

Tulare Basin Working Group
October 26, 2012
Minutes

Facilitator: Larry Saslaw

1. Tulare Basin Watershed Initiative (TBWI)

a. Update (Kathy Wood, TBWI Watershed Coordinator)

Kathy Wood:

- The TBWI is halfway through its 3-year grant from the Department of Conservation. We continue to work with IRWM groups, NRCS and RCDs on project development but are now moving more toward specific project implementation with the IRWMPs.
- SW Tulare County in the Deer Creek Watershed is our priority area and is described in our 2nd year annual work plan. (*TBWI_GeneralWorkPlan_year2 - attached*).
- Kathy worked with Tasha Newman (CSG) on submittal of the successful planning grant for the SSIRWM.
- With the help of the TBWI core team members (particularly Rob Hansen), Dan Vink and Kern NWR staff, a CVPCP grant to acquire lands around Pixley NWR was submitted to Reclamation to protect valley grasslands and alkali scrub habitat for threatened and endangered species.
- Kathy is working with several organizations and IRWM on creating setbacks around creeks and streams. Many of these stream courses have been used for conveyance of irrigation water AND flood waters over the years. There is an interest to integrate flood management/attenuation with ground water recharge. An important side benefit is the potential for re-establishing riparian habitat. For example, along Poso Creek, there is an interest by the IRWM group to develop set-backs to slow flood waters to improve recharge. The “benches” created would provide opportunity for willows and other riparian plants to re-establish. Kathy is also working with Fresno Irrigation District on maintenance along Fancher and Dry Creeks that could benefit riparian habitat through reduction of invasive plants such as arundo. Kathy met with the Army Corps of Engineers in Sacramento earlier in the month and they are very interested in supporting this type of effort.
- One of the objectives of the TBWI is to find funding beyond the life of the grant. At a minimum, we want to continue our outreach work and the TBWI website.
- Kathy introduced the TBWI core team: Dick Moss, Elizabeth Palmer, John Shelton, Carole Combs, Rob Hansen, Sarah Campe, and Niki Woodard. The team meets monthly.

b. Newly-launched TBWI website (Niki Woodard, TBWI Communications/Outreach Specialist)

Niki introduced and gave attendees a tour of the TBWI website:

www.tularebasinwatershed.org. If anyone has suggestions or items they want to contribute to the news or calendar page, please contact Niki or Sarah (or click “contact” on the webpage.) Niki is also looking for contributions to the Resources Library – it can include published and unpublished research, workshop notes – anything that may be useful to resource managers. The TBWI team is also looking for funding (approx. \$30,000) to

develop an interactive map with multiple layers (e.g. disadvantaged communities, wildlife corridors, flood zones, etc.) that could be manipulated by the user.

c. Request for project submittals (Niki Woodard)

The Project Database portion of the website is a place to feature partially-completed and conceptualized on-the-ground projects with the hope of creating partnerships and attracting more attention and funding to this region. This will only work if we have projects!! Niki has put a project database submittal form on-line: <http://tularebasinwatershed.org/submit-a-project> (*print version attached – TBWIProjectDatabase_submittalform.*) Please contribute! Kathy, Sarah or Niki can help fill out the template if we are sent project information.

Suggestions:

- DFG has recreation reserves, etc. with public access; it would be good to feature these (and other public recreation areas – i.e. link to Watchable Wildlife.)
- Post (calendar, blog) wildlife-related events (SRT events, birding events, etc.)
- Include a subsection with learning opportunities for teachers.
- Put a statement on the project database saying that projects are in the process of being posted, but this page will eventually serve as a clearinghouse for on-the-ground projects in the Tulare Basin

d. Discussion of Southwest Tulare County roundtables and future water, environmental, and recreational opportunities (Niki Woodard, Denise Akins, Jessi Snyder, Denise Kadara, Kayode Kadara, Matt Hurley, Ernie Hernandez, Steve Larson, TBWG)

Niki and the TBWI team have partnered with the County of Tulare, Self Help Enterprises and United Way to host two workshops/roundtables in Allensworth and Alpaugh, (with participation from Richgrove) on leadership training and best practices largely around the issue of improved management of drinking water. The TBWG brainstormed ideas around linking the communities in SW Tulare County –for recreation, conservation, and for water service. Below are some highlighted comments:

