of the cottonwoods and willows are large specimens. Epiphytic wild grape is common to abundant. This riparian corridor and the associated stream course itself is an important regional biological linkage between the Interior Coast Range and the Sacramento River.

Access area 3 (middle access site) is heavily infested with tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), an especially invasive, exotic species that is displacing desirable native species. The impacted area is, however, largely located outside the extensive floodplain which otherwise provides a structurally complex riparian habitat dominated by black walnut, Fremont cottonwood, and black willow, with an herbaceous understory dominated by a tall sedge species.

The two lower access sites include an elevated terrace area that is dominated by annual grasslands with a heavy infestation of another invasive species, the yellow starthistle. These sites also include part of the riparian corridor along Putah Creek.

The Putah Creek Access Parks collectively are a relatively underused outdoor recreation resource in the County. These sites should be broadly considered as primary "nearby nature" resources.

As an opportunity for interpreting popular culture, it should be noted that brothers Tom and John Fogerty, who lived part of their formative years in El Cerrito, enjoyed visits to Putah Creek in the summers; the creek became the inspiration for a 1969 hit song "Green River," performed by their band, Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Master Plan Recommendations

Celebrate the "Green River" with an expanded range of park infrastructure and public serving facilities that support an expanded range of uses.

Currently these park sites are classified as fishing access areas; however, the management concept for these sites should be expanded to include other activities, including day use and possibly camping. Existing parking areas are problematic and largely underused.

- **Consider an entire revamping of the access and parking infrastructure. Conduct studies to determine a course of action, including possible removal of portions of some existing paved areas.**
- **In consultation with Caltrans, address highway right-of-way parking and coordinate a solution to on-highway parking.**
- **Ensure the preservation of the key areas of "wild" riparian habitat in an undisturbed condition, with controlled public access.**
- **Develop amenities at this site that enhance the day-use experiences, including picnic tables and supporting infrastructure.**
- **Create and furnish cultural and environmental interpretation components including interpretive trails and signage.**
- **In conjunction with resource agencies, non-profit groups, and other interested parties, participate in efforts to improve and protect fish habitat.**
- **Invasive non-native vegetation should be removed.**
- **Cooperatively and in consultation with Native American representatives, protect and enhance areas supporting plants used for cultural purposes.**
- **Support and participate in planning the "Dam-to-Dam" trail corridor concept proposed by non-profit groups.**
- **Consider developing overnight camping facilities located in the vicinity of Sites 4 and 5. (All of the principal intensive use areas should be screened to the extent possible from views from the highway).**
- **Consider seasonal closures for wildlife sensitivity and flood management.**
- **Consider expanding trail hiking opportunities, subject to careful planning to minimize potentially adverse environmental effects.**
- **Generally, consider the north side of the creek for active public access and use, and the south side to be dedicated as habitat and conservation.**
- **These sites collectively would benefit from coordination with Solano County, consistent with and expanding upon the existing agreements between Yolo and Solano Counties.**
- **Expanded roles for this partnership could include resource monitoring and ranger patrols of access sites.**

12.2.12 Vernon A. Nichols Park

Nichols Park is located on Cache Creek off of State Highway 16 on County Road 57, near the town of Guinda. This approximately 21-acre park site was severely altered by flood events in 1995 and 1997, which swept away the beach, upland areas in the floodplain, and significant stands of riparian woodland. There is a park host in residence onsite; use fees are not charged.

Improvements and furnishings at this site include picnic tables, barbecues, a field area with sports backstop, playground equipment, and portable chemical toilets. There is access to a creekside beach area. Associated with the host site is a septic tank and leachfield. There is electrical power and phone service onsite, as well as a limited irrigation system. Parking areas are unpaved.

While not directly part of the park, there is a County bridge on Road 57 just east of the park that is scheduled by County Public Works for replacement. The County road ends just past the bridge on the eastern side of the creek.

Probably the most attractive feature at Vernon A. Nichols Park is its proximity to Cache Creek, and the most popular activities in the area are water-related activities such as wading, swimming, and fishing; these activities, however, occur to a large extent off-site. Picnicking and informal team sports in the open areas are also accommodated on this site. Overnight camping is not allowed.

Nichols Park includes some areas with important environmental resource values, as well as other areas with limited environmental value. The changes that resulted from Cache Creek flood events and channel migration substantially

affected the natural resources at the site, including the loss of riparian vegetation. The park includes a narrow valley foothill riparian habitat fringe along the eastern margin of the terrace, as well as a part of the Cache Creek floodplain below the terrace. The riparian habitat is mostly sandbar willow, with several Fremont cottonwoods. There is a Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (VELB) mitigation area adjacent to the riparian vegetation in the southern portion of the park.

