

# Yolo Flyway Farms project takes off

**Lauren King, Daily Democrat, 3-24-16**

The Yolo Flyway Farms Restoration project can now move forward after Yolo Supervisors approved pending use permits and signed a Williamson Act Open Space Agreement into effect.

According to Eric Parfrey, Principal Planner within the County Planning, Public Works, and Environmental Services department, the project is a component of a larger, 3,800 acre Lower Yolo Restoration Project that seeks to restore tidal interaction and associated wetland habitats to enhance and create habitat on 1,770 acres for special-status fish.

The Flyway Farms Restoration Project would restore and enhance around 278 acres of tidal freshwater wetlands on a 362-acre parcel.

Parfrey reported that the project has been designed to support delta smelt recovery, provide rearing habitats for out-migrating salmonids, and support other aquatic and wetland-dependant species such as the Sacramento splittail.

The project site consists of two separate parcels that are zoned for agricultural uses, located about 9.4 miles southeast of Davis. The parcel has historically been managed as a duck hunting club and, recently, as a seasonal pasture.

The second parcel is 80 acres and its proposed use would be for stockpiling excess soils. The latter parcel is in idle agricultural use according to staff reports.

The properties are under separate Williamson Act contracts and contain flood easements for the Central Valley Flood Protection Board.

Staff have conducted analyses of the possible environmental, biological, agricultural, and flooding effects that the project may have with the input of relevant federal and state wildlife agencies.

The project could affect habitat and or individual giant garter snakes and western pond turtles, but areas that they inhabit will be flagged as Environmentally Sensitive areas and shall be avoided by all construction personnel. Similar measures will be taken, when possible, with other animals such as the Swainson's hawk.

Parfrey and his staff have also identified the project's beneficial impacts. The benefits include, but are not limited to: substantial increases in shallow-water and tidal marsh habitats for native fish, aid in local methylmercury production and transport, and permanent conversion of the seasonal ag-land to tidal wetlands — which are of a higher ecological value.

A public hearing was opened at Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting, but when no issues were brought forth, the Board moved to adopt the findings of the Planning Commission, approve the pending Use Permit and Flood Hazard Development Permit and authorized Supervisor Jim Provenza, Board Chair, to execute any documents or contract amendments necessary to ensure compliance with the Williamson Act — which restricts contracted land to be designated for agricultural or related open space use — and continued preservation of the property.

The project requires approval from several other State and federal agencies before the restoration effort can break ground.