- Rob Hudson, Alpaugh Superintendent, would like BLM involvement and the Alpaugh School/Atwell Island connection to continue (per Carole Combs).
- Matt Hurley pointed out that this was a manageable group/area to find projects that are mutually beneficial and make things happen. He would like to have strategically located water bodies that could be used for multiple uses – drinking water, recreation, etc.
- John Shelton gave an example of a sustainable community forest collaborative near Oakhurst that works on projects that are sustainable, economic and environmental.
- Denise Kadara said a primary focus is water quality: there are funding opportunities from the CA Dept. of Public Health and the Sustainable Growth Commission; she would also like to build agri-tourism linked to the Allensworth state park – there are many opportunities to integrate multiple interests.
- Kayode Kadara and Steve Larson discussed an opportunity to expand Allensworth state park: landowner Jack Phillips, who owns land around Allensworth is divesting himself of 600 acres.
- Kayode, Carole and Matt Hurley discussed coordinating with High Speed Rail authorities (TBWP has submitted comments on the HSR and offered itself as a resource.) Matt Hurley also gave feedback that, of two routes, the eastern route would be preferable.

- Steve Larson talked about connecting Allensworth State Park and Kern and Pixley NWR through fee title ownership and easements. This would be great for recreation, wildlife, and water systems – connectivity benefits everyone.
- There is the intention to invite Supervisor Vander Poel to a meeting, but the group needs to do some planning for his visit.
- John Shelton mentioned the cultural importance of this area to local tribes – there is opportunity in that area for a Native American museum or cultural center. Tammy Whitley with BLM has been talking with the Tachi tribe about projects – Kathy will follow up with Tammy.
- We will continue to publicize roundtables – please come and get involved. The next one will likely take place mid-November. Watch the TBWI website for details.
- Sarah will copy Matthew Bettelheim (URS Corp.) on these minutes.

3. Kern-Pixley NWR update, Pixley NWR add-on acquisition request for funding to CVP CP-HRP submitted by Kathy Wood, Scott Frazer with Lower Tule River Irrigation District as willing seller (Kathy Wood TBWI WC; Scott Frazer, Kern NWR) with brief Partners in Fish & Wildlife grant opportunity update by Jacob Byers (Kern NWR)

Scott Frazer and Jacob Byers:

- Scott thanked TBWP, Kathy for being the catalyst behind the CVPCP grant for the Pixley acquisition. Kern has had three successful applications for this source of funding so Scott feels the chances are good the application will be successful, but we won't know until March.
- Jacob works for a US FWS cost share program to do restoration on private lands. Jacob has funding to obligate towards projects that benefit wildlife on private lands. Kayode will follow up with Scott and Jacob about Jack Phillips' properties and possible state park expansion.
- Matt Hurley said that there are 2400 acres of natural lands in that area.
- Kern NWR is a migratory bird refuge. This year the fall flight forecast for migratory wildfowl is the best ever.
- Shannon Ludwig is the new project leader (replacing Dave Hardt). The Kern biologist position should be filled by Jan 1.
- Kern is flooding up incrementally; due to some glitches, they're about 30 days late in fall flood-up schedule.
- Scott works with private landowners in the Tulare Basin Wildlife Management area – a geographic area within which there is goal of acquiring 22,000 acres of easements on private lands. (per Ruth Ostroff, CVJV: there are presently 11 US FWS easements in the Tulare Basin management area totaling 3527 acres). FWS easements are in perpetuity – they restrict certain activities on the land in exchange for a one-time payment. These easements should be available on the USFWS easement database.

4. San Joaquin Valley Upland Species Recovery Team (SJVRT) mapping efforts and gap analysis as information resource for TBWI website and TBWI project integration follow up (Larry Saslaw, participants in July SJVRT meeting at Los Banos invited, as well as Larry Vredenburg, Scott Phillips); identify Tulare

**Basin upland/wildlife corridors protected and gaps -- areas in need of protection;
Elizabeth Palmer (re: Tulare Basin wetland boundaries GIS info)**

- a. Tie in to TBWP/Tulare Basin Watershed Initiative (TBWI) primary goal under CA DOC Grant (“ . . . to create a healthy regional watershed with ecologically functional waterways, wetlands and upland, providing abundant clean water for both people and wildlife.”)
- b. Connection to TBWI website interactive map & IRWM project integration efforts (Sarah Campe, Niki Woodard, Kathy Wood)
- c. TBWG review of maps and feedback regarding need for additional protected areas (TBWG)
- d. Next step planning for TBWI-SJVRT collaboration and TBWI website integration of SJVRT information

Scott Phillips, with the Endangered Species Recovery Program at CSU Stanislaus, showed slides of the San Joaquin Valley Recovery Team (SJVRT) mapping efforts.

