

# Proposed North Delta National Wildlife Refuge

## Questions and Answers

November 30, 1999

### Agriculture

**Question:** How will the conversion of prime agricultural land into habitat be minimized?

**Answer:** The Service has excluded approximately 4,600 acres of prime agricultural land in Yolo County and 5,000 acres in Solano County from the preferred alternative. Approximately 3,776 acres of prime agricultural land in Yolo County that remains in the Service's Preferred Alternative 5 would be maintained in production through agricultural easements. Approximately 445 acres of prime agricultural land that is within the Putah Creek levee system is proposed for native habitat restoration, in cooperation with the City of Davis.

**Question:** What will the direct and indirect effects from farm conversion be?

**Answer:** The Service is now analyzing the potential economic effect on prime agricultural lands, agricultural production, recreation and refuge management, jobs, and personal income in the two county Yolo/Solano County region. The projected economic impact will be presented in the North Delta NWR Environmental Assessment (EA). The restoration scenario under analysis in the EA indicates that the effects of agricultural land conversion to habitat would not result in a significant impact to the two county region's economic base. The two tables below summarize the effects.

Displacement of Prime Agricultural Land and Crop Value by Alternative

Alternative	Prime Agriculture Land Displaced		Crop Value Displaced by County	
	Solano County (acres / % of county)	Yolo County (acres / % of county)	Solano County (million / % of county)	Yolo County (million / % of County)
Alternative 2 - 9,200 Acres	0 / 0.0%	0 / 0.0 %	-\$2.8 / -1.3%	-\$0.1 / <-1%
Alternative 3 - 18,200 Acres	2,385 / 1.6%	0 / 0.0 %	-\$4.7 / -2.2%	-\$0.7 / <-1%
Alternative 4 - 34,800 Acres	5,492 / 3.6%	0 / 0.0 %	-\$5.7 / -2.7%	-\$1.3 / <-1%
Preferred Alt. 5 47,500 Acres	5,492 / 3.6%	445 / 0.2%	-\$5.7 / -2.7%	-\$4.7 / -1.4%
Alternative 6 49,200 Acres	5,492 / 3.6%	0 / 0.0 %	-\$5.7 / -2.7%	-\$3.2 / <-1%

**Effect on Jobs and Personal Income in Solano and Yolo Counties**

Alternative	Agricultural Effect Yolo and Solano Counties		Recreation & Refuge Effect Yolo & Solano Counties		Net Effect Personal Income Yolo & Solano Counties (million/% of total)	Net Jobs Yolo & Solano Counties (full & part time/% of total)
	Personal Income (Millions)	Jobs (full & part time)	Personal Income (Millions)	Jobs (full & part time)		
Alternative 2 - 9,200 Acres	-\$3.2	-72	\$1.0	23	-\$2.2 / <0.01%	-49 <0.01%
Alternative 3 - 18,200 Acres	-\$5.9	-140	\$2.4	62	-\$3.4 / <0.03%	-78 <0.03%
Alternative 4 - 34,800 Acres	-\$8.1	-199	\$4.8	121	-\$3.3 <0.03%	-78 <0.03%
Preferred Alt. 5 47,500 Acres	-\$12.2	-297	\$5.8	153	-\$6.5 <0.06%	-144 <0.06%
Alternative 6 - 49,200 Acres	-\$11.0	-259	\$5.9	157	\$5.1 <0.05%	-102 <0.04%

**Question:** What restrictions will be placed on agriculturally productive land within the refuge.

**Answer:** There would be no restrictions on private agricultural lands within the refuge boundary were the Service has not yet purchased an interest on a willing seller basis. On properties where the Service has purchased an agricultural easement, the Service would seek to establish wildlife friendly crops or grazing practices through negotiations with the individual landowners. On properties purchased in fee-title the Service may choose native habitat restoration or continuation of compatible wildlife friendly grazing or farming.