The floodplain adjacent to the park (south of the bridge) is mostly unvegetated sediment, and is impacted by invasive species, including salt-cedar (*Tamarix* sp.) and giant reed (*Arundo donax*). The newly created floodplain on the eastside of the creek is in the early stages of a willows and cottonwoods dominated vegetation community. The groins and native vegetation installed by the County as part of a bank stabilization project have also trapped sand, which has developed a cover of sandbar willow and a variety of herbaceous species.

Master Plan Recommendations

Take better advantage of the creek-side adjacency – for people and for natural resources.

This park property offers a potentially attractive setting that holds considerable potential for a variety of uses. Enhancement of visitor experience should begin with an acknowledgement of the relationship between the park and the creek, as well as the people who have made this watershed their homes.

Through a site-specific planning process, the uses and management for this site should be redefined to create an attractive destination for day-use activities and to enhance natural resources. The plan should consider the following:

- Relocate the park host area to a less conspicuous location and screen it with vegetation.
- Establish tree canopy coverage for the primary day use areas. If appropriate, work with a commercial tree grower to implement a grove landscape, consistent with Yolo County's agricultural tradition.
- Establish a stronger connection between upland areas and Cache Creek for both recreation benefit and interpretative values.
- Provide interpretive information regarding the flood events and fluvial

processes that caused such dramatic changes in the landscapes, as well as the emergent riparian vegetation response to these changes.

- Consider interpreting other agricultural and natural values with the establishment of a demonstration garden.
- Improve physical access to the creek and include provisions for ADA compliance.

13 Future Parks, Open Space, & Recreation Opportunities

Planning for improvements to the existing set of County parks and open space areas is the first order of business in this master plan. In the longer term, “building on what we have” also involves planning for additional parks, open space areas, and outdoor recreation opportunities in the County. This plan assumes that as the County’s population grows, the demand for additional parks, open space, and recreation opportunities will also increase. This demand will be felt regionally, in cities, and in local, unincorporated community areas. Accordingly, this master plan promotes increases in a range of public parks, open space areas, and recreation opportunities through a variety of means. The plan offers suggestions on new park concepts for the future, both County-wide and by Sub-areas.

13.1 County-wide Strategies

Consistent with existing County General Plan policies, this master plan promotes long-term planning to effect an overall increase in the *amount* of parkland and open space. This plan also promotes a related increase in the *range* and *availability* of outdoor recreation opportunities. As discussed previously, the County’s projected population growth in future years is a compelling factor in such planning for future parks, open space, and recreation opportunities.

As part of this approach, this master plan suggests that the County should plan for additional public parks and open space facilities; however, such planning should not presume that all new components would be added only through full acquisition of new public lands. While acquisition from willing sellers is one possibility, the plan also recommends creating new opportunities in a variety of ways, as discussed below.

13.1.1 Work with Other Government Partners

When found to be in the public interest and consistent with Yolo County policies and values, cooperative agreements between and among the County and other

government entities may be appropriate for purposes related to parks, recreation, open space, and conservation. County partnerships with the cities, adjacent counties, state and federal agencies, tribal governments, special districts, watershed groups, and private businesses can have mutual advantages in the acquisition, development, and administration of recreation facilities and resources.

The County should make the most of existing and future Joint Powers Authorities (JPAs) or similar agreements with cities, other counties, and other public agencies. This plan supports County participation in cooperative agreements with government entities that include, but are not limited to, adjacent counties (Sacramento, Solano, Napa, Colusa, Sutter, and Lake) the incorporated cities, state agencies such as the Department of Parks and Recreation and the State Wildlife Conservation Board, federal agencies such as BLM, and University of California, Davis.

This plan also encourages the County to explore the possibility of recreation and open space projects in cooperation with the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians, including the possible sharing of lands for

use as open space amenities, recreation, conservation, and interpretive programs.

This plan encourages and supports efforts by state and federal agencies, tribes, cities, special districts, and nonprofit and conservation organizations to protect lands containing open space resources.

13.1.2 Develop Appropriate Gateway Units

In conjunction with the above item, this plan supports the idea of creating "Gateway Parks" to facilitate access to existing public lands, where feasible and mutually agreeable to all parties.

As described earlier in this plan (Part III, Section 10.2), Gateway units would generally be small but strategically located properties, providing access for equestrians, hikers, bicyclists, boaters, and other potential users to existing public lands managed by local, state, or federal agencies. Acquisition of County interest in the gateway area could be by agreement, easement, or other mechanism; it should not necessarily be presumed to require acquisition in fee title.

13.1.3 Work with Private Landowners

This plan supports mutually beneficial partnerships with private landowners to provide additional recreation opportunities in Yolo County.

As discussed earlier in this plan (Part II), a number of important, potential issues must be acknowledged at the interface of recreation and rural land uses. However, in the longer term, this plan asserts that, on a case-by-case basis, private landowners and the County may be able to work together in several possible ways:

- Programs that provide outdoor recreational opportunities that are not

available or allowed on County lands. Such activities include hunting and target shooting, bird watching tours, horseback riding, and hiking.

