

Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Paul C Robins

Initial Selection Panel Review

0088

Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Applicant amount requested: \$2,257,978

Fund This Amount: \$2,257,978

Recommended conditions: As a condition of funding, proponent should (1) prepare a more meaningful socio-economical evaluation with a full description of methodologies and (2) structure scope of work to ensure the performance measures (performance evaluation plan) are laid out and identified prior to initiation of major work. Additionally, the proponent needs to publish its results in the areas of (1) the proxy methodology for the giant garter snake and (2) the socio-economic study.

Suggested Revisions: See recommended conditions; also need to demonstrate experience and expertise in socio-economic skills.

Explanation of Review: Proposal is within Yolo and Solano counties, portions of which are identified as high priority areas. It builds upon established partnerships, ones that have worked well together. The partnership is comprised of a diverse, well qualified team that builds upon an established track record. The proposal demonstrates involvement of landowners. The monitoring proposal is specific, detailed, and clear, showing relevance to the PSP priorities and demonstrating the bridge between ag practices and ecosystem benefits. That being said, the performance measures were not well defined and need further work to clarify how monitoring from component pieces interrelate and contribute to measuring outcomes. The Technical Review Panel review was favorable for this project.

Final Recommendation: Fund with conditions

#0088: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Initial Selection Panel Review

Fund

#0088: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Technical Panel Review

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$2,257,978

Panel Rating:

Very Good - High quality in nearly all respects

Panel Summary

This organized and comprehensive proposal presents a desirable suite of research efforts and on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects. Strengths of the proposal include a clear and well-integrated conceptual framework, the goal of testing assumptions, and good partnerships. This project also includes the transfer of methods and information to other RCDs. The proposal's ambitious scope presents a drawback as it was challenging to assess the depth of each facet of the project. Panel members approved of the Sacramento perch management component but the GGS survey aspect of the proposal caused widespread confusion, including the relevance of the "proxy habitat model." The economic analysis facet of the proposal was unsatisfactory as written: it contained claims about measuring ecosystem services, but there was little detail or strong methodology to document public benefits and costs. There was little evidence that any real measurements would be made or primary data collected. The proposal could be focused on services that could be accurately measured, valued and strengthened if the socio-economic section was re-written with more detail and included methods to measure the on/off farm effects.

Potential transferable value of the project was high, and the applicants are known to be effective and well-connected in the agricultural community.

External Technical Review #1

Proposal Number: 0088

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$2,257,978

Goals

Rating	very good
Comments	<p>The project following goals.: 1) encourage agricultural management practices that improve wildlife habitat values to support specialstatus wildlife and other wildlife dependent on the BayDelta; 2) increase the health of its important ecological processes, habitats, fish, wildlife and plant populations and makes substantial contributions to the health of the BayDelta; 3) modify land stewardship practices to correct negative impacts while maintaining and improving the agricultural economy; 4) integrate agriculture and natural habitats to support ecological health; and 5) actively involve landowners and local watershed groups critical to the maintenance and restoration of BayDelta ecosystem.</p> <p>The above listing fits all of the criteria requested for goals. Additional text in the proposal fleshes these out into more concrete objectives that can be accomplished during the time frame.</p>

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	excellent
Comments	The proposal abstract outlines what appears to be the conceptual model:

External Technical Review #1

	<p>1) Initial implementation of three aspects of barrier reduction programs including landowner assurances, permit streamlining and conservation fund leveraging; 2) New information regarding farm pond benefits for native aquatic and terrestrial species; 3) Further documentation of onfarm habitat improvement benefits for wildlife; 4) Social and economic analysis of farm ecosystem services; 5) Extension of the project model to other regions; and 6) Effective information dissemination and exchange through public workshops, presentations, youth education and small publications.</p> <p>Additionally, there is a chart in the proposal which shows the flow from problems to goals to tasks and ultimately how the project handles all this. The project has a great scope, which can be hard to justify. But I thought they did a good job in showing how all of this flowed logically from beginning to end.</p>
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Approach

Rating	very good
Comments	I was very impressed with the approach. I think it all goes back to how they were able to lay out a clear conceptual model for their ambitious project. They pull together a diverse group of stakeholders, from farmers on down. And I thought it was key that they do not shy away from addressing the regulatory aspects of the problem.

