

HABITAT ENHANCEMENT ON AGRICULTURAL LAND

Yolo County encourages farmers and ranchers to participate in voluntary programs to enhance habitat on agricultural land, including oak woodlands. Yolo County is a member of the Yolo Habitat Joint Powers Agency, a six-member agency developing a countywide multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan and Natural Community Conservation Plan, known as the Yolo Natural Heritage Program. Among other items, the Natural Heritage Program will emphasize wildlife-compatible farming and ranching practices. Yolo County is also one of a handful of counties in the state that has developed an oak woodlands conservation plan to encourage voluntary efforts to preserve oak woodlands habitat, much of which is also grazing land. Furthermore, the Yolo County Resource Conservation District, along with their partners, work with landowners to install habitat and conservation projects on ranch and farmland that is compatible with normal agricultural practices.

ISSUE #1: Many Yolo County landowners are unaware of resources available for habitat conservation on agricultural land or do not have the time or money to implement projects. Most landowners have never participated in habitat projects, so there is a steep learning curve as well. Despite these challenges, local non-profit organizations and government agencies involved with these efforts - such as the California Audubon's Landowner Stewardship Program, the Yolo County Resource Conservation District, the Center for Land-Based Learning, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Yolo Land Trust – have seen an increase in landowner interest in the last few years.

ISSUE #2: Limited funding is available for installation and ongoing maintenance of habitat enhancement projects. Many willing landowners cannot implement projects because of a lack of funding and limited capacity among local non-profit organizations that assist with such efforts. In addition, many programs require a 50% cost share on the part of the landowner. Habitat restoration projects are expensive to maintain, especially in the first three years. These expenses create a barrier to widespread adoption throughout the county.

YOLO LAND & CATTLE CO.

The Yolo Land & Cattle Co. is a 7,500-acre ranch encompassing grasslands and a portion of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Yolo County. The Stone family owns the ranch and has participated in many voluntary programs to preserve habitat and protect the ranch, including entering into an agricultural land conservation easement to preserve the land in perpetuity. The Stone family also has worked with the Yolo County Resource Conservation District, California Audubon Landowner Stewardship Program and the Center for Land-Based Learning to enhance habitat on the ranch. Yolo County hopes to encourage other landowners to follow in the footsteps of the Stone family.