- Agri-tourism programs, such as farm trails (motorized routes between agricultural markets and other points of interest), tour routes through the County's Delta area, guest ranches, wineries, and rural bed and breakfast inns.
- Programs that provide controlled access across private lands to public lands.

The County could support these private efforts primarily through administrative and regulatory means, as further discussed in the next part of this plan. As one example, the County could host a website page where landowners could post information about available recreation activities. As another example, County economic development staff could assist with agri-tourism / Delta region tourism promotion and marketing efforts.

One example of a successful cooperative arrangement for controlled public access on private lands is the docent-led program set up and run by the Middle Mountain Foundation, a non-profit organization, for the Sutter Buttes area. The foundation provides the interface between the private lands and general public. User fees are charged that serve as nominal revenue to the landowners, as well as help to support some trail and restoration work.

13.1.4 Work with NGO Partners

The County should continue and enhance partnerships with non-government organizations, such as watershed and conservation groups, including, but not limited to, those involved with the Blue Ridge-Lake Berryessa Natural Area, the

Cache Creek and Putah Creek watersheds and corridors, the Yolo Bypass, and the Sacramento River corridor. These partnerships with non-government organizations should include efforts to create and enhance recreation opportunities, as well as to support management, open space, and conservation projects.

13.1.5 Bring a State Park to Yolo County

Special opportunities may be available through partnerships with the State Department of Parks and Recreation. Unlike many other counties in the state, Yolo County is not well endowed with state parks or recreation areas; the Woodland Opera House is currently the only State Parks property in the County.

In longer-term planning for future parks and recreation areas, the County should request and encourage further studies and possible development of a park or recreation area by the state government within Yolo County, where such facilities would be consistent with the policies and values of the County.

Yolo County may be an appropriate site for parks considered under the State's ongoing Great Central Valley initiative, particularly for an "Central Valley agricultural heritage" park. Other options may include an off-road vehicle recreation area developed with State assistance.

13.1.6 Consider Open Space Areas for Ecological Conservation

Open space areas may serve a variety of functions. In future parks planning, open space areas should be considered where one primary function is to contribute to regional conservation goals.

This plan supports efforts to use parklands to help implement the objectives of conservation plans, including, but not limited to, the Yolo County Habitat and Natural Community Conservation Plan, undertaken by a Joint Powers Agency, which includes the County and the incorporated cities, with representation from the University of California Davis, and participation by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Other opportunities include mitigation banking. Mitigation banks can provide funding, which is critical for management and restoration of habitat.

13.1.7 Consider an OHV Park

A recreational use consideration that was expressed during the public input process and subsequently during the comments on the draft plan was the idea of developing an off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation area in Yolo County. Such a facility would provide a legal alternative to existing OHV use presently occurring along the Cache Creek corridor. The optimum site location for such a facility would be an existing disturbed area, such as a quarry site or borrow area in that vicinity.

It is envisioned that the development of an OHV area would include the restoration of nearby OHV-impacted areas and an enforcement component that would be aimed at ensuring the closure of the illegal areas and the redirection of users to the developed site. Long-term management of such a facility is presumed to be either through a concessionaire arrangement or through another public agency such as State Department of Parks and Recreation.

This plan recommends that the County conduct preliminary investigations to ascertain public support, identify candidate sites, and consider related

logistical and resource needs for development and operations.

13.2 Concepts for Parks and Open Space by Sub-Area

The Recreation Sub-Areas defined previously in this plan (see Part III) can be used to provide a context for potential future parks, open space, and recreational opportunities in various parts of the County. Consideration is given to population distribution, potential demand, natural resources, and other factors.

In the discussions below, all suggestions are meant to be conceptual, with the understanding that specific park proposals would require additional analysis, public participation, and involvement by other agencies and organizations. In evaluating future park and open space facilities, all provisions, policies, and issues addressed in this plan would need to be considered.

13.2.1 Sacramento River Edge

New parks, open space, and recreation opportunities in this sub-area generally need to consider the outstanding natural and scenic resources of the river itself, the higher populations densities around West Sacramento, water-oriented recreation opportunities, and potential partnerships with other entities. Several possibilities are suggested for this sub-area.

West Sacramento Area Park Concepts

Future park system development near West Sacramento may include:

- Opportunities involving partnerships with the City of West Sacramento.
- Opportunities involving partnerships with the Port of Sacramento.

- Park facilities that provide river access for rowing clubs, paddlers, and non-motorized watercraft.
- Possible use of the Port's western levee area for compatible public recreation.

Delta Recreation Site

The southernmost extension of Yolo County reaches toward the Delta, suggesting new types of recreation opportunities that may be possible for the County-wide system. These include:

- Opportunities involving partnerships with Solano County and the Delta Protection Commission.
- A gateway park and water trails for non-motorized boaters; one location could be on a slough near Liberty Island, which is currently in public ownership (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). A public bridge from the Solano County side provides access to the island.
- Nature interpretation of aquatic environments.

