

YOLO COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Annual Report 2007

Moving Ahead With Something Old and Something New

So, why are we here? 53 years after a group of growers decided they wanted to start a conservation district in western Yolo County, what have we done, and what purpose do we serve? We have grown from a volunteer board of directors/farmers giving local direction to the USDA Field Office to that plus a staff of eight conservation professionals with a national reputation for on-farm conservation innovation and strong local partnerships spanning the agricultural, urban, agency and environmental communities. That sounds great, but what does it mean on the ground, and how sustainable can we be if all of our growth is based on 'soft' grant funding?

Tough questions, but ones we needed to tackle as the RCD Board of Directors looked ahead for the next 10 years and beyond to develop our latest strategic plan. What came out of that strategic planning process was a shift of our organizational priorities towards new work in farmland protection, affirmation of ongoing wildlife and water quality efforts, and a challenge to shift our operational funding towards more stable sources. These are tall orders for staff, but critical for our ongoing relevance and utility to supporting resource conservation in Yolo County.

Thanks to our partners, there are some clear paths ahead for this work. We are blessed in Yolo County with many collaboratively-minded landowners, agencies and non-profits with whom we share visions of viable, local agriculture and natural resource management with little or no 'traditional' power struggles. Two notable expressions of these relation-

ships are the Yolo-Solano Conservation Partnership (YSCP) and the Cache Creek Watershed Forum. Each bring together a dozen or more entities to collaborate and share resources to implement farm, wildland and creek projects, as well as educate the public about our local natural bounty and our place in it.

In 2007, the YSCP received two different grants for over \$3 million for projects in both counties over the next three years, involving thirteen organizations and many cooperative landowners. In the first three months of work, already a half-mile of riparian improvement was implemented on Cottonwood Slough, and plans initiated for numerous ponds throughout the two counties. The Cache Creek Watershed Forum hosted the first-ever Cache Creek Discovery Day in the Upper Cache Creek watershed in May 2007, and over 170 children and families attended from Yolo, Colusa and Lake Counties. This year's Discovery Day will be held May 10 at the Cache Creek Nature Preserve near Woodland.

As for funding, the Board has charged staff with developing non-grant dependent means of supporting our work, phased-in over the next 10 years. Grant programs change with legislation, and any given grant is only good for three years or less at a time. While we've managed to grow considerably on a grant-based budget for over the past 15 years, it limits our activities and lacks the solidity/permanence that would give the public confidence that we'll still be in force

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Something Old, Something New, continued from page 1

20 years down the line. Several strategies that we'll initially explore are formalizing work relationships with established entities needing our services and "public" status; promoting opportunities for developing endowments through planned giving or other donations; and acquiring land from which we could generate lease income to fund demonstration projects there and elsewhere in the county.

This last item relates to the Board's new top priority: farmland protection. With County government, the Yolo Land Trust, and citizens committed to maintaining Yolo County's viable agriculture and its land base, the RCD is actively participating in all local forums and efforts possible with the skills and resources we have available. Groups such as the Ag Futures Alliance, the Ag Economic Development Working Group, and the Ag Mitigation Ordinance Working Group have formed over the past several years to tackle different aspects of maintaining and promoting sustainable local agriculture. If it can't happen in Yolo County, we'll be hard-pressed to find another place it can in California. At the RCD's Annual Dinner on March 12, guest speaker Tom Tomich (founding director of UCD's Ag Sustainability Institute), asked the audience to identify topics of greatest concern for sustaining local agriculture. The preponderance of responses named "farmland protection" as a key issue to address. Alright then, we're in the game. Let us know if you'd like to weigh in on this or how we're going about it.

Blair Voelz, President, & Paul Robins, Executive Director



Blair Voelz and Tom Muller (former board chair).

