

Yolo Bypass Drainage and Infrastructure Study Update 2020
Yolo Bypass Working Group Meeting
Friday, November 20, 2020
10 AM – 11:30 AM via Zoom

Attendees:

Elisa Sabatini (Grant manager, Yolo County)

Heather Nichols (Study team, Yolo RCD)

Jai Singh (Study team, cbec eco engineering)

Chris Campbell (Study team, cbec eco engineering)

Doug Brown (Study manager, Douglas Environmental)

Petrea Marchand (Study team, Consero Solutions)

Robin Kulakow (Study team, Yolo Basin Foundation)

Chelsea Martinez (Study team, Yolo Basin Foundation)

Vance Howard (Study team, GEI Consultants)

Mike Reinhart (Yolo Basin Foundation Board)

Byron Buck (Conaway Preservation Group)

Jeff Jenkins (DWR)

Phil Gaines (Swanston Ranch)

Dean Ongaro (H Pond Ranch)

Mark Hennelly (California Waterfowl)

Mark Cowan (Larsen Wurzel)

Marty Meisler (MWD)

Julie Spezia (MWD)

Phillip Martinelli (Channel Ranch)

Dominic Bruno (River Garden Farms)

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and Introductions – Robin Kulakow, Yolo Basin Foundation

2. Study method – Jai Singh, cbec

In 2013, the Board of Supervisors initiated the original study to see how the proposed restoration would affect wetlands and wildlife management in bypass. The original Yolo Bypass Drainage and Infrastructure Study, published in 2014, was prepared and 12 high priority projects were identified. Yolo County, Yolo Basin Foundation and Ducks Unlimited pursued grant funding for a number of projects in the 2014 study and implemented several successfully. With new large-scale projects, such as the Fremont Weir Salmonid Habitat project and the Lower Elkhorn Setback Levee going on in the Yolo Bypass, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors thought it prudent to update the study. It was funded by the State Water Contractors and Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency.

One main goal of the study update was to include as many stakeholders as possible. Over 10 meetings with Yolo Bypass landowners were held. From the stakeholder meetings, a database was developed which includes over 80 of the suggested project opportunities. This meeting is another opportunity for stakeholders to bring up comments about the study and projects.

The database is an appendix of the study document. It includes project name, id, location code, and short description. Projects included have a focus on drainage, water supply or both.

Scope of work was to describe up to 8 projects. This was expanded to 12. Project opportunities were ranked based on evaluation criteria such as benefits and feasibility. These criteria are similar to those in which projects are often also rated in grant proposals. Example criteria include agricultural benefits, migratory waterfowl or shorebird habitat benefit, public education and recreation benefit, estimated benefit acreage, listed species benefit, easement compatibility, etc. The top 12 ranked projects were described in individual project sheets. Some of the project opportunities were grouped together by unified purpose and location into a regional master project where they would have been shown as individual opportunities in the database.

Draft of the study is available for the public and comments can be submitted through November 30, 2020.

3. Summary of projects – Jai Singh, cbec

Projects 1-8 are location-specific and are shown on the map on page 6 of the study document. Projects are numbered north to south. Project 9-12 are Yolo Bypass wide projects that drive Bypass wide improvements. Overview of project sheet layout and brief summary of each of the top 11 projects.

Currently, none of these projects are funded or have a current plan to pursue funding. It will be up to groups of landowners to move forward with the projects in which they are interested. End of study has a list of potential funding mechanisms.

4. Comments and questions from meeting participants

- Byron Buck, Conaway Ranch –How will questions / input from stakeholders be catalogued and made publicly available so folks can hear what others are saying?

Doug Brown – We will likely add an appendix to the study identifying comments received and how the report was modified or not based on comments.

- Phil Gaines, Swanston – How will these projects be meaningfully advanced without specific plans or funding to be implemented?

Doug Brown – said that the main objective is to position these locally identified and supported projects such that they can be advanced as opportunities arise. This includes state and federal agencies needing to implement locally supported projects to minimize impacts on increases in flows in the Bypass. The projects are not funded yet. Landowners may want to pursue funding on their own or with partners.

Phil Gaines, Swanston – If no one did anything, where would it go? If certain projects don't happen, what happens to the whole project?