13.2.2 Yolo Bypass Sub-Area

The Yolo Bypass is a unique feature of the region with multiple functions and uses. Various recreation activities already take place on private and public lands within the Bypass. The following concepts are suggested.

Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

In cooperation with the Department of Fish and Game, the Yolo Basin Foundation, and the City of West Sacramento, the County could consider a partnering arrangement to develop a gateway for public access to the east levee of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and the Yolo Bypass. Currently, only one point of access is available on the western side.

Properly coordinated and developed, a gateway trailhead could provide access to a linear public facility for day-use and educational opportunities along the eastern bank of the Toe Drain. Public access to this area must be compatible with the management objectives of the Wildlife Area, including wildlife protection and hunting. Use of the facility should not interfere with agricultural operations or management of the floodway, and it must allow unimpeded operations and maintenance of the Deep Water Ship Channel and Port of Sacramento.

In addition to effective access control measures, trailhead features should include an interpretive signs. Other features could be considered, such as a bird observation blinds, interpretive trails, and possible picnic sites. The trailhead would need to accommodate visitor parking, non-motorized access, and ADA requirements, as well as facility maintenance and emergency vehicles. Siting and design considerations would also include ways to minimize impacts to adjacent properties and local roads.

Conaway Ranch Area

Also in the Sacramento River Edge Sub-area is the 17,300-acre Conaway Ranch, west of Woodland and partially in the Yolo Bypass. If acquired by the County, existing uses on the property would be given paramount consideration, including open space, agricultural uses, floodway management, bird-watching and passive recreation, and habitat conservation.

13.2.3 Central Yolo Flatlands, Creeks, & Urban Areas Sub-Area

As described in the previous part of this plan, this large sub-area contains large, open agricultural areas, as well as high

population concentrations. This sub-area is low in terms of total parkland acres, yet it highly accessible to most residents. Suggested concepts for this sub-area include the following.

Lower Cache Creek Corridor Parks

The potential for park acquisitions along Lower Cache Creek has been previously recognized and recommended in the County's Cache Creek Resource Management Plan (CCRMP). As aggregate extraction sites owned by local industry become exhausted, reuse plans are required by County and state law.

One likely use for these sites is as County parks, recreation areas, and open space. The CCRMP's six recreation "nodes," located at approximately two-mile intervals along the creek, would provide creek access and substantial outdoor recreation opportunities (see Figure IV-1, next page).

Capay Open Space Park accounts for the most westerly of these six sites; the new park at Wild Wings (near the Cache Creek Nature Preserve) serves as the third site downstream. Additional sites should be acquired for management, as designated in the CCRMP, including sites in the vicinity of the crossing of Interstate 5.

Regional Park in Vicinity of Woodland

The general vicinity around the City of Woodland is another part of the Central Yolo Sub-Area where latent demand for parks and recreation is presumed to be quite high. This plan proposes further investigation of a possible multi-use regional park in this area, similar in functions to Grasslands Regional Park.

Further study would be needed to identify candidate sites in this general area. Initial

suggestions include the areas near Willow Slough or in the general vicinity of the Cache Creek settling basin. Access to Cache Creek would be a positive feature when siting a park unit in this location.

Putah Creek Corridor Opportunities

The Putah Creek corridor provides natural resource values, open space, scenic value, and recreation opportunities. This plan supports continued efforts to work with Solano County, the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee, UC Davis, State agencies, and private landowners to enhance the Putah Creek corridor. More specifically, the County should:

- Cooperate with Solano County to create enhanced opportunities within the corridor near Lake Solano Park and Putah Creek Access Sites.
- Work with the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee and its

partners to interpret such features as salmon and native fisheries restoration.

- Support continued planning and facilitation of a Putah Creek trail system (e.g., the dam-to-dam trail, including the County's Putah Creek Access Sites. This trail alignment must be carefully located to minimize adverse environmental effects.

13.2.4 Dunnigan Hills Sub-Area

Park resources are limited in the north central part of the Yolo County. In coming years, the population in this area, particularly in and around Dunnigan, is expected to increase dramatically. While community parks in residential neighborhoods should be developed in conjunction with residential subdivisions (see Part V), this plan also suggests consideration of an additional concept.