- Loss of habitat is classically the biggest problem for endangered species. Recovery plans for these species include a number of conservation measures including habitat requirements (i.e. protect x amount of potential habitat in a specific area.) Models can show areas of habitat suitability; the SJVRT is mapping which/how much of suitable lands are protected.
- Scott is using the CA Protected Areas Database (a database of fee protected lands)—sponsored by the Greeninfo network. There is a ‘map collaborator’, which allows users to add notes, upload shapefiles, show where data is out of date, etc.
- Scott is also using the National Conservation Easement Database Portal, although easements data isn’t always available to the public.
- This GIS/mapping effort can help the TBWI by showing what lands are protected, what needs to be protected – this is good information for project development and can probably help IRWM groups develop more competitive projects.
- The SJVRT is hoping to end up with a map/data highlighting the best of what’s left, and showing how much of this is protected and what still needs protection. They want to broadcast this information – to conservation groups, counties, etc.
- The purpose of the presentation was to get feedback from the TBWG about any information/lands that are missing – particularly parcels or pieces of land that are in the process of being conserved that have not yet shown up on any of these databases.

Suggestions/feedback:

- Include conservation bank lands (if they aren’t already part of the database.)
- Look at the TBWP Conservation Plans/CAPPs – they may include information useful to the team.
- The TBWG and TBWI team will spread the word to the water agencies to include any parcels that are in the process of being protected.
- Scott should connect with Sarge Green (who is also leading an effort to collect GIS data).
- Carole asked that the SJVRT and the TBWI team continue to coordinate – the work of the SJVRT can inform the TBWP/TBWI 2014-2016 Strategic Plan.

5. NRCS

a. “Ensuring the future of Wetland Reserve Program in Tulare Basin” -- FY 2013 Farm Bill status and CA funding for WRPs, success level of existing outreach efforts, brainstorming more outreach options and opportunities (Elizabeth Palmer, Jesse Bahm, Karl Kraft, TBWG participants)

- NRCS just ended a very successful 2012 fiscal year. There is a new project in Kings County that is closing (the Nederend project) and another in an area near Summit Lake that should close by Christmas. They have new restoration agreements in Kern, Tulare and Stanislaus counties and Jesse is working on a restoration project on the Fresno Slough.
- New for 2012, NRCS, USFWS and DFG formed a tricolor working group with funding to enter 3-year management agreements for water for habitat. Four dairies participated in a very successful silage buyout program.
- Jesse mentioned that the DAC organic farming efforts could possibly get assistance through EQIP. Niki will invite Jesse to the next roundtable.
- Jesse talked about other habitat programs – NRCS can, for example, fund fencing for riparian areas through the declining species initiative (part of EQIP). Kathy will talk to Jesse/Elizabeth about the potential of this program with setbacks in the Poso region.
- Carole mentioned that Liberty Ranch, in the Angiola Water District, was once considered for WRP funding but it didn’t meet the AGI requirement – this might be worth revisiting. Karl and Elizabeth pointed out that they now have to consider AGI and water rights – they need a constant emergent marsh, not just every 5 years.

b. TBWG feedback re: other NRCS habitat program project opportunities, including brainstorming functionality of Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and potential for enhancements to increase usefulness in Tulare Basin (Sarah Campe – on behalf of Dick Moss, Elizabeth Palmer, TBWG)

- Sarah gave a background on the AWEP program: AWEP is a voluntary conservation initiative in which NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to farmers to implement practices on ag land to conserve surface and ground water and improve water quality. AWEP is not a grant program - eligible partners enter into an agreement with NRCS in which they promote water conservation or improve water quality on ag lands within an approved AWEP project area. The partner then administers the program. Farmers still have to qualify for EQIP funding, but they are competing with a smaller pool of applicants.
- In a presentation given by Dick Moss, he argued that AWEP in its current state is difficult to use. It can give an area (like the landowners within an irrigation district if the district were to apply on their behalf) a competitive advantage to access USDA funding under the program, but the District can’t receive anything for administering the program. The money can only go to the landowners.
- Dick (and others) have been pressing the issue for this year’s farm bill to allow programs under AWEP where there was a local effort to build a project or a program and have it funded (including its administration) and not have all of the funds flow only to landowners. This would open the program up to projects that cross landowner boundaries (like distribution system pipelines and recharge

facilities).

