

# Butte Regional Conservation Plan

Winter 2011

## A Cooperative Planning Effort

[www.buttehcp.com](http://www.buttehcp.com)

### Conservation Plan to Ease Permitting Burdens

Once the Plan is adopted, the environmental permitting process for new projects in the Plan area will be streamlined. In addition to city and county approved projects, the approved permits will be particularly beneficial for water districts. Recently, Biggs West-Gridley Water District, Butte Water District and Richvale Irrigation District joined the BRCP.

### Comments Welcome — Draft Conservation Strategy Released for Review

A primary component of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan (BRCP or Plan) – the Draft Conservation Strategy – has been completed and is available for review. The Conservation Strategy details the Plan’s goals, objectives and

vernal pool species will be released after an approach to conserving the Butte County Meadow-foam is completed. The Butte County Meadow-foam is a rare and endangered plant that grows on the edges of vernal pools and swales.

The Draft Conservation Strategy is available for review at: [www.buttehcp.com](http://www.buttehcp.com) (see Chapter 5). Please send your comments to Chris Devine at [cdevine@bcag.org](mailto:cdevine@bcag.org).

In addition, public workshops and review by the Independent Science Advisory Panel are planned for 2011.



*Golden Clover*

measures to provide for the conservation of 41 covered species and eight natural communities. The Conservation Strategy also includes plans for ongoing monitoring, research and adaptive management.

This is the first of two planned drafts which will continue to be refined by the Stakeholder Committee and Wildlife Agencies as other chapters of the Plan are developed. Conservation actions for



*Foothill Yellow Legged Frog*

### Local Stakeholders Provide Input



*Stakeholder Meeting*

The Butte Regional Conservation Plan Stakeholder Committee, a group of interested stakeholders that provides input into the Plan, met for the 34th time in December and continues to meet monthly. The committee members represent a broad range of local interests including environmental, farming and agriculture, the development community, and educational institutions. In addition to Committee meetings, the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) staff also participate in discussions with other interested parties including land owners, cattle ranchers, and economic development groups.



*The BRCP will streamline maintenance activities for canals that provide water to rice fields*

Western Canal Water District (WCWD) joined as a permit “applicant” in early 2010 and will collaborate with the other related water districts in the plan development process.

The BRCP’s endangered species permits will cover canal and ditch maintenance activities and allow local water districts greater assurances in managing their lands while providing certainty that there will be consistent environmental requirements for 30 – 50 years.

The economic benefits of the BRCP are further explained on pages 2 and 3.

# Streamlined Environmental Permitting

**"One-stop-shop" for Environmental Permits - Saves Time, Money**

The BRCP streamlines the environmental permitting process for the next 30-50 years. The Plan analyzes the impacts of future projects including those from BCAG and Caltrans, land use activities and infrastructure projects from the cities' and county's General Plans, and maintenance activities from water and irrigation districts. The BRCP provides for the conservation of at-risk species of wildlife and plants, including necessary mitigation and measures to offset impacts on those species. Federal and California endangered species permits will be issued based on the Plan.

Once the BRCP is approved, BCAG will be responsible for its successful implementation. Project proponents will be able to receive their endangered species permits from their local planning department. Caltrans, BCAG and participating water districts will hold their own permits.

## BRCP to Provide Improved Environmental Permitting Process for Covered Activities

The BRCP will ease development of new projects in the area by simplifying the environmental compliance process. By providing permits to developers and planners in a timely manner, the Plan supports the completion of necessary transportation and local infrastructure projects.

Project proponents can receive their endangered species permits from the city or county jurisdiction as soon as surveying and planning are complete, so permits are in hand concurrent with the local approval process. This keeps decision making at a local level instead of with federal and state agencies. It avoids permitting delays and additional planning and permitting costs that can occur during a project's approval process.

These permits facilitate the construction of buildings and transportation safety projects throughout Butte County. Future projects include plans for new homes, commercial buildings, parks, and schools; as well as needed infrastructure improvements for roads, bikeways and pedestrian facilities.

Specific transportation enhancement projects are planned for rural areas as well. Additional passing lanes and capacity enhancements are proposed for Highway 70 and 99. Other projects include the replacement of numerous bridges, installing intersection signals, and safety improvements for roads and bikeways.

### Benefits of the BRCP

Through replacing the existing endangered species permitting process, the BRCP provides many benefits to ensure reliability and predictability for future projects.

- Consistency: The BRCP assures consistent environmental requirements for the next 30-50 years
- Local control: Endangered species permits will be distributed by city and county jurisdictions, not federal and state regulatory agencies

- Time savings: Endangered species permits can be issued concurrently with local development approvals
- Cost efficient: Associated mitigation costs can be accurately determined early in the project planning process
- Effective conservation: Centralized decision making to conserve land into an effective regional conservation land system that provides better long-term habitat for endangered species

The BRCP creates many benefits for the local community. Developers and project planners gain cost and time efficiency in planning and executing new projects. Community members achieve better quality of life from decreased traffic congestion, safer walking and bike lanes, agricultural land conservation, and new open space. The regional economy is boosted by additional jobs, improved commercial, office and industrial areas, and improved accessibility.