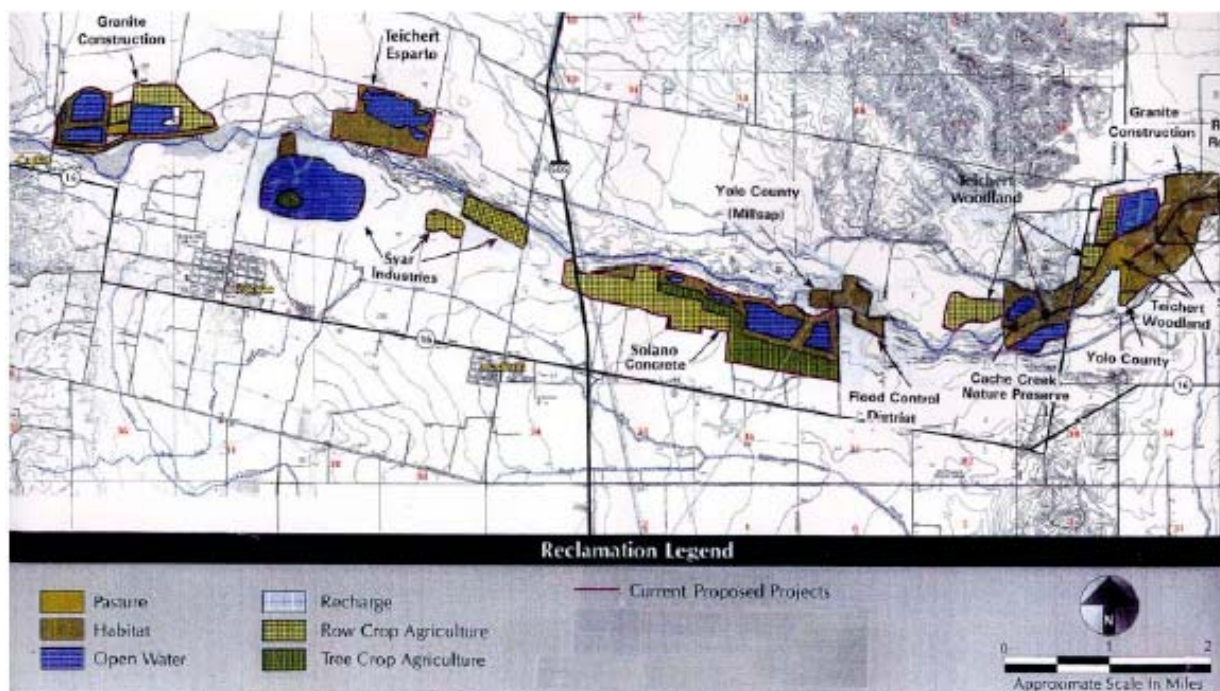


Figure IV-1. Reclamation of mining areas on Lower Cache Creek over the next thirty years is planned to result in restored habitat and agricultural areas, as well as new recreational opportunities. (Source: Yolo County; Capay Open Space Master Plan.)

Dunnigan Hills Area Park

A County Park or Regional Park in this location would serve a growing part of the County. In comments on the initial draft of this plan, comments were expressed both in favor and opposed to this concept. There was seemingly little support for a general suggestion by the State Parks and Recreation to develop a state park in this area, under their Great Central Valley initiative.

The conservation potential of this area is high, however, and the native species of valley grassland habitats would make a good focus for enhancement and interpretation within an open space area with limited public access.

13.2.5 Western Foothills Sub-Area

This sub-area of the County contains most of the least accessible areas in the County. It is relatively low in population, and contains the highest percentage of the current park acres. It is generally high in natural resource values and scenic amenities. During preparation of this plan both support and opposition were expressed regarding improved public access to public lands in the Blue Ridge/Rocky Ridge area. The following concepts are proposed.

Western Foothills Landowner Initiatives

As noted in the discussion of general County-wide strategies, landowner initiative in partnership with the County may take several forms. In the western foothills, of particular interest to hikers and backcountry explorers would be landowner offers that provide docent led tours or controlled access hiking excursions.

