

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Feasibility Assessment Recommendation

The Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) recommends that a collaborative stakeholder process be convened to address Lower Yolo Bypass (Lower Bypass) conditions. The process should be sponsored by the Yolo Basin Foundation (Foundation), potentially with co-sponsor support from the Delta Protection Commission. CCP recommends that the intended outcome of the collaborative process should be a comprehensive set of management recommendations for the Lower Bypass, prepared in a consensus process, that include the following specific elements:

- Guiding principles and agreements for multi-party management of the Lower Bypass
- Mutually beneficial actions with proposed implementation timelines
- Preliminary technical analysis to support proposed actions, and
- Preliminary regulatory strategies required to implement different actions

CCP has found that almost all conditions for feasibility support this conclusion. There are some key constraints regarding available resources and spokespersons that will need to be resolved, but they do not appear insurmountable.

Background

The Lower Bypass is the most downstream portion of the Yolo Bypass, a leveed 59,000 acre floodway located west of the lower Sacramento River and within Yolo and Solano Counties. The Bypass was built between 1917 and the mid 1930s.

The purpose of the Bypass is to provide flood conveyance. It is a primary component of the Sacramento River Flood Control Project (FCP) and carries the cumulative high flows from several northern California waterways to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Delta).

Purpose of Assessment

Several islands that are largely under public and quasi-public ownership in the Lower Bypass have been flooded since 1997. Other islands have been neglected and are not being actively managed. These flooded and non-flooded areas include rapidly growing habitat areas and levee degradation. Previous agricultural and other infrastructure is inundated or severely impacted. Agricultural land management has been rendered infeasible. Private land owners on these islands and lands adjacent to these islands have been impacted by these conditions. CCP proposed to the Foundation that an Assessment be conducted to determine whether a stakeholder-based process could help create solutions to the conditions in the Lower Bypass. The Foundation elevated this proposal to the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program, Contract Amendments Subcommittee which approved the proposal in late Summer 2004.

Description of Assessment Process

This assessment considers whether sufficient resources and conditions exist in the Lower Bypass for implementation of a stakeholder process, and if so, what the most appropriate process is to resolve existing social, physical, and political issues in the Lower Bypass. Nearly 50 individuals were invited to participate in assessment interviews; 45 ultimately participated. Interviews were conducted by CCP staff from February through May 2005.

Assessment Findings

Description of the Lower Yolo Bypass

Participants describe the Lower Bypass in a geographic context. However, several participants also describe the Lower Bypass:

- functions (e.g. flood management, ecological),
- land use (e.g. agriculture, managed habitat), and
- social / political perspective (e.g. responsible parties, affected stakeholders)

Importance and Implications of Current Conditions

Participants identified land ownership / land management conditions, and the physical results of those conditions. These include:

- Public Land Ownership
- Public Use
- Emergency Services
- Flood Management
- Habitat Conditions
- Water Quality

An overwhelming majority of participants said that the conditions listed above are interconnected and:

- Should be addressed in a more comprehensive and integrated way,
- Will primarily lead to very negative implications if they are not addressed in a comprehensive and integrated way.

Actions and Impacts in the Lower Yolo Bypass

Many participants have not taken any direct action to address Lower Bypass conditions. Participants that have taken action have focused on their individual interests and needs, rather than working with other stakeholders to identify communal problems and solutions.

Impacts of Conditions in the Lower Bypass

There is an almost unanimous opinion that other stakeholders will be negatively impacted by current and future conditions. Participants can not specifically describe how those impacts will occur. Almost all responses are based on assumptions and intuition.

Responsibilities of Stakeholders in the Lower Yolo Bypass

Most participants named many responsible stakeholders and did not “single out” a specific party.

Preferred Stakeholder Actions

A majority of participants said that responsible agencies should be sponsoring and organizing more comprehensive discussions between all affected stakeholders.

Stakeholder Process Feasibility

All but one interview participant believes that a stakeholder process is warranted and feasible.

Organizing the Process

Most participants believe the Foundation and the Yolo Bypass Working Group should organize or have some part in organizing a stakeholder effort.

Potential Stakeholders

The following stakeholders were most recommended to participate:

USFWS	USBR	USACE
DFG	CALFED	SAFCA
DWR	DPC	Hunting clubs
TPL	All adjacent RDs	Agricultural land owners
Port of Sacramento	Yolo County	Ryer Island
City of Rio Vista	Solano County	land owners
Prospect Island land owners	Hastings Tract land owners	Little Hastings Tract land owners
Flood control representatives	Upper Sacramento River system representatives	Ecological / habitat specialists

Structure of Participation

Participants believe that everyone needs to be equal in a stakeholder effort. They also believe that the process should be consensus-based. Many acknowledged that all stakeholders may not be equal when it comes to implementing future recommendations, and that agency decision-makers and funding organizations need to be actively involved in all aspects of a process.

Potential Outcomes

The preferred outcome from most participants is a “management plan” for the Lower Bypass area.

Process Duration

A slight majority of participants acknowledge that a multi stakeholder process might take approximately two years.

Assessment Analysis

Geographic Scope

Flood management and the affects of adjacent public lands are the primary factors influencing geographic descriptions of the Lower Yolo Bypass. Private land owners and local governments and organizations do not want to be “left out” of any discussions about Lower Bypass issues and given a choice of inclusion or exclusion, these parties support a broad rather than narrow geographic description of the Lower Bypass.

Implications of Current Conditions

Almost every participant believes that:

- The Lower Bypass needs some type of comprehensive management approach developed by a cross section of public and private stakeholders.
- Current conditions in the Lower Bypass are not sustainable and pose imminent risks to a variety of stakeholders in a variety of conditions.
- There has been no effective opportunity for stakeholders to come together in a working environment to jointly address their differences.
- Recent public efforts related to the NDNWR were not effective ways to involve the wide range of stakeholders related to the Lower Bypass; there are better ways to do so.

Participants do not uniformly agree on the many issues affecting the management of the Lower Bypass however participants are closer to agreement on many topics than they may believe they are. Most of the differences can be solved by jointly accessing technical information and working with each other and technical specialists

Factors that have most negatively influenced stakeholder relationships are a lack of:

- Trust,
- Respect,
- Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities (discussed further below), and
- Understanding of the Physical System.

Roles and Responsibilities

There is a general lack of understanding about stakeholder roles and responsibilities in the Lower Bypass. This lack of understanding includes not only generally expected uncertainties between public and private parties, but also extends to uncertainties between agencies.

The Lower Bypass has fallen in between the “responsibility cracks” of several organizations. No single organization is responsible for Lower Bypass conditions. Physical and land use conditions have changed recently. However, private and public stakeholders were not prepared to similarly adjust because they have not resolved philosophical differences about what the Lower Bypass should and could be.

Preferred Actions to Address Current Conditions

Solutions proposed by interview participants have merit but reflect little cohesion or a collective strategic approach. They need to be coordinated and prioritized in a way that reflects collaborative partnership, coordinated strategic planning, and tactical intent.