Doug Brown – The study team tried to position projects so they can be funded. The study shows how to improve drainage and infrastructure in the Yolo Bypass based on landowner input. Some projects from the 2014 Study were funded by the state because they met state objectives for the Yolo Bypass. The project sheets are formatted so they can be scaled to move forward effectively. Projects can be positioned so they will be seen as the changes needed to respond to state and federal initiatives. The study tried to leverage knowledge gathered in a way that these projects can be implemented in the future. Landowner needs are very interrelated.

- Mark Hennelly, CWA – were all of the duck clubs contacted and were they able to provide input? Did any duck clubs fall through the cracks in terms of being contacted about opportunities to provide stakeholder input?

Heather Nichols, Yolo RCD – responded that they tried to get as complete of a list as possible. They used parcel quest to get all of the parcel owners and sent out letters and contacted those with available information.

Robin Kulakow – added that they updated the previous Yolo Bypass Working Group contact list as well. The goal was to be completely inclusive.

- Heather Nichols – What were the project ranking criteria? Did the study prioritize projects for funding?

Doug Brown - The study team generated and refined a list of criteria and weighted improvements. Agricultural use, waterfowl and shorebird habitat benefits and public education and recreation benefits weighted highest. Criteria are summarized in the report on page 20. Feasibility criteria were also part of ranking process. The study team is looking for additional information and feedback during this public comment period. Combining multiple benefits into one project in addition to local landowner support should set the projects up well for state funding opportunities.

- Dean Ongaro, H Pond – has any updated modeling or tools been developed to demonstrate the changes to inundation (depth, duration, etc.) for properties within the Yolo Bypass that would result from the modifications to the Fremont Weir?

Petrea Marchand, Consero - DWR has developed a tool specifically to help address Dean's question.

Chris Campbell - DWR's tool is essentially a data viewer providing inundation results for hydrology of a select number of water years under the proposed project conditions

Jeff Jenkins – he has not seen updated models. The DWR engineering team is constantly looking at those numbers. The big notch is going to allow more water through the system, rated at a maximum of 6,000 cfs. The goal is not to increase flooding, but to extend the window of fish passage a little longer after an overtopping event. DWR is looking at how much flows are passed and how that affects downstream landowners.

Chris Campbell – cbec is working on updated models with DWR. All of that is possible. The data in the Salmonid EIR are the most current data.

Petrea Marchand – The Yolo Bypass Salmonid project will increase flooding. This has been modeled and documented. This study was done to look at improvements that could minimize flooding and improve drainage downstream of the Fremont Weir. DWR created a tool which allows landowner to look up their property to see the estimated level of flooding. Jeff will reach out to DWR about seeing if the parcel tool is still available.

Jeff Jenkins, DWR - provided a link to the publicly available tool:

<https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/YoloBypassSHRFPPProject/>. The link must be opened in Google Chrome browser for it to work.

- Robin Kulakow – will the new modeling include the impacts of the Lower Elkhorn Setback Levee and the expansion of the Sacramento Weir?

Chris Campbell – yes. The new modeling will take into consideration the cumulative effect.

- Robin Kulakow– it would be good to present the new model at a YBWG meeting when it is available. Would that be possible?

Jeff Jenkins will look into that.

- Phil Gaines – what is the purpose of the 4' berm along the Tule Canal on the Swanston Ranch Master Project?

Chris Campbell – to confine extra flows in the Tule Canal and LEBLS area and limit inundation of Swanston Ranch. The proposed berm could convey extra flows under certain conditions on the east side of the tule canal and reduce the water elevations on the landscape. The goal is to minimize impacts of extra water in the Bypass.

- Mark Hennelly – Can public comments be provided after Nov 30th?

Doug Brown – comments can be provided after Nov 30, but we cannot guarantee that they will be incorporated in the final report due to the tight turnaround time to finalize the report in advance of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors meeting before the end of the year. Late comments could potentially be included in notes that accompany the report for the Yolo County Board of Supervisors meeting. If any other questions come up, please send them to Robin Kulakow and she will distribute to the study team.

5. Next steps – Doug Brown

A design charrette is being planned for the Tule Canal from Fremont Weir to upper Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. The goal is to get the people and agencies together to brainstorm what improvements could be implemented on a landscape scale to address operational constraints or issues. Two design charrettes are planned in early January for about 4 hours each. More information will come out about those soon.

Review period ends on Nov. 30. Intent is to take the updates to the Board of Supervisors on Dec. 15 for approval. Once the study report is finalized, then the works really begins on how to move the projects forward. If any landowners are interested in these projects, it would be good to reach out to Yolo County to talk about ways to advocate for these projects and get them moving forward.