RCD Directors

- Blair Voelz, *Chairman*
- James Mayer, *Vice Chairman*
- Rudy Lucero, *Director*
- David Gilmer, *Director*
- Rachael Freeman-Long, *Director*
- Wyatt Cline, *Associate Director*
- Scott Stone, *Associate Director*
- Garth Williams, *Associate Director*

RCD Staff

- Paul Robins, *Executive Director*
- Jeanette Wrynski, *Senior Program Manager*
- Mark Lane, *Water Lab Manager*
- John Reynolds, *Revegetation Assistant*
- Tanya Meyer, *Vegetation Management Specialist*
- Sue McCloud, *Bookkeeper*
- Diane Crumley, *Technical Writer*
- Sheila Pratt, *Administrative Assistant*

NRCS Staff

- Phil Hogan, *District Conservationist*
- Wendy Rash, *Soil Conservationist*
- Ha Truong, *Agricultural Engineer*
- Nick Gallagher, *Rangeland Management Specialist*

Cache Creek Discovery Day

May 10, 2008, 9-3

The Cache Creek Watershed Forum presents a one-day outdoor learning event as part of Watershed Awareness Month.



- Guided hikes through the nature preserve
- Wildlife viewing
- Native American basketry and demonstrations
- Displays highlighting stream biology
- Local geology, birds, wildlife tracks and signs
- Native plants and habitat restoration
- BBW lunch with live music or bring your own picnic

Cache Creek Nature Preserve
34199 County Road 20
6 miles west of Woodland
(CR 20 and CR 94B)

For information call Cache Creek Conservancy (530) 661-1070, Yolo Co. RCD (530) 662-2037 ext. 117, Colusa Co. RCD (530) 458-2931 ext. 3, or East & West Lake Co. RCD (707) 263-4180 ext. 12.

LONG-RANGE GOALS & RECENT ACTIVITIES

In May 2007, the YCRCD approved its new long-range strategic plan for 2007-2012. The RCD Board and staff prioritized five conservation goals along with education and district administration to guide YCRCD work over the next 5-10 years:

Non-native Invasive Species Management

YCRCD is active in county-wide and regional collaboration efforts to reduce the presence of non-native invasive plant species.

Habitat Restoration

YCRCD provides leadership, information, and technical assistance for landowners, state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations that are restoring natural habitat that is both ecologically sustainable and agriculturally compatible.

Farmland Protection

YCRCD is committed to sustaining local agriculture through research, technical assistance, education, advocacy and leadership. By continuing to work with landowners, interest groups, professional experts and public officials, we strive to contribute to policies and practices that result in the continued creation and preservation of local agriculture.

Water Resources

YCRCD works to improve water quality, support water conservation efforts, minimize flooding and control excessive erosion through on-farm water management practices and technical monitoring support.

Air Quality

Assess current and future rural air quality impacts in Yolo County - identify BMP's to mitigate impacts, identify partners to find appropriate technical and financial assistance so the health and well being of the region's residents can be protected.

A copy of the YCRCD Strategic Plan and related Annual Plans are available on the YCRCD website at www.yolorcd.org. What follows are the highlights of our efforts in 2007 to implement these goals.

COOPERATORS OF THE YEAR

Butlers' hedgerow along CR 89.

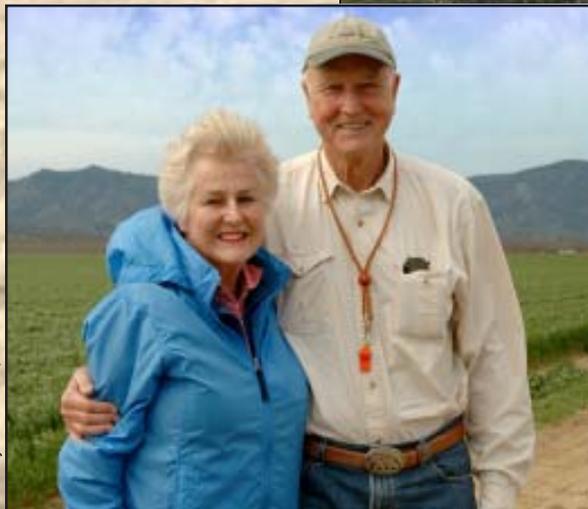


Photo by Eron Evans, eronevans.com.

At the March 12 YCRCD Annual Dinner in Zamora, Lew and Sheana Butler were named Cooperators of the Year for 2007. They have been active cooperators with the RCD for over ten years, starting with the installation of tailwater ponds, roadside native grasses, and hedgerows on Lew's property just south of Madison, west of County Road 89. Last year, they placed a conservation easement on that property, effectively limiting the future "sprawl potential" of nearby Madison.

On Sheana's new ground this past year, they also implemented several large-scale conservation practices including 1.5 miles of grassed waterway and hedgerows, two pond/sediment trap complexes bordered by native plantings, a half-mile of roadside native grasses, and a half-mile of slough levee setbacks with native grass, tree and shrub plantings (in conjunction with their neighbor Roy Parcel).