**Question:** Does the Service propose any agricultural mitigation for lands converted to habitat.

**Answer:** Where appropriate the Service will purchase properties at fair market value from willing sellers. The extent of conversion of agricultural lands to wildlife habitat is dependant upon willing sellers, available funding, and refuge management objectives. The habitat restoration scenario analyzed in the EA indicates that the estimated level of agricultural land conversion to habitat would not result in a significant impact to the two county region's economic base.

## **Recreation**

*Question:* Will the public be allowed to visit restored wetlands and habitat?

*Answer:* Approximately 40% of properties purchased in fee-title and restored would be accessible to the general public. Long-term management decisions regarding the types and extent of visitor use will be made as part of the public involvement process associated with development of the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan that would be completed subsequent to refuge establishment. The Service anticipates providing wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities on the refuge including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, natural resource interpretation, and environmental education. Areas protected under conservation or agricultural easement remain in private ownership and are in general not open to the public.

*Question:* Will the proposed refuge affect the operation of existing duck clubs that operate in the Yolo Bypass?

*Answer:* The Service would seek to further protect and enhance existing and potential new duck clubs primarily through federal or state conservation easement programs. Duck clubs would benefit from easements through more cooperative management, funding for weed and pest control, water delivery and drainage, and law enforcement. The Service would provide technical assistance and cost-sharing programs in habitat design and management as requested.

*Question:* If public access to restored lands is permitted, how will trespassing, vandalism, and littering be controlled so as not to affect nearby agricultural operations?

*Answer:* The Service would hire an appropriate level of law enforcement personnel for the refuge. Mutual aid agreements would be established with local, county, and state law enforcement agencies to provide the necessary level of protection for the public and adjoining landowners.

*Question:* Will public activities at the Yolo County Grasslands Park need to be restricted due to the proximity of the refuge?

*Answer:* Under the Preferred Alternative, the Service would seek to enter into a cooperative agreement with Yolo County to cooperatively manage the Grasslands Park in the manner consistent with the park and refuge habitat goals and objectives.

*Question:* How will development of the refuge be coordinated with the U.S. Army Corps proposal for trails along the Deep Water Ship Channel?

**Answer:** If the refuge is established, the Service would seek a partnership role with the Corps on the proposal to establish the trail.

**Tax Revenues**

**Question:** If the refuge is established what are the anticipated impacts to tax revenues of Solano and Yolo Counties?

**Answer:** Solano and Yolo Counties receive approximately 45% and 12%, respectively, of tax revenue generated by properties within the study area; special districts receive the remainder of the revenue. The Service's fee title acquisition of properties would result in the loss of property tax revenue and Williamson Act subvention payments for Yolo County. These losses would be partly offset by Refuge Revenue Sharing payments. The estimated net impact to county revenue will be presented in the EA. However, current analysis in the EA indicates that the estimated effects of fee title acquisition would not result in a significant impact to tax revenues of Solano and Yolo County. The table below indicates the net impact to tax revenues in Solano and Yolo County including revenue sharing payments.

Alternative	Net Change in County Revenue		Net Change in Special District Revenue	
	Solano	Yolo	Solano	Yolo
Alternative 2 - 9,200 Acres	-\$6,700	-\$300	-\$8,200	-\$1,900
Alternative 3 - 18,200 Acres	-\$10,300	-\$100	-\$12,700	-\$500
Alternative 4 - 34,800 Acres	-\$14,800	-\$800	-\$18,100	-\$7,500
Preferred Alt. 5 47,500 Acres	-\$13,800	-\$3,200	-\$16,800	-\$23,600
Alternative 6 - 49,200 Acres	-\$14,800	-\$2,900	-\$18,100	-\$21,400

**Question:** What measures can be incorporated into the refuge to assure continued local tax revenue if Congress fails to fund the Revenue-Sharing program?

**Answer:** Between 1989 and 1998, annual Congressional-approved revenue-sharing payments averaged 76.8 % of the full 0.75 % of fair market value. There is no indication that Congress would not continue these payments, in fact recent discussions in Congress tend to indicate growing support for full-funding for the revenue-sharing program.