Feasibility

Rating	very good
Comments	The proposal does a good job of addressing permitting, environmental compliance, and their extensive time line addresses timing issues. This is a far reaching proposal, but they have thought through each part and I think it has a great chance to do a lot of good. It is obvious

External Technical Review #1

	to me that there will be a lot of useful information generated, and it will be at the very least a good start to addressing the issues raised in the RFP.
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Performance Evaluation

Rating	very good
Comments	Performance evaluation is in Appendix 5. They list each task, which are directly related to their goals, and the deliverables that will be made available. They show how they will encourage farmer cooperation, and how changes in farm practices will directly change and hopefully improve the whole ecosystem, especially in terms of riparian habitat and specific species.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	excellent
Comments	Expected outcomes The project proponents expect to accomplish the following: 1) improved and increased wildlife habitat on farmlands; 2) increased learning and lessons regarding onfarm habitat restoration; and 3) increased public perception of the full value of agriculture and willingness to support incentives programs that safeguard and enhance wildlife and habitat.

Capabilities

Rating	good
Comments	Mr. Robbins has the appropriate experience and is in the right place for this project. I would have liked more information about his collaborators. Part of the problem may be the rigid rules the University of California has with regard to grants and contracts. The U of CA administration may restrict how much each employee can pledge formally in support of the project

External Technical Review #1

	at this time. However, I feel confident that they will more than help once the project is funded.
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Cost-Benefits

Rating	good
Comments	That is really hard for me to say. This is outside of my experience. To accomplish their tasks they must do some things that are costly, and they appear to be doing them in the logical way.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	excellent
Comments	It is a well thought out proposal that seems to cover all the basis. Conceptually interesting and detailed. While it covers a lot of ground, I believed that they have assembled the right team with the proper plan to accomplish their goals, and that these goals match what Cal Fed needs to do.

External Technical Review #2

Proposal Number: 0088

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$2,257,978

Goals

Rating	very good
Comments	The goals seem very reasonable and achievable. My only suggestion would be to expand the goal to include more about potential "landscape level" impacts and outcomes.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	excellent
Comments	I like the model proposed. Perhaps as an additional justification related to the farmers involved could be mention of increased potential land enrollment in "green payment" programs such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP), assuming it remains available.

Approach

Rating	excellent
Comments	Approach to the project seems clear and and well thought out. Perhaps more could be said about what baseline data will acquired and how it will be secured. That part seems a little unclear to me.

External Technical Review #2

Feasibility

Rating	excellent
Comments	The project seems very feasible and should succeed. Contingencies have been included.

Performance Evaluation

Rating	very good
Comments	I am somewhat concerned about the baseline data that is planned. Unless solid baseline data is secured prior to implementation, any outcomes reported may be questioned. I would also suggest that "landowner innovation" be included. Letting some landowners use their management skills to achieve the desired outcomes can be very informative and valuable. What role, if any, will rotational/managed grazing have in maintaining and improving vegetative quality and vigor over the long term?

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	excellent
Comments	The anticipated products appear to be well conceived. Perhaps an additional outcome could be policy changes at the state level that will protect the farm lands from urban development over that long term (perpetual easements?). Using the students (SLEWS) to implement portions of this project will have long term, unmeasurable, positive impacts. All reports should be made available in a wide variety of formats for easy use and access. Suggest using "kitchen table" meetings to share the goals/outcomes with landowners. Thought should also be given to what impact, if any, TMDL will have on these waters. Will they likely be designated as impaired? If so, what changes, if any, will be made to this proposal?

External Technical Review #2

Capabilities

Rating	excellent
Comments	It appears that you have an excellent team of experts with a history of making projects like this successful.

Cost-Benefits

Rating	excellent
Comments	The budget appears to make sense and should be adequate to accomplish the work described. Cost share and matching contributions are impressive.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	excellent
Comments	Overall, I feel this is an excellent project and should result in valuable outcomes. I really like the idea of using students to get certain measures applied and cost share and matching funds are to be commended.

External Technical Review #3

Proposal Number: 0088

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$2,257,978

Goals

Rating	excellent
Comments	While this proposal integrates many different goals, they are woven together in such a way as to all contribute to the overall goal of ramping up farm contributions to landscape ecosystem restoration. The listing of objectives is remarkably precise and measureable - clearly only possible because this interdisciplinary proposal builds on many previous projects and relationships.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	excellent
Comments	Again, the proposal actually includes numerous conceptual models for its various components. I was particularly impressed with how science, implementation on the land, outreach, and policy improvements were all tied together into a coherent whole. The model is holistic, and I guess their hypothesis is that progress must be made on all fronts simultaneously in order to succeed. I'm convinced.

