

Butte Regional Conservation Plan

Newsletter – Summer 2008 Edition

www.buttehcp.com

The Red-legged Frog Approach

The Red-legged frog is protected as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. While historically Red-legged frog likely occurred across much of lowland Butte County, there are presently only two known sites with Red-legged frogs in the County. Both of these sites are east of Paradise and outside the Butte Regional Conservation Plan Planning Area. Because habitat suitable for Red-legged frog is found within the Planning Area, the Plan will incorporate protections for such habitat as preserve locations are considered. While specific permitting under the Endangered Species Act will not be requested for Red-legged frog and they will not be a Covered Species in the Butte Regional Conservation Plan, should they someday re-occupy habitat in the Planning Area the approach being taken by BCAG could make future legal compliance less difficult.



New Grant Award Allows More Progress

BCAG was recently awarded \$378,600 in Federal Section Six Grant funding from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fund Phase IV of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan. This is the third successive grant received by BCAG for the development of the Conservation Plan. Previous grant award amounts included \$500,990 to develop most of Phase II, and \$319,200 to develop Phase III. Additional grant funding from the State of California in the amount of \$365,000 was used to develop Phase I and a portion of Phase II. To date, BCAG has received a total of \$1,563,790 in state and federal grant funds to develop the Plan.

The latest grant funding will be used to develop Phase IV of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan, which includes determining strategies and sources for funding Plan implementation, and preparing a draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) document. Funding is also included for continued public outreach and legal assistance.

BCAG staff expects to submit an additional Section Six Grant application in July 2008 to obtain funding for the final phase, Phase V, which will include the development of the final Butte Regional Conservation Plan document, final EIR/EIS, and final permit processing.

New Species Taken Into Account

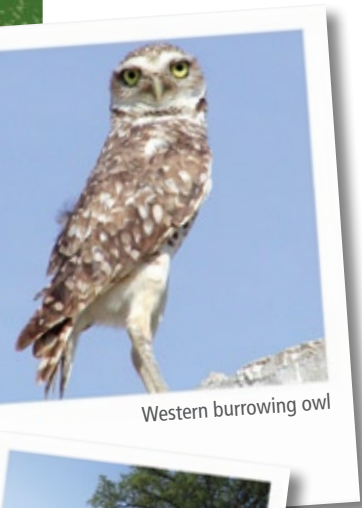
After consulting with the Stakeholder Committee and the Science Advisory Panel, BCAG has added four new species that will be covered by the Conservation Plan Covered Species list. The species are: California beaked-rush, Red Bluff dwarf rush, Ahart's paronychia, and Slender Orcutt grass. Three of these species are being added to the Covered Species list in anticipation that they may become listed within the next thirty years. Anticipating the potential listing of species whose populations are in decline and providing for their conservation will reduce the need to revise the Plan in the future should these species be listed.

Information about these species including an explanation of their life cycles and habitat needs can be found online.

See: www.buttehcp.com.



What Are We Doing Now?



Western burrowing owl



Blue Oaks

“ The Butte Regional Conservation Plan process benefits and compliments the efforts of Butte County General Plan 2030 by providing a clear future path for conservation and development.”

—Tim Snellings, Director Butte County Department of Development Services



Richvale Vernal Pools

Coordination With General Plans

BCAG and SAIC, the lead consultant developing the Butte Regional Conservation Plan, continue to coordinate with the County of Butte and the City governments of Biggs, Chico, Gridley, Oroville, and the Town of Paradise in the development of their General Plans. BCAG is coordinating with each jurisdiction through regular meetings of the ‘Planning Directors Group’, which includes planning directors and staff from each local jurisdiction as well as staff from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The goal of this group is to provide a forum to encourage communication between the jurisdictions that are currently updating General Plans, and to encourage the integration of the Conservation Plan with General Plan updates by providing biological data on species to be covered by the Conservation Plan to the local jurisdictions.

Recently, BCAG and SAIC have been assisting the City of Chico by providing concepts for the conservation of Butte County meadowfoam. This plant is protected as an endangered species under both the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts and lives in ephemeral swales and on the edges of vernal pools. Its entire known distribution is within the Planning Area in the grasslands east of Highway 99 from the Tehama County line in the north to just south of Hwy 149 to the south. Growth of the City of Chico to the east has resulted in the loss of Butte County meadowfoam populations and habitat.

“ The City of Chico is excited to have the opportunity to work cooperatively with BCAG on the development of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan. The timing of the Conservation Plan concurrent with the City of Chico 2030 General Plan update has allowed for a better informed land use planning process.”

—Holly Keeler, Principle Planner, City of Chico

SAIC has developed conservation concepts based on mapped populations and habitat suitability models in order to assist the City of Chico in assessing potential development options. The conservation concepts were developed using current knowledge of Butte County meadowfoam ecology, genetics, and principles of conservation biology. These concepts will be considered in the development of Chico’s General Plan.