Future Gateway Facility

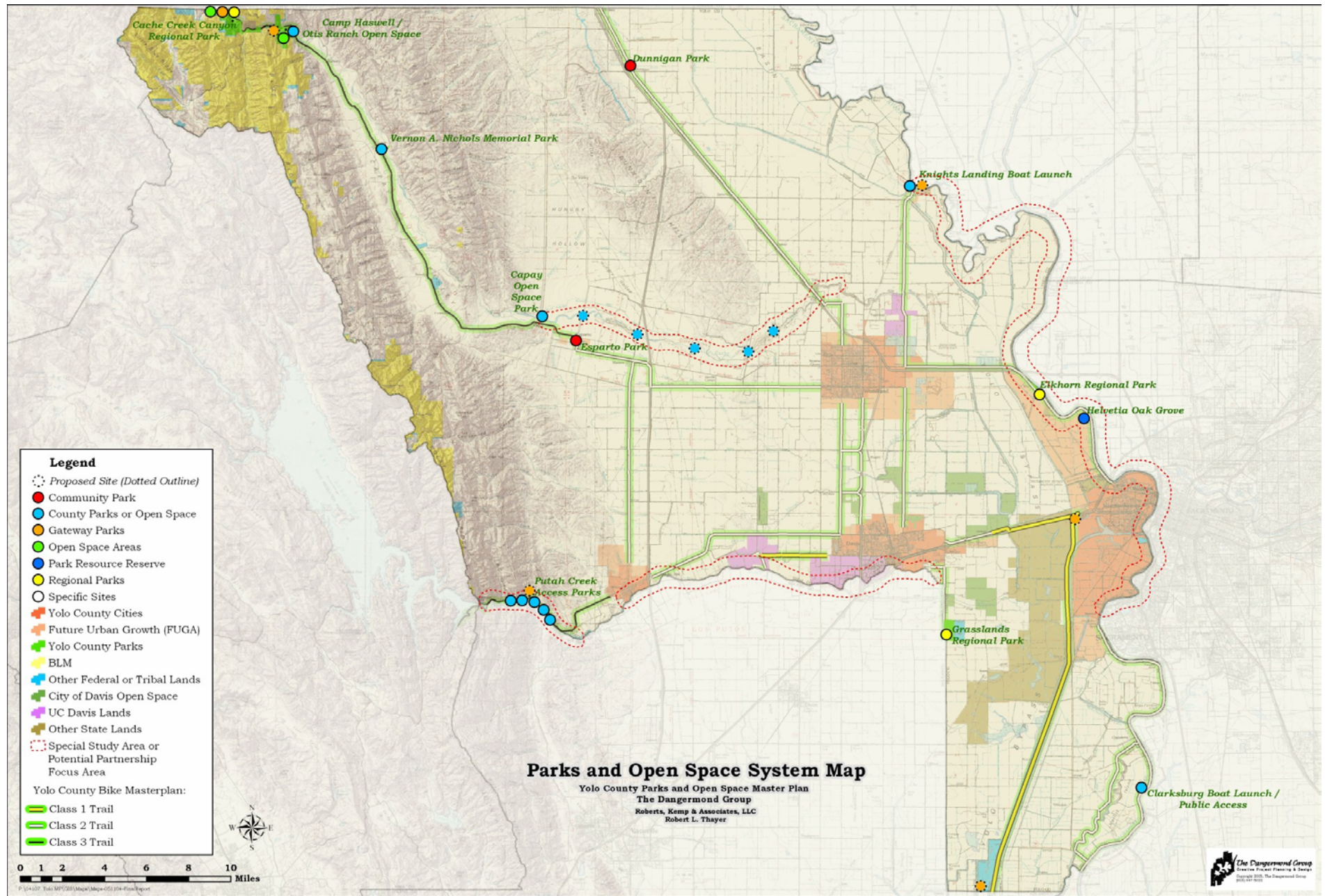
As a longer term concept, a gateway facility is suggested in this master plan that would provide controlled public access to the public lands in the western foothills. For the County to acquire interest in such property, there would need to be a willing seller. Further, assurances and other provisions would need to be negotiated to the satisfaction of the affected private landowner(s) to reduce or avoid potential adverse effects of public access on private properties.

13.3 Park & Open Space System Map

This master plan includes a Parks and Open Space System Map, which is intended to show the existing park units and illustrate some of the concepts in this master plan. The park unit designations generally follow the classification system presented in Part III. The information in this map is general and conceptual, rather than specific; the County is not targeting specific properties.

The System Map also shows potential "Special Study Areas" or "Potential Partnership Focus Areas," in accordance with the recommendations in this plan. These areas – such as along Cache Creek, Putah Creek, and the Sacramento River – are characterized by a higher level of recommended partnerships, inter-agency agreements, and other cooperative arrangements with landowners, organizations, and agencies.

As a long-term concept, the plan generally supports a connected system of parks, with linkages that do not necessarily require motorized transportation. For this reason, the System Map includes existing designated bikeways.



14 Managing County Parks & Open Space Areas

Park system management strategies are discussed throughout this master plan; this section summarizes some of the broader strategies in the areas of administration, parks and open space areas management, and resources management. Financing and budget considerations are part of this mix; implementation and financial matters are addressed extensively in Part V. Where these discussions lead to specific recommendations, the resulting policies and action items are carried forward into the policy and action summary in Part VI.

14.1 Administrative Strategies

14.1.1 Procedures for Park Project Review & Approval

This master plan provides a long-term framework for managing the County park system. To implement this plan on an ongoing basis, a public process should be instituted for identifying and prioritizing County-wide parks, recreation, and open space projects.

This master plan supports the establishment and “institutionalizing” of a specified process by which park and open space-related projects are identified, reviewed, prioritized, approved, and implemented. Expenditure of grant funding is one example. The siting and design of new facilities and improvements should also be conducted under established procedures for design review.