Approach

Rating	excellent
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External Technical Review #3

Comments	Each component is well explained and presents a convincing study or methodological description. There is a strong emphasis on dissemination of findings to other regions, and on outreach to diverse stakeholders within this region. Cooperation and partnerships are essential and this project models how to do it.
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Feasibility

Rating	excellent
Comments	I did not notice any unfeasible approaches. Whether all the parts will come together is a question, but clearly the applicants have thought about how it all should integrate, how timelines come together, and the realities of permitting. In fact part of the proposal itself addresses the potential frustrations of permitting and compliance from the view of the farmer, and tries to simplify that.

Performance Evaluation

Rating	excellent
Comments	Nearly every component has described its own evaluation plan. The performance evaluations (including baseline) of the conservation practices and their impact on certain species should prove valuable. There is also an independent evaluator to be hired to conduct an overall evaluation. Exemplary.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	excellent
Comments	Many products of value are indicated. The applicants seem to have really addressed how every component should be shared with the rest of the world.

External Technical Review #3

	<p>Exactly how this project will solicit farmers for its farm practice implementation projects is not specified. However, the involvement of local agencies and NGOs with extensive experience in the two counties leads me to assume they have the necessary contacts and trust of farmers.</p>
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Capabilities

<p>Rating</p>	<p>excellent</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>While I have no personal knowledge of the members of the team, the proposal indicates a depth of experience and a history of cooperation that appears outstanding. In many cases there clearly is additional support from the organizations which make their roles in this project possible.</p> <p>There is some indication of overall team management and a plan for Semi-annual project management meetings with all participants, which shows a commitment to collaboration, and not just division of labor.</p>

Cost-Benefits

<p>Rating</p>	<p>excellent</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>The total amount of this grant is large, but it really is many projects rolled into one. My one question is the \$352K for Audubon; they are the key contractor for conducting the restoration work under this proposal, but it is not clear to me exactly what they will be performing versus what NRCS and other conservation programs will help the farmer pay for.</p>

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

<p>Rating</p>	<p>excellent</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>This project looks like it will make a number of great contributions to ag/ecosystem restoration.</p>

External Technical Review #3

Furthermore, it has been well documented in every regard.

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

Proposal Number: 0088

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

The project will meet certain goals of CALFED (water quality and ecosystem restoration) and the ERP (protect and restore habitats and improve or maintain water and sediment quality). This project meets three of the five project priorities outlined in the PSP; projects that contribute to understanding the relative effectiveness of different conservation-based farming practices and systems, and their contribution to larger restoration efforts; projects that develop and implement agricultural activities that benefit MSCS-covered species; and projects that facilitate permitting or regulatory assurances that support agricultural activities benefiting MSCS-covered species.

This project will occur in Yolo Basin an identified priority area within the PSP, and in Solano County which is not listed as a priority area. This project will assess significance of 1.5 miles of small stream levee setbacks, two miles of canal revegetation, and creation of up to 10 new or enhanced ponds for Sacramento perch establishment. These activities and how they affect MSCS species will be evaluated. Anadromous fish are not part of this proposal. The levee setback and canal revegetation projects are individual projects; however they will be assessed in terms of how such projects are currently implemented, how to make them more environmentally friendly, and how to reduce implementation costs. These final recommendations will have value in future projects.

The establishment of Safe-harbor agreements, permit coordination, and the incentives layering program will have a significant effect in reducing barriers to farmers

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

implementing conservation efforts. Reducing these barriers will theoretically improve the participation in conservation programs thereby improving habitat quality and quantity, and water quality.

The creation of ponds may expedite Sacramento perch reintroduction into the Central Valley. The ponds would be designed to fit the habitat requirements for perch. In addition, perch will be planted in existing farm ponds and sloughs. The monitoring of their survival and reproduction success will assist in determining the ability to reintroduce the perch into its native habitats. The giant garter snake survey will assist in determining its occupied range within the Central Valley and assess habitat constituents associated with their presence. This information will help advise land managers on snake-friendly procedures to perform maintenance tasks on irrigation and drainage canals.

notes:

The panel supported project's regional/geographic approach.