PLANNING DIRECTORS GROUP MEETINGS

Increase Regional Conservation Planning Coordination

Butte Regional Conservation Plan Provides Biological Data to Butte County
 City of Chico
 City of Oroville
 City of Biggs
 City of Gridley
 Town of Paradise

Cities and County use Biological Data to Help Develop General Plan Updates

Butte Regional Conservation Plan uses Land Use Elements of General Plans to Develop Impact Analysis

Improved Regional Conservation Planning and Streamlined General Plan Implementation



April 2008 Field Tour

Grasslands and Ranch

Upper Bidwell Park

Oak Woodlands Natural Community

Range of Approaches to a Conservation Strategy

A key aspect in the development of a Conservation Plan is the creation of a conservation strategy to protect, enhance, and restore natural biological communities and species habitat. There are different approaches to creating a conservation strategy to plan for future development and habitat preserves that have been used in other conservation planning processes. The Butte Regional Conservation Plan is in the process of considering each approach and methodology carefully to ensure that the goals of the plan are met.

Map-Based Approach

One potential strategy involves specifically mapping the locations of future land development and future preserves and connecting corridor habitat. While this approach provides a high level of certainty regarding land use, it is quite inflexible and requires a large amount of information for the planning process. This approach may also conflict with keeping to a purely willing-seller process for land acquisition.

Process-Based Approach

The process-based approach does not rely on mapped locations for future preserves but rather describes the process for identifying appropriate conservation areas without identifying specific locations. This strategy allows more flexibility in finding an appropriate site for preserves and connecting corridors, but does not provide the high level of certainty that a map-based approach provides. One advantage is that it clearly maintains the willing-seller process and can be authorized with less up-front information (information that would be gathered during implementation).

Hybrid Approach

The hybrid approach incorporates both the map-based and process-based methods. For example, a hybrid approach could include mapping large areas with potential conservation opportunities within which a process-based approach could be used to create the preserve system. This approach allows some location specificity to ensure that regional diversity of biological resources are conserved and also provides flexibility to ensure a willing-seller, market-driven process for locating preserves.

SAIC has recommended the hybrid approach to the Stakeholder Committee for developing the conservation strategy that includes subdividing the Planning Area into broad conservation acquisition zones and then developing conservation goals for each zone. The goals would be achieved through a well-defined preserve design and implementation process.

More details on this recommendation can be found in the memorandum "Alternative Approach and Recommended Approach to the Conservation Strategy for the Butte Regional HCP/NCCP" available online at www.buttehcp.com.

Updated Covered Species List

Birds

Bald eagle
Swainson's hawk
American peregrine falcon
Greater sandhill crane
Western yellow-billed cuckoo
Tri-colored blackbird
Yellow-breasted chat
Western burrowing owl
White-tailed kite
Bank swallow
California black rail

Reptiles

Northwestern pond turtle
Giant garter snake
California horned lizard

Amphibians

Western spadefoot toad
Foothill yellow-legged frog

Fish

River lamprey
Green sturgeon
Central Valley spring run Chinook salmon
Central Valley fall/late-fall run Chinook salmon
Sacramento River winter run Chinook salmon
Central Valley steelhead
Sacramento splittail

Invertebrates

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle
Vernal pool fairy shrimp
Vernal pool tadpole shrimp
Conservancy fairy shrimp

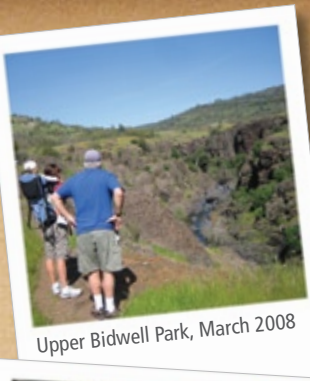
Plants

Ferris's milkvetch
Lesser saltscale
Butte County checkerbloom
Butte County meadowfoam
Ahart's dwarf rush
Hairy Orcutt grass
Hoover's spurge
Greene's tuctoria
Butte County golden clover
Ahart's paronychia
Slender Orcutt grass
Red Bluff dwarf rush
Veiny monardella
California beaked-rush



Butte County Association of Governments

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Upper Bidwell Park, March 2008



Fremont's Tidytops –
Common Spring Wildflower



Humboldt Fire Burns Portion of Planning Area

The recent Humboldt fire burned more than 23,000 acres of Butte County, much of which was in the Butte Regional Conservation Plan Planning Area. Although the immediate impact on native plant populations is dramatic, native plant populations are adapted to fire disturbance and are expected to recover over time. Some native plants are more resilient and will reproduce the next season while others will take longer to establish new populations.

More recent fires started from lightning strikes on June 21st are entirely outside the Planning Area. **Thank you firefighters for your hard work!**



Ahart Ranch Field Tour, April 2008



Oroville Vernal Pool

How Can You Participate?

Throughout the development of the Butte Regional Conservation Plan there are opportunities for the public to be involved. We encourage all interested citizens to attend the Stakeholder Committee Meetings held on the first Wednesday of each month. Additionally, there will be a second round of public workshops in late 2008 or early 2009.

For more information about these opportunities please see the meetings page on our website at www.buttehcp.com or contact Planning Manager Chris Devine at (530) 879-2468.



Infrastructure Improvement Project