This process should include public review by, and input from, the County Parks, Recreation, and Wildlife Advisory Committee, members of the public, non-government organizations, the Board of Supervisors, and other parties as may have involvement in County parks and open space. The process for considering all new development, acquisition, and expansion proposals must include meaningful opportunities for public review and comment. Particular efforts should be made to invite representatives from the County’s agricultural and environmental communities.

Park and open space project selection criteria should include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following:

- Consistency with the County General Plan and this County-wide Parks & Open Space Master Plan;
- Eligibility of the proposed project for grant funding;
- County ownership or control of land and access;
- Likelihood of beneficial joint agency partnership opportunities;
- Public health and safety considerations;
- Potential environmental effects;
- Ability of project to serve needs of County residents and visitors;
- Potential local economic benefits;
- Associated future County maintenance obligations;
- Local support and participation by non-government organizations;
- Other criteria as may be determined by the County.

14.1.2 Fee Rate-Setting

Charging users of County parks reasonable fees is necessary to pay for costs associated with maintaining the facilities. Reasonable user fees should be collected at County parks to help offset

costs associated with maintenance and upkeep.

In setting rates, both day-use and seasonal fees should be considered. Rate schedules should be reviewed and approved in a public setting on an annual basis. (See additional discussion in Part V.)

14.2 Park Unit Management Strategies

14.2.1 Integrated Uses & Adaptive Management

Park management should incorporate integrated use (or “multi-use”) and adaptive management approaches. The goal in managing each park unit is to seek an appropriate, compatible balance of uses.

This master plan supports the concept of integrated use, where multiple functions are considered at the same time within the same park property, although not always in the same area. (See Part III for a description of suggested Yolo County Park system park classifications and area designations and their suggested range of uses.)

This plan also supports “adaptive management,” whereby the results of implementation activities are monitored and subsequently changed, if necessary, to better accomplish the identified goals.

14.2.2 Interpretation & Outreach

For many people, part of the enjoyment of visiting a park is learning about what one is seeing and experiencing. Interpretation is a key element in the visitors’ experience. Resource interpretation on County parklands should generally be directed toward helping people learn about the place in which they live, their bioregion. In turn, as people learn about the value of

the resources, they are more apt to help protect them.

Yolo County parks should tell the landscape stories of the region, including the themes mentioned earlier in this plan (see Part III, Section 11.2). A wealth of material is available for interpretation in Yolo County.

14.2.3 Park Hosts

This plan supports the continuation and improvement of the County’s park host program. Park hosts are on-site representatives of the County, and they can perform a variety of important public service duties at County parks, including encouraging proper public use of County properties, discouraging vandalism, and helping to foster the stewardship ethic.

This plan supports the idea that the County may enter agreements with qualified persons to serve as parks hosts at certain County parks, as may be necessary or desirable. Hosts may be volunteers or receive a stipend.

Park hosts should be responsible for being familiar with the goals and management policies of their park and the park system as a whole. Hosts should attend periodic orientation and training programs. If living onsite, camp hosts must be responsible for managing their personal areas to keep orderly and free of unsightly materials and conditions. The length of their stay at any one location should be limited.

14.2.4 Use of Park Properties for Commercial Purposes

As stated in principles supporting this plan (see Part II), parks exist for the public; public access and use should take precedence over exclusive use by specific

interest groups. In some cases, County parks can accommodate appropriate seasonal or longer-term uses by groups that obtain County approval according to reasonable conditions.

Commercial use of park areas involving retail trade, where products, merchandise, or services are offered for sale for profit are generally not appropriate on County park properties; however, selected commercial uses may be appropriate at County Parks, where the uses complement park uses. Commercial uses are also an avenue to provide additional funding for park management.

Commercial uses might be considered for approval under conditions such as the following, where the services or for-sale items that are provided:

- Complement and support an appropriate public use;
- Cannot be provided by the County otherwise;
- Do not interfere with public access or uses;
- Do not violate other laws or regulations;
- Are provided under an approved agreement with the County under specified conditions, which may include appropriate payments to the County.

14.3 Resource Management Strategies

14.3.1 Natural Resources

As discussed in other parts of this plan, and as more thoroughly described in background reports (see appendices), the existing park units exhibit a range of natural resource values important to regional conservation.

Environmental laws and regulations protect a variety of environmental components and natural resources, from sensitive species to wetlands. Protection and enhancement of sensitive resources need to be based on sound technical information.

This plan supports regional conservation efforts, habitat improvement, removal of invasive vegetation, and additional studies of park resources to further the objectives of resource management at County parks and open space areas. When considering the possible acquisition of potential new parks or open space areas, consideration should be given future parklands or open space areas that will protect and preserve biological resource values, including riparian habitat, wetlands and vernal pools, habitat for listed species, and other sensitive habitat.

As part of the acquisition evaluation of candidate parks and open space lands, reconnaissance-level biological resources survey is recommended. Within park and open space units, areas of high biological value should be classified as “Protected Areas” (see Part III). Additional recommendations are provided by individual park unit.

