

November 5, 2001

## Merced River Restoration Plan Merced River Stakeholder Group DRAFT Meeting Minutes

(Click here to review DRAFT [Nov. 5, 2001, Technical Advisory Committee](#) minutes)

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Sam Pipes room of the Merced City Civic Center at 678 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Merced from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m. Fifteen stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties.

The objectives of the meeting were to: (1) discuss the future of the Stakeholder Group, (2) finalize the format for the upcoming public workshop; and (3) begin to prioritize restoration actions included in the Draft Restoration Plan.

### Introductions and Announcements

Teri Murrison (EMRCD) opened the meeting. No announcements were made during the opening.

### Stakeholder Group Future

Teri Murrison distributed a revised memorandum estimating costs to provide staffing assistance to the Merced River Stakeholder Group and led a discussion on future Stakeholder Group activities. The Stakeholder Group approved the budget the Teri provided with some modifications (see below), which includes funding for Teri to coordinate and facilitate the group and funding to maintain a web site (the EMRCD's Department of Conservation Watershed Coordinator grant will fund establishing the site). The Stakeholders clearly stated their desire to be involved in the planning and implementation of restoration projects on the Merced River.

After this meeting, the Stakeholder Group will shift to meeting quarterly rather than monthly. Future quarterly meetings should promote education and information exchange by inviting guest speakers on a variety of subjects, such as biotechnical erosion control, TMDLs, and the state of other watersheds and stakeholder groups. In an effort to meet this objective, Rhonda Reed [CDFG] will revisit various education topics at the Stakeholder Group meetings for the next 6 months.

In addition to the quarterly meetings, four half-day field trips will be arranged for the group. These trips will focus on sharing information on important river features. An example would be a tour of an aggregate mining plant, which would include representatives of the aggregate industry, environmental concerns, and County permitting. Subcommittees will be formed to address specific tasks or issues.

The Stakeholder Group continued to discuss the level of involvement of Stakeholder Group representatives in the public workshop. It was decided that during the presentation period of the workshop, selected Stakeholder Group representatives would briefly introduce themselves and their relationship with the Merced River corridor and explain why they participate in the Stakeholder Group. The following interest areas and potential speakers were identified:

- angling/recreation, Ken Jensen;
- environmental issues, Lydia Miller;

- floodplain aggregate mining, Michelle Langmaid or Terry Howard;
- dredger tailings mining, Bernie Wade;
- Landowners and agriculture, Pat Ferrigno; and
- Merced Irrigation District, Ted Selb

The Stakeholders and Jennifer Vick will follow-up with and confirm potential speakers.

The Stakeholder Group will also have a poster at the public workshop. Stillwater Sciences will draft the language for the poster, and Cathy Weber, Lydia Miller, and Pat Ferrigno will review the draft on behalf of the Stakeholder Group. Stillwater will finalize and produce the poster for the group.

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) reviewed the filters and project selection criteria developed by the Technical Advisory Committee (see attached prioritization criteria). The Stakeholder Group added several criteria to the list (see attached). Project selection will continue at the next meeting.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next Stakeholder Group meeting will be held on January 7, 2002 from 6:30–9:00 p.m. Agenda items will include (1) review of the November 17, 2001 public workshop; (2) a presentation by Gwen Huff on the Coalition for Family Farmers; (3) a presentation by Abigail Smith on water quality issues and the TMDL process; and (4) development of five top-priority restoration actions.

October 15, 2001

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Cooperative Extension Conference Room at 2145 Wardrobe Avenue, Merced from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Twenty three stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties.

The objectives of the meeting were to: (1) receive comments to the Draft Restoration Plan; (2) continue discussion of Stakeholder Group vision and future function; (3) discuss support services available through the East Merced Resource Conservation District; and (4) schedule the date and location of the next public workshop.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Ted Selb [Merced ID] announced the beginning of Fall 2001 pulse flows on the Merced River. Flows will reach approximately 700 cfs for approximately 12 days and will be 400–450 cfs through December for spawning maintenance flows. Approximately 25,000 acre-feet of water will be sold to CDWR's Environmental Water Account and exported at CVP/SWP for refuge use.
2. Marsh Pitman [Sierra Club] announced a Merced Group Sierra Club meeting on Thursday, October 18, 2001 at 7:30. The meeting will address the Merced River 50 years from now. Friends of the Tuolumne and the Farmland Working Group will be in attendance.
3. Ted Selb [Merced ID] announced that the Merced Area Groundwater Pool Interest, of which Merced ID is a member, is seeking funds (approximately \$7 million) through Proposition 13 for a conjunctive use program for converting groundwater wells to surface water. A Stakeholder Group will be formed as part of the program. To be on the mailing list, contact Ted.