2. Links with other restoration actions.

Yes. From proposal: "This proposal builds on the capacity developed and lessons learned from the following successfully completed projects funded by the CALFED ERP or Water Use Efficiency Program and implemented in part or in whole by project partners:

- Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program, ERP 98-E13 (Audobon)
- Willow Slough Watershed Rangeland Stewardship program, ERO 01-N31 (Audobon)
- Sustaining Agriculture and Wildlife Beyond the Riparian Corridor, ERP 01-N25 (Yolo RCD)
- Cultivating Watershed Stewardship, ERP 02-P11 (CLBL)
- Educating Farmers and Landowners in Biological Resource Management ERP 01-I213 (California Alliance with Family Farmers, with SRCD)
- CALFED Water Use Efficiency Pilot

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Program with YCRC (2000-2001) • Restoration of the Sacramento perch to the San Francisco Estuary, ERP 02-P34 (UC Davis, Peter Moyle) • Restoring Ecosystem Integrity in Northwest Delta, PHASE II, ERP 02D-P54 (SLT)

All of the Yolo County work supports implementation of needed work identified in the watershed plans developed for Willow Slough (Jones & Stokes, 1996) and Capay Valley (YCRC, 2003)."

The Safe-harbor agreement, permit coordination, and incentive layering program could be used as a model if successful in reducing the barriers faced by farmers, and expedites their conservation efforts. Lessons learned from the implementation of Task 3, levee setback and canal revegetation, could be used for future projects. Task 4.3, Sacramento perch study, may serve as a model for restoration of this population in the Central Valley.

notes:

3. Local circumstances.

Yes, the project is feasible and appropriate to the project site. Lessons learned in Yolo County will be transferred to Solano County.

Many aspects of this proposal are very similar, with many of the same proposed outcomes, as Proposal # 0055, Creating Conservation Partnerships, Research, and Incentives to Benefit Farmers and Ecosystem Restoration in the Sacramento Valley.

The major constraint to timely implementation is lack of agreement from landowners to participate in the program/projects. There are some potential willing participants, but no firm commitments.

notes:

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4. Local involvement.

The project has adequate stakeholder support from the Yolo and Solano Resource Conservation Districts, Audubon California, Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL), NRCS, Solano Land Trust, UC Davis, USGS, and private non-profit researchers. However, as stated above, no landowners have agreed to participate in the program/projects.

There are sufficient public outreach activities in the proposal to keep local stakeholders informed of project implementation and results. The CLBL will participate in a student and landowner education and watershed stewardship (SLEWS) program that will participate in implementation of at least five of the proposed projects. Up to five different high schools will participate. In addition, a detailed conservation outreach plan will be developed. This plan will include six field days per year, three tours, six journal/newspaper articles, a dedicated webpage, and three new conservation technique brochures.

Transfer of information between Yolo County and Solano County includes presentations to groups such as the local irrigation districts, Watershed Groups, and the Jepson Prairie Management Group; "shared problems/shared solutions" workshops or tours; and peer-to-peer networking between individual farmers, irrigation and water districts, and other agricultural interests in Yolo and Solano County. A final document describing the process and results of the Yolo-Solano conservation transfer project will be published.

notes:

The project promotes partnerships and emphasizes outreach.

5. Local value.

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

Establishing Safe-harbor agreements, streamlining permitting, and incentive layering programs will determine whether or not these programs will actually expedite and increase farmer involvement in conservation practices, as well as reduce costs. This has implications Central Valley-wide.

The monitoring of Sacramento perch and giant garter snake will assist in determining the feasibility of creating favorable habitats within the confines of farm operations. This information will be of value within the range of the two species.

The monitoring of the levee setback and canal revegetation projects will determine if the current practices need to be altered in order to promote riparian dependent species habitat such as the giant garter snake but still provide the needed function for farm operation.

notes:

Panel members support the multiple benefits of the project: the proposal includes on the ground improvement, addresses MSCS, and includes a mosquito abatement element.

6. Applicant history.

I have no knowledge of this applicant. However, several of their past proposals were funded by ERP.

notes:

The panel noted that the applicants are known for achieving results on previous projects.

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

The proposal was considered to be strong and cohesive. The project is expensive, but leverages \$1.4 million in additional funding. Numerous agencies are included and coordination between agencies appears to be strong. The proposal appears to have a strong connection to the PSP priorities.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Very Good

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

High

notes:

Environmental Compliance Review

Proposal Number: 0088

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

1. Is compliance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) required for this project?

Yes.

2. Is compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) required for this project?

No.