**Question:** How will the refuge affect the tax revenues of Reclamation Districts located within the project area?

**Answer:** There are no reclamation districts within the Yolo County portion of the proposed refuge boundary under the Service's preferred alternative. In Solano County the Service may enter into cooperative agreements with affected reclamation districts to ensure that the Service continues to provide a proportionate share of funding for any services rendered by that district.

## **Flood Control**

**Question:** Will similar restrictions as those placed on the Yolo Basin Foundation be adopted to ensure that the increased vegetation within the refuge will not reduce existing flood capacity within the Yolo Bypass?

**Answer:** The Service is committed to developing a refuge that will be compatible with the critical flood control function of the Yolo Bypass, including requiring that any habitat restoration plan for the proposed refuge not impact flood capacity or conveyance of flood flows through the bypass. The preliminary habitat restoration scenario analyzed in the EA indicates that Alternatives 2 and 3 would reduce flood levels in the Bypass and that Alternatives 4, 5 and 6 would result in slight increase in the flood elevation of less than 0.3 feet. Before initiating any habitat restoration within the new refuge the Service has committed to complete detailed hydrologic modeling of restoration alternatives in consultation with the State Reclamation Board and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. As provided for under the National Environmental Policy Act, any restoration plan would be tiered from this EA and subject to additional environmental analysis and public review.

## **Water Quality**

**Question:** Will restored wetlands significantly increase the potential for the production of methylated mercury and what are the expected mercury-related impacts to wildlife in the Yolo Bypass?

**Answer:** The levels of mercury within the soils of the study area and the rate at which mercury is converted to methylated mercury and becomes available for bioaccumulation in plants and animals within the Yolo Bypass, are not known. The CALFED Bay/Delta Program has recently funded a study to examine the potential effects of planned or anticipated changes in land use that may affect mercury chemistry, including permanent flooding of areas for wildlife habitat in the Yolo Bypass. Results from this and other studies related to mercury will be analyzed in detail and utilized by the Service to develop site specific habitat management and restoration plans for the proposed refuge to minimize any potential negative affects on wildlife.

## **U.S. Air Force Communication Site**

*Question:* What is the Service's intentions with regard to the communications site?

*Answer:* The Service supports the transfer of the communications site to Yolo County and its incorporated into the Grasslands Park. The Service would seek to enter into a cooperative agreement with Yolo County to cooperatively manage the Grasslands Park in a manner consistent with the park and refuge's habitat goals and objectives.

## **Endangered Species**

*Question:* Will "safe harbor" provisions be available to agricultural operations adjoining the refuge?

*Answer:* Establishment and management of the refuge will not result in additional regulatory restrictions (e.g., fish screens) being placed on the traditional activities of adjacent landowners. Landowners adjoining the refuge are free to pursue development of safe harbor agreements and refuge staff are prepared to provide technical support, where appropriate.

*Question:* How will establishment of the refuge affect ongoing efforts to establish a Habitat Management Plan in Yolo County?

*Answer:* Private properties that are within the established refuge boundary would remain eligible for participation in the HCP. In contrast, Service lands owned in fee would be ineligible.

*Question:* Does the refuge include plans to increase the east levee toe drain within the Bypass to increase opportunities for the mitigation of anadromous fish from the Delta to the upper Sacramento River?

*Answer:* The Service is participating in ongoing discussions with State and Federal agencies, including the Department of Water Resources, CALFED, and the Yolo Basin Foundation, to pursue opportunities to improve fish habitat on the east side of the Bypass.

## **Port of Sacramento**

*Question:* Will establishment of the refuge affect the operations of the Deep Water Ship Channel?

*Answer:* The Service's recognizes the importance of the ship channel and would take into consideration the need to maintain the function of the channel in development of future refuge management and restoration plans.

## **Other Effects**

*Question:* Will the refuge be consistent with the Yolo Bypass Management Plan currently being developed by the Yolo Basin Foundation?

*Answer:* Although the Yolo Bypass Management Plan is still under development, the Service anticipates that the refuge and its management would be consistent with the plan.

*Question:* Will the refuge be consistent with CALFED's policies and plans?

*Answer:* Yes, the Refuge is fully consistent with the goals and objectives of the CALFED program and its plans.