#### Comments to the Draft Restoration Plan

The following comments were made during the meeting regarding the Draft Restoration Plan.

- Concrete revetment cannot be removed, because it is needed for bank protection. Vegetation isn't sufficient to hold banks in place. This is especially true on river bends. As a result of the 1951 flood, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers told landowners to protect banks with rubble. [Rhonda Reed suggested that they invite a speaker to an upcoming Stakeholder Group meeting to discuss bank revetment and biotechnical erosion control methods.]
- On page 4-7 (Geomorphologic Characteristics), strike "irrigation ditches." Sloughs are equivalent to drains.
- What if biotechnical erosion control fails? Who is responsible? Downstream effects must be addressed, and the public should be involved in the review of those effects.
- The Stakeholder Group wants to be involved in the review and oversight of implemented restoration projects. This could be an important role for the Stakeholder Group in the future.
- Large floods must be considered when designing and implementing bank erosion projects.
- On page 3-10, pumping diversions are also present above Shaffer Bridge.
- Regarding the overarching goals: "in the river" should be changed to "in the Merced River Corridor".
- On page 4-5, "six" diversions should be changed to "seven".
- If water quality sampling is done, aggregate mining operations and dairy operators want to participate in the study design.

- Through a watershed coordinator grant, Teri Murrison could develop an advisory committee to look at the feasibility of water quality monitoring.
- Landowners want to be involved in determining the effects of runoff and sediment from Dry Creek. This action should be done through the Stakeholder Group.
- A Stakeholder Group website is needed. Pat Ferrigno will provide a website contact to Teri Murrison.
- Another recommended action should be added: "Stakeholder Group continues to support/oversee project implementation and communication within the community." The group website could be a tool in implementing this action

#### Continued Discussion of Stakeholder Group Role

Teri Murrison led a group exercise to review the Stakeholder Group's history and accomplishments.

Rhonda Reed announced that \$16,000 is available through the EMRCD to fund Stakeholder Group activities. Funds could be used for supporting the Landowner Group and coordinating meetings.

Teri Murrison distributed a proposed Stakeholder Group coordination budget and asked for comments. Pat Ferrigno commented that hours for polling landowners should not be included in the budget; this has already been done. Lydia Miller commented that the production of a newsletter should not be included in the budget since it is so expensive. Sticking to the website should be adequate and less expensive. Stakeholders will review the budget and will decide on the expenditure of funds at the next meeting (in November).

#### Public Workshop Format

The public workshop was scheduled for the afternoon of Saturday, November 17, and it will be held at the Washington School in Winton.

The Stakeholder Group suggested inviting the following groups/people to the public workshop: legislators, city council members, representatives, Farm Bureau, California Women for Agriculture, schools, news sources, city and county chambers of commerce, and the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs.

The Stakeholder Group decided that representatives of each stakeholder interest group should be involved in the public workshop presentation and explain why they participate. Michelle Langmaid and Terry Howard could represent aggregate mining; Ray and Ray Gene Veldhuis and Henry TeVelde could represent dairies, and Lloyd Perrera could represent orchards.

In addition to the workshop, the group discussed the need for broader, more aggressive outreach to legislators, funders, and local groups.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next Stakeholder Group meeting will be held on November 5, 2001 from 6:30–9:00 p.m.. Agenda items will include the development of a Stakeholder Group website, further review of the proposed Stakeholder Group-coordination budget, and the public workshop format.

September 17, 2001

The meeting was held at the USDA Agriculture Extension Office, 2145 Wardrobe Ave., Merced, CA 95340. There were approximately 25 stakeholders in attendance. The meeting began at 6:40 p.m. Rhonda Reed discussed the agenda and asked if there were any announcements. Bill Nicholson, Merced County Planning Director, announced that the Draft MRZ and Negative Declaration for Merced County will be distributed next week and mailed to all who commented on the documents. Further, CALFED has extended the deadline for this program until Oct. 5, 2001.

1. Ratzlaff Site Visit Randy Mager, DWR

Randy Mager, DWR, Rhonda Reed, CDFG, Jen Vick, Stillwater Sciences, Lydia Miller, San Joaquin Raptor Center, Joe Mitchell, public stakeholder, and Cindy Lashbrook, landowner, visited the Ratzlaff Restoration Project at the request of the Ratzlaff family to investigate the potential causes of vegetation die-off in the project area.