The slough enhancement project is the first site for restoration implementation for the new CALFED-funded *Yolo-Solano Conservation Partnership* program.

Thank you Sheana and Lew!

Farmland Protection

According to a recent report from the Department of Conservation, nearly 280,000 acres of California’s farmland was converted to urban uses from 1990 – 2002, including over 96,000 acres of prime farmland, considered the most productive type of soil for long-term crop production. YCRCD Sr. Program Manager, Jeanette Wrynski serves as a member of the *Yolo County Ag Futures Alliance (AFA)*.

In 2007, the group drafted policy recommendations and implementation measures to be considered by the County as it updates its General Plan. The Ag Futures Alliance recommended the following:

Creation of a farmland mitigation bank in Yolo County to encourage coordinated efforts in farmland conservation;

Development of farmland conservation zones within large tracts of contiguous, highly productive farmland, removed from urban and housing areas;

Focusing funding and policies that encourage agricultural viability within the farmland preservation zones;

Creation of a dedicated funding source to support a thriving local agricultural economy.



Non-native invasive species management

These “invading” species can displace native plants and wildlife habitat, crowd out crops and rangeland forage, increase the risks of wildfire damage by generating increased fuel load, can clog creeks and consume enormous quantities of water.

In 2007, the YCRCD’s campaign against invasive weeds included:

Completion of a second season of Tamarisk, Arundo and Ravenna grass control along 11 miles of Cache Creek as

part of the *Capay Valley Riparian Vegetation Management Program*;

Assistance with the organization and plan submission for the Will Baker Native Plant Garden in Nichols Park near Guinda in conjunction with the Cache Creek Watershed Stakeholders Group and Yolo County Parks and Natural Resources;

Vegetation Management Specialist, Tanya Meyer served on the board for the CA Invasive Plant Council, and Re-vegetation Specialist, Sean Kenady completed another term on the board for the CA Native Grassland Association;

Organizing the Riparian Weed Control and Re-vegetation Workshop held at the Cache Creek Nature Preserve, that included six speakers and 80 participants, and a Spring Weed Identification meeting at the UC Davis Weed Research and Information Center;

Receiving funding for continued *Weed Area Management* projects for Woolly distaff thistle treatment and control in the uplands of Capay Valley and for additional riparian weed control along Cache Creek.



Photo by Joe DiTomaso.

Water Resources

In 2007, our programs focused on both on-farm and watershed-based efforts to address water quality improvement throughout the county. This included:

Irrigation efficiency evaluations for over 650 acres of orchards, vineyards, row crops and irrigated pastures through the *Yolo-Colusa County Mobile Water Lab Program*;



Providing technical and financial support for the installation of 13 new water quality management practices including five sediment traps, three vegetated ditches and five cover crop projects through the *Yolo-Solano Ag Water Quality Management Support Program*;

Initiation of landowner project coordination in the Hungry Hollow and Lamb Valley watersheds;

Continued watershed group coordination in Capay Valley and a collaborative effort with NRCS staff on two stream bank stabilization and re-vegetation projects along Cache Creek;

New grant funding from the CALFED Watershed Program for a large-scale geomorphic assessment of Cache Creek to determine causes and solutions for continued stream bank erosion along 33 miles in Capay Valley;

Completion of the field demonstration and testing of water chemistry, toxicology, vegetation and sediment sampling in agricultural ditches adjacent to alfalfa and tomato fields as part of the *Vegetated Ag Drainage Ditch Project*; this project is designed to evaluate vegetation’s role in reducing the concentration of nutrients, sediment and pesticides to improve water quality.

Habitat Restoration

Current priorities include projects that contribute to the enhancement of threatened or endangered species in riparian corridors, wetlands, oak woodlands and native grasslands. An additional focus is on programs that reduce conservation barriers for farmers including landowner assurances, permit streamlining and conservation fund leveraging. In 2007, our restoration projects included:

Completion of the *Permit Coordination Program* to facilitate riparian enhancement projects on private lands;

Initiation of habitat improvement along a half-mile portion of Cottonwood Slough near Madison that included “setting back” and re-contour-



ing the channel banks, and seeding with native grasses as part of the new CALFED funded *Yolo-Solano Conservation Partnership* grant;

Coordination of three *Farm & Ranch Solid Waste Cleanup* projects funded by the CA Integrated Waste Management Board that resulted in the removal of 88 tons of debris from construction, autos, appliances and household waste, and the subsequent planting of native grasses, trees and shrubs;

Completed planting of over 1600 native trees and shrubs along four highway interchanges along I-80 near the Yolo Bypass Causeway and West Sacramento, as part of the Caltrans-funded *Native Tree Project*.