- Carole is interested in working to change AWEP program design so that it works better for Tulare Basin purposes and within the IRWM parameters. She suggested that CVJV might be interested in looking at this during their update process.

Other comments:

- Presently there is no accounting for water conserved through this program; it would be good if there were some way to use conserved water for conservation purposes.
- There has been some research showing that there are cases in which NOT conserving water has provided benefits for birds and that these crops should be considered habitat.
- Elizabeth: AWEP is not currently open for new project applications.
- The TBWI team will discuss this at their next core meeting.

c. Discussion/decision re: TBWG April 2013 spring tour of Tulare Basin NRCS WRP and other NRCS habitat program easement sites

We'll wait and see what opportunities there are. There may be a tour possibility at the Hair site.

6. BLM-Bakersfield Update (Steve Larson)

a. New Atwell Island Project Manager--Jihadda Govan

- Jihadda Govan will fill the position vacated by Steve Laymon.
- BLM will be restoring 200 acres of upland soon.
- Bureau of Reclamation funding (which covers a lot of the cost of management and some acquisition costs) is due to expire in 2014; BLM is thinking ahead as to other funding sources. Buying water for wetlands is an ongoing funding issue. BLM/Atwell Island will likely reduce the number of positions.
- Atwell Island focus is shifting from restoration to public visitation and endangered species management.

b. Other BLM news (e.g. UC NRS Field Station at Atwell Island)

- BLM is in discussions with UC Merced about establishing a field station near Atwell Island. UCM seems enthusiastic, but funding is an issue. UCM is also interested in the cultural history of the area. There is potential for partnering with the tribes.
- John Shelton mentioned the idea of creating a cultural resource that gets used (i.e. a garden with culturally significant plants that a tribe both manages and harvests.) BLM/UCM should think in terms of a cultural resource center rather than a museum. This may be something that the Allensworth Community Group/roundtable can help with.

7. Central Valley Joint Venture 2012/2013 Implementation Plan Update and TBWG participation/assistance (Ruth Ostroff, in person; Greg Yarris, Bob Shaffer phoning in; TBWG feedback)

The current CVJV Implementation plan was written in 2006; it was originally designed as a 5-year plan. CVJV is beginning the update process. They are presently putting together committees, determining habitat goal accomplishments, looking at whether underlying assumptions of habitat plans are valid, and revisiting population objectives. Some of the

issues they are looking at for the update include:

- CVJV has been monitoring the Bay-Delta conservation Plan and other Delta/Suisun planning processes; CVJV partners have met with Resources Agency staff to provide input on the BDCP Effects Analysis, which is the portion of the BDCP which evaluates the impacts of the Plan on various plant and wildlife species. Ducks Unlimited has been contracted to help with the portion of the Effects Analysis that addresses migratory waterfowl and shorebirds in the Delta proper. The impact of BDCP in places like the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valley (including the Tulare Basin) is not being evaluated; there are potential indirect impacts that are not being addressed but need to be discussed (e.g. if Sacramento Valley farmers can sell their water to southern interests, will rice farming and waterbird habitat be reduced?)
- CVJV has made it clear that BDCP should not impair, and hopefully will enhance, the ability of federal and state agencies to provide full Level 4 water to refuges and private lands per CVPIA
- The release date for the draft BDCP is scheduled for Dec. 21 (subject to change) although the Effect Analysis might come out in November. CVJV intends to alert its partners (including TBWP) so they can review it if desired. The CVJV provided comments on the original Effects Analysis, and will likely convene a group to do that again. Because the Effect Analysis for waterfowl uses a similar approach as CVJV's Implementation Plan (an energetics model), the methodology will be familiar and CVJV believes this approach to be better for evaluating impacts to wintering waterfowl.
- Mosquito abatement regulations have made flooding wetlands before October 1 is cost prohibitive in certain districts – this has a large effect on shorebirds early migrants who need water in July and August.
- Water quality issues – There are several water quality issues that will impact the management of wetlands (and flooded crops, such as rice and corn) that the CVJV is tracking. These include the Delta mercury TMDL, irrigated lands regulatory program, and CV salts among others. Many of these are the result of regional implementation of the Clean Water Act (through the regional and state Water Quality Control Boards) and the designation of the Delta as an impaired water body.
- CVJV will be strengthening the climate change portion of the plan.
- Grassland birds were not included in previous plans; CVJV is expanding this plan to include grassland birds will be discussed by the Technical Committee and Management Board.