14.3.2 Cultural Resources

In times before Euro-American settlement, Central California supported some of the densest populations of Native American people in North America. The Sacramento Valley may have been inhabited as early as 10,000 years ago, although specific archaeological evidence has not been found in Yolo County.⁵

⁵ Jones and Stokes Associates (JSA), Yolo County General Plan Update Background Report, 2005.

Yolo County occupies the ancestral territory of the Native American people of Penutian linguistic stock, known as the Patwin, the word for “people” as used by tribes, or “tribelets,” that inhabited the region from the Delta up into the Sacramento Valley. Some ethnographers have included the Patwin in a larger group collectively called Wintun.

Patwin-inhabited lands included the whole County, including the western hills, along the Sacramento River, and particularly along Cache Creek and Putah Creek. The region near the river in what is now southwestern Yolo County was also used to a lesser extent by Plains Miwok people.

The region was first explored by Spaniards in the early 1800s, as well as various early hunters and trappers, including Jedediah Smith. Originally, the County was comprised of eleven Mexican land grants. The County experienced considerable growth following the Gold Rush, as early residents turned from gold mining to farming and ranching. Most of today’s cities and communities date to the later part of the 19th century. Woodland became the County seat in 1862. The Sacramento River and the railroads were important to early transportation through the region. The causeway across the Yolo Bypass was constructed in 1916.

The County’s agricultural history began with its first settlers. In the 1860s and 1870s, major crops included barley, wheat, and alfalfa; fruit crops followed soon after. By the 1870s, most of the fertile land in the County had been homesteaded. Flood control and reclamation allowed agricultural and other uses to develop on lands that were previously vast wetlands. The County has a long agricultural heritage, which continues to the present.

Cultural resources are protected by state and federal laws and regulations. The County General Plan and the County Code ⁶ also contain provisions protecting historic and prehistoric resources. More than 1200 cultural resource sites have been recorded in Yolo County; of this total, 270 sites are considered archaeological sites. ⁷

Prehistoric site distribution tends to be correlated with river and creek drainage systems; overall sensitivity is considered to be high in some areas. Numerous historic sites are located throughout the County, many of which have been evaluated for eligibility to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Gibson House, which houses the Yolo County Historical Museum, is one of a number of sites that are listed in the National Register.

This plan supports the protection of areas within County park units that may be of cultural significance to Native Americans, including places for cultural uses, such as plant material gathering. It also supports consultation with Native Americans, and the protection and interpretation of cultural resource sites and the stewardship of areas of known or potential archaeological and historic sensitivity. Park units should be managed so as to avoid adverse effects to these resources, to preserve them for the benefit of future generations.

When considering the possible acquisition of potential new parks or open space areas, consideration should be given to future parklands or open space areas that will protect and preserve cultural resource values, including archaeological sites, historic properties, and traditional cultural

⁶ Yolo County Code, Title 8, Chapter 8.

⁷ JSA, op cit.

places. A reconnaissance-level survey and a cultural resources records search are recommended as part of the acquisition evaluation of candidate parks and open space lands. Areas of high cultural value should be designated “Protected Areas” (see Part III).

This plan recommends additional investigations of the County’s cultural resources. It also supports partnerships with Tribal groups and consultation on cultural resource protection measures.

14.3.3 Monitoring & “Adaptive Management”

Resource management strategies for public parks and open space properties should generally include monitoring and “adaptive management” protocols, particularly for management of larger properties in primarily natural conditions.

“Adaptive management” should be practiced to ensure that habitat restoration objectives are being met and to protect wetlands, water quality, and other environmental values from significant impacts. Generally, the County’s application of “adaptive management” should include, at minimum:

- Identifying the desired state of conditions within areas that are being managed, including identifying quantified measures of the desired habitat conditions.
- Developing measures of the existing conditions within the areas being managed, which measures can be used in comparison with the desired conditions to assess the results of management.

- Specifying corrective actions that may be necessary to restore the managed areas to a state closer to the desired conditions.

14.4 Land Trusts

This plan recognizes that private, non-profit land trusts may be beneficial partners in parks and open space management, as also recognized in the County General Plan Agricultural Element ⁸ and Open Space Element. This plan supports the use of land trusts to help protect agricultural lands, habitat, open space, and parklands.

14.5 Land Banking & Surplus Property Disposition

This plan supports land-banking methods to hold and transfer ownership of desirable park properties into the County park and open space system. The plan includes a park classification for this purpose. A “Yolo Legacy” or other land trust-type organization may assist the County in acquiring open space and habitat lands for public use.

This plan also supports the County disposing of “surplus” property that it may have acquired but cannot effectively use, because of access impediments, environmental protection constraints, or other reasons. Parkland may be acquired and held in reserve; parkland determined to be surplus may be sold for fair market value or traded for comparable resource value.

⁸ County Agricultural Element, Section 3.10.