Air Quality

The first step under this new goal for YCRCD has been to promote inclusion of air quality components in new farm plans, for which NRCS staff have provided primary leadership. YCRCD staff have been exploring farm energy management strategies in light of greenhouse gas policies and assessing the need for a new RCD program dedicated to local air quality management.

Education and Outreach

Develop and collaborate on programs that inform and motivate landowners, farmers, ranchers, agencies, and the general public about farmland protection, the management of water, air quality and non-native species, and habitat restoration. Education about these priority resource issues will be conducted through publications, policy development, workshops, school programs, presentations and websites, with the goal of increasing conservation actions in Yolo County. In 2007, our education and outreach activities included:

Assisting Solano RCD with the development of their *Welcome to the Watershed Program* website to accompany their booklet publication that serves as a resource directory for local stewardship practices and organizations;

The completion of the reconfiguration, reorganization and expansion of the YCRCD website;

Outreach and educational booths at the Yolo County Fair, the Yolo Basin

Foundation’s Duck Days Festival, and Davis Farmers Market;

The continuation of the annual fall-spring *On-Farm Conservation Field Meetings Series*;

Collaborating with the tri-county *Cache Creek Watershed Forum* in the planning, organization and hosting of the first *Cache Creek Discovery Day*, an outdoor youth educational event held in conjunction with Watershed Awareness Month;

Teaching the biennial 10-week ‘Farmscape Architecture’ studio at UC Davis in partnership with Solano RCD;

Hosting Conservation Planning Workshops that paired landowners with two conservation professionals (from RCD & NRCS) and UCD landscape architecture students;

Receiving funding as part of a CALFED



Watershed Program Grant to develop and implement a watershed science program for Esparto Middle School students to supplement in-class studies of earth and life sciences,

Providing scholarship funding for two high school students to attend CA Range and Natural Resources Camp in Half Moon Bay.

Summary of Fiscal Year 2007 (ending June 30, 2007) Financial Information

Income Sources:

State Grants	\$673,146
<i>funding for Cache Creek Weed Management Area & Union School Slough</i>	
Federal Grants	\$19,854
Local & Private Sources	\$69,732
Total	\$762,732

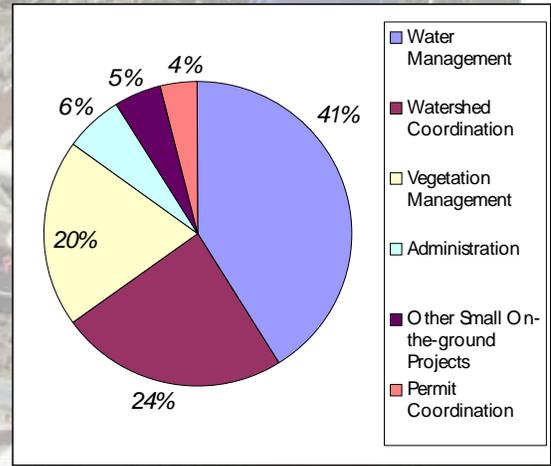
Expenses:

Personnel Costs	\$443,260
Outside Services	\$145,788
Tools & Ag. Supplies	\$34,293+
Office Expenses	\$25,776
Transp., Travel, Training	\$23,429
Insurance, Audit & Admin.	\$54,595
Total:	\$742,804

Change in unrestricted net assets (after vehicle depreciation): +\$11,974

YCRCD unreserved fund balance on July 1, 2007: \$308,184

RCD Programs Relative Expenses:



Find project progress reports, events, links, and updated conservation articles on the RCD website at www.yolorcd.org

If you would like to receive this report electronically instead of by mail, please notify Sheila Pratt at pratt@yolorcd.org.

Yolo County RCD/NRCS Field Office
 221 W. Court Street, Suite 1
 Woodland, CA 95695



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