3. Does this project qualify for an Exemption or Exclusion under CEQA and NEPA, respectively?

Yes.

Comments

If work occurs during work windows.

4. Did the applicant correctly identify if CEQA/NEPA compliance was required?

Yes.

5. Did the applicant correctly identify the correct CEQA/NEPA document required for the project?

No.

Comments:

The applicant is confused about the difference between a cat ex and a neg. dec.

6. Has the CEQA/NEPA document been completed?

No.

7. If the document has not been completed, did the applicant allot enough time to complete the document before the project start date?

No.

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Environmental Compliance Review

8. If the document has not been completed, did the applicant allot enough funds to complete it?

No.

Comments:

unknown, not defined in task.

9. Did the applicant adequately identify other legal or regulatory compliance issues (Incidental Take permits, Scientific Collecting permits, etc.) that may affect the project?

Yes.

Identify those additional permits that may be needed by this project:

1600, 401, Collecting permit.

10. Does the proposal include written permission from the owners of any private property on which project activities are proposed or, if specific locations for project activities are not yet determined, is it likely that permission for access can be obtained?

Yes.

11. Do any of these issues affect the project's feasibility due to significant deficiencies in planning and/or budgeting for legal and regulatory compliance or access to property?

No.

Budget Review

Proposal Number: 0088

Proposal Name: Yolo–Solano Conservation Partnership for Habitat on Working Lands

Applicant Organization: Yolo County Resource Conservation District

1. Does the proposal include a detailed budget for each year of the requested support?

Yes.

2. Does the Budget Form include a detailed budget for each task identified on the Task and Deliverables Form and in the proposal text?

Yes.

3. Are the costs associated with each task and deliverable reasonable costs for performing the services?

Yes.

4. Is each person (employee, consultant, subcontractor, etc.) identified on the Personnel Form also included on the Budget Form?

Yes.

5. Are there estimated hours and an associated hourly rate of compensation for each person identified on the Personnel, Tasks and Deliverables, and Budget forms?

Yes.

6. Does the budget include the benefit rate for all personnel identified on the Personnel and Budget forms?

No.

If no, please explain:

Not all subcontractor personnel identified have a benefit rate applied, other than Yolo RCD benefit rate of 35%.

Budget Review

7. Are the proposed labor rates comparable to state rates?

No.

If no, please explain:

Not enough information to evaluate the rates of subcontractors. Don't agree with 5% annual pay increases, too high. The percentage increase should be total increase including benefit costs not in addition to or on top of any benefit increase.

8. Is more than 25% of the work proposed to be performed by subcontractors?

Yes.

If yes, what is the exact percentage to be performed by subcontractors?

65%

9. Are project management expenses appropriately budgeted?

Yes.

10. Does the proposal clearly state the type of expenses encompassed in indirect rates or overhead costs? Are indirect rates, if used, appropriately applied?

Yes.

11. Does the proposal adequately explain major expenses? Are the labor rates and other charges proposed reasonable in relation to current state rates?

No.

If no, please explain:

No major expenses were identified, it is assumed there were none.

12. For equipment \geq \$5,000, was a separate worksheet filled out?

Please note: No overhead or indirect rate charges are allowed on the equipment purchases

No.

Budget Review

13. Is the purpose for all travel clearly represented in either the proposal itself, or in the Tasks and Deliverable Form?

Please note: Recurring travel costs for a specific task or subtask may be combined into one entry on the Budget Form, but the number of trips and cost for each trip must be clearly represented.

No .

14. Are travel and per diem at rates specified by the California Department of Personnel Administration for similar employees?

No .

15. Are other agencies contributing or likely to contribute a share of the projects? costs?

Yes .

If yes, when sufficient information is available, please total the amount of matching funds likely to be provided:

\$1 , 389 , 338

16. If the applicant identified cost share or matching funds, are they also described in the text of the proposal?

Yes .

17. Does the applicant take exception to the standard grant agreement's terms and conditions? If yes, are the approaches the applicant proposes to address these issues a reasonable starting point for negotiation a grant agreement?

Yes .

18. Are there other budget issues or "red flags" that warrant consideration?

Yes .

If yes, please explain:

State mileage rate is not \$.41/mi (see Solano Land Trust, pg VI-5)

19. Provide revised amount requested based upon your review:

Budget Review

\$

Other comments:

I like the idea of including subcontractor budgets. But, I think they should all be included and the numbers should roll up to the project budget numbers, by task and year.