Greg will engage members of the TBWG as the CVJV moves forward. He hopes the update will be completed in 2013. It's early in the process and he's open to any suggestions. He is specifically seeking feedback on other species that benefit migratory birds (e.g. the giant garter snake.) Carole mentioned the need to define achievable restoration targets for NRCS and NAWCA programs

Carole pointed out that TBWP's conservation plans and CVJV's conservation plans had some difference in approaches; she asked that CVJV consider other approaches in their update. Rob read through a TBWP policy document: "A comparison of Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners and Central Valley Joint Venture Wetland Goals for the Tulare Basin" (TBWP.CVJV_2009WetlndComp and TBWP.CVJV.Wetlands&RiparianWaterNeeds2010Feb 16 - attached). Rob pointed out that a much of the difference in TBWP and CVJV wetland

accounting could be due to TBWP's recognition of "opportunistic wetlands" that may be exist in only very wet years. Rob reiterated that TBWP/TBWI team members are available and willing to help CVJV with their update.

8. TBWG volunteer biological monitoring proposal, feedback, follow up (Larry Saslaw)

There are entities with good conservation projects that are held back due to the cost of surveys and monitoring to meet regulatory standards. Larry suggested putting out the word (and using the TBWI website) to find consultants to volunteer their time for worthy projects (i.e. Pintail Slough). Carole pointed out that there may be specific projects under the TBWI that will need monitoring once funded – biologists could record their volunteer time as an in-kind donation.

9. Brief Conservation Strategy Group legislative update (Sarah Campe, on behalf of Tasha Newman/CSG)

Due to limited time, it was decided to include this item in the notes only – see 2012.10.26_TBWG.CSG-TNewman_report attached.

10. Brief agency and organizational updates, including update by Chris Hildebrandt/DU re: Delano Wastewater Treatment Project

We missed Chris Hildebrandt on the phone, but he emailed his update to be included in these minutes – see 2012.10.26_TBWG.DU_Update attached.

Other agency and organizational updates:

- John Shelton: DFG is changing its name to the Fish and Wildlife Service. This will be phased-in starting in January. John is working with American Rivers and SRT on a water conservation easement on the Tule River (above the reservoir) that may tie in to an ecological reserve. The easement would pay landowners to keep water in the creek.
- DFG and CA LCCs are jointly hosting a "Climate Academy" series of webinars/events. One is coming up on Nov. 5. (See TBWI website for details.)
- Sarah Campe announced the upcoming "Southern Sierra Nevada Adaptation Workshop" February 20-22 at the Visalia Convention Center addressing climate change issues in the Southern Sierra. (*SSCAW_Save the Date_Final_Revised attached.*)
- Thomas Leeman is working on Buena Vista Lake shrew critical habitat. He suggested that, when considering different types of wetlands in Tulare Basin planning processes (i.e. the CVJV plan update), planners keep this animal in mind as another species that could benefit from seasonal wetlands.
- Rob Hansen: SRT submitted a successful application to the River Parkways grant program (reviewed by Tasha Newman, CSG) to purchase the Hesse Property, adjacent to KOP. SRT plans to eventually do some restoration work on the property.

11. Next TBWG dates TBD--previously set as follows: Spring TBWG tour/meeting -- TBD; Fall TBWG meeting at NRCS --Visalia, Friday, October 25, 2013; discussion/decision re: possible new dates (Larry Saslaw, Kathy Wood & TBWI team)

Kathy asked if there was interest in having the TBWG meeting on a day other than Friday; there was a positive response. The Spring TBWG meeting date is therefore TBD (possibly April 18). Carole is stepping down from TBWG organizing – Kathy, Sarah and Niki will henceforth organize meetings.