*New apartment construction will be streamlined under the BRCP*



*New bikeway projects would be easier and quicker to build once the BRCP is approved*



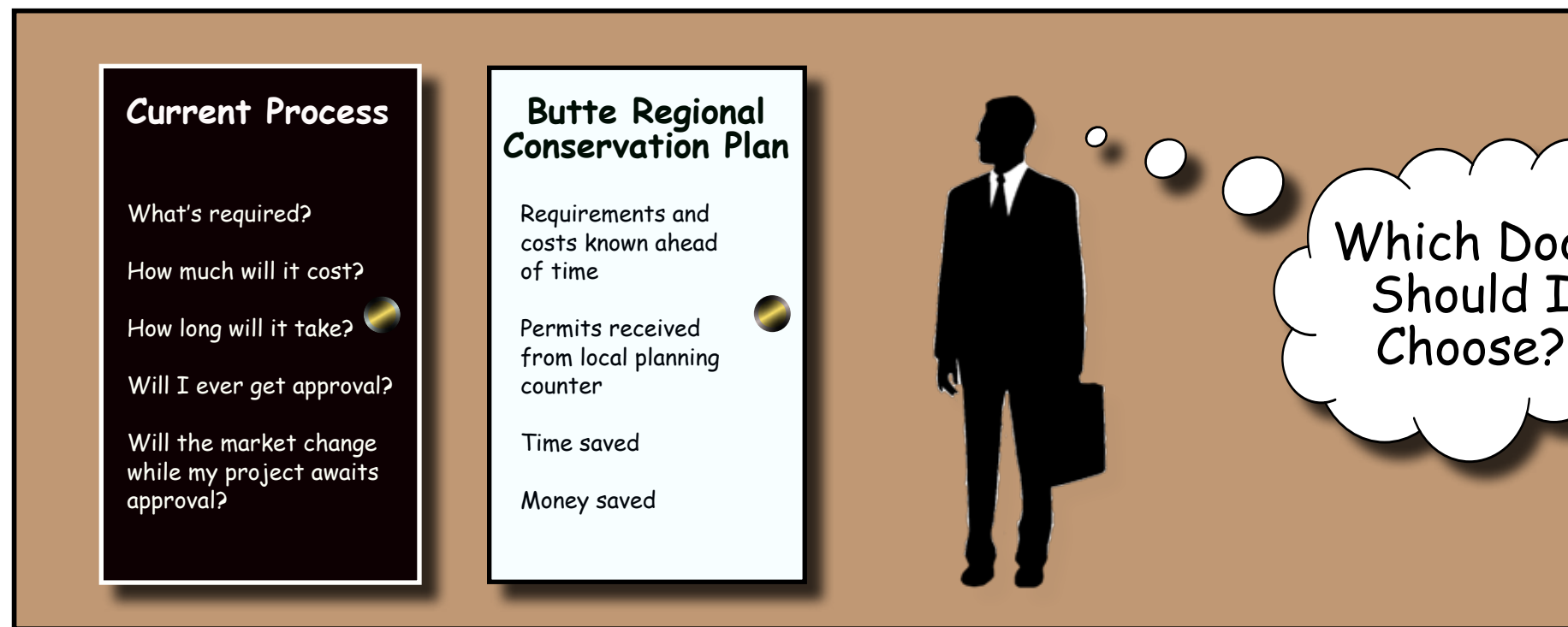
*New business centers are a covered activity under the BRCP*



*The BRCP allows for new communities to be built while protecting natural habitats*



*The BRCP would make it easier to build new homes, such as this one in Chico, and bring jobs to the local economy*



- \* Chapter 6 – Plan Implementation in review
- \* Chapter 7 – Implementation Structure in review
- \* Draft cost estimates in review

- \* Administrative Draft of HCP/NCCP
- \* Administrative Draft of EIR/EIS
- \* Public Workshops

- \* Public Draft of HCP/NCCP
- \* Public Draft of EIR/EIS
- \* Public Workshops

- \* Final HCP/NCCP
- \* Final EIR/EIS
- \* Permits issued by USFWS, DFG, and NMFS

2010

2011

2012

\*NOTE:  
Project initiated in 2007  
Schedule is subject to change.

Currently, the environmental permitting process is done on a project-by-project basis and project planners need to obtain permits from federal and state wildlife agencies. The BRCP is a one-time planning effort that will save each future project time and money by bringing the decision making to the local level for up to five decades.

Additionally, BCAG is beginning discussions with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and California Department of Fish and Game staff to develop and implement a streamlined process for wetlands and streams to ease permitting under the Federal Clean Water Act Sections 404 and 401 and California Fish and Game Code Section 1602. This process will run in parallel to the BRCP and is expected to provide similar streamlining benefits for future development projects.

# Butte Regional Conservation Plan

## Environmental Consultant Selected

ICF International has been selected to lead development of the Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR). The purpose of this report is to summarize the environmental impacts of the proposed BRCP on a range of human and environmental resources. This document also includes analysis on how impacts can be avoided or mitigated.

A request for proposals was released in spring 2010 and received 4 responses. The top three firms were interviewed by staff from the BCAG and Wildlife Agencies to find a team that is most suitable for the Plan's collaborative work to date.

The ICF team was selected based on their extensive experience in developing joint EIS/EIR and conservation documents. This includes recent experience completing similar reports for projects in East Contra Costa County and the San Joaquin Valley. The draft EIS/EIR will be developed and released with the draft BRCP itself and both draft documents will be made available for public review. For additional details on timing, please refer to the timeline on pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter.



*Sharing the road for multiple users*

Butte County Association of Governments  
2580 Sierra Sunrise Terrace, Suite 100  
Chico, CA 95928-8441

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



## Regional Conservation Plan — Looking Ahead

Next steps for Plan development include completing the final draft Conservation Strategy Chapter, including development of the special conservation approach for Butte County meadowfoam, followed by the conservation approach for the remaining vernal pool species. The public and the Independent Science Advisory Panel will have an opportunity to review and provide additional input on this chapter in 2011.

The project team has developed Chapter 6 (Plan Implementation) and Chapter 7 (Implementation Structure), which are now available online for review. Chapter 8 (Implementation Costs and Funding) is anticipated for winter/spring 2011. A complete administrative draft of the Plan will be released in summer 2011.



*View of Butte County*