Randy reported that they will get an arborist to look at the die-off, but it appeared that at least one of the Oak trees may have had shallow roots because of its proximity to the river (before it was diverted) and it may have also been inadvertently damaged during construction.

The landowners have also reduced watering frequency to some vegetation on the bluff above an area of die-off. The Ratzlaffs disputed that frequency of irrigation contributes to die-off there. Randy said he still wants to check the water table data and asked the group for input and suggestions. Discussion followed on the condition of vegetation along the river in general.

Jill Ratzlaff commented that she is very concerned about the fire danger below the bluff.

2. Discussion of Proposed CALFED Funding Requests

- Bob Acker, Merced Irrigation District, Temperature Study and Gravel Introductions – As presented by Rhonda Reed, his proposal would place monitoring devices in the reservoirs to determine water temperatures. This information would be used as a tool to put cooler water in the river in the summer to benefit the fish. In addition, MID will request funding to place wing dams in the river.
  - Rich Lunden, Wondinja Institute, Mercury Evaluations – This proposal would put in 400 test holes over a 10 mile stretch of the river (from the upper tailings to the 59 Highway) to sample for the presence of mercury in the upper and some lower gravel tailings. Participation in this testing will be voluntary. Focus: 1. Find out heavy metal (mercury and other heavy metals) content in coarse materials; 2. What is nature of aggregate in the tailings (to see if their mining would pay to cover some of the revegetation); and 3. Testing for nitrates and organo-phosphates... Deep sub-surface materials (at bedrock) would also be tested. At request of Yokut/Miwok tribes, this proposal would also document traditional native cultural sites within the gravel tailings and undisturbed areas so as not to disturb them. Public input will also be solicited during the project.
- Revere and Associates, putting in a proposal to monitor waterfowl.
- Gwen Huff, Community Alliance of Family Farmers – Funded for Merced Creek and Putah Creek to reduce pesticide use, watershed fairs, and sediment reduction, possibly in Dry Creek.
- Jennifer Vick, Stillwater Sciences, 3-year Dredger Tailings Reach Project, Phase 1 - Demonstration on Merced River Ranch (318 acres) – proposed project with CDFG. Dredger tailings reach project to excavate a flood plain (60 acres of restoration next to the river) and examine tailings to see if they can be used to add gravel back into the river (size, texture, vertical and horizontal distribution of mercury). USGS, UC Davis, and University of Minnesota will also participate in evaluation of presence and potential migration of mercury in the dredger tailings. Monitoring includes vegetation and wildlife surveys, etc.

3. Distribute Draft Restoration Plan ,Jennifer Vick

Hard copy and CD copies of the draft Restoration Plan were distributed to the stakeholders. Jennifer thanked the stakeholders for their significant input and asked them to review the documents and comment to her before October 22, 2001. A public workshop will be scheduled to follow in November and the plan will be finalized in December of 2001.

Rhonda discussed a request from a stakeholder not to distribute sign in sheets from prior meetings. It was the consensus of the group that signing the sign in sheet was voluntary and that the sheets should be distributed because the MRS meetings are public. She also distributed a list of Technical Advisory Committees and members from early on in the process in response to a request from a stakeholder at the July 30<sup>th</sup> meeting.

4. Vision Statement Development, Rhonda Reed

Process for Merced River Stakeholders Group

Rhonda asked stakeholders for their visions of the river in the next 20 years. Mentioned were:

- more habitat and river restoration to usable channels;
- riparian restoration to resemble circa 1930 era on the river;
- the river is acceptable as it is today – agricultural presence maintained vs. “wild”, would like to see it left alone;
- healthy, non-polluted river, farmland stays in farmland; intervention to save suffering Oaks (channels to divert some water to them);
- Reach 1 to G St. bridge in public access – maintain wildlife zones and also have public access corridor – population increase will demand more recreation, restore fish population, no housing in that reach – save it for wildlife and public recreation access;

Rhonda discussed a range of options for the future of the Merced River and asked stakeholders and if they thought it would be valuable to conceptualize the future of stakeholder property and the river. Population growth and sprawl, water supply to serve future growth, access vs. “protection,” of concern to stakeholders.

5. Set Next Meeting and Agenda Items - The next MRS meeting will be held on Monday, October 15, 2001, location TBA. Agenda items will include a discussion of specific tasks and comments on the Draft Restoration Plan.

August 13, 2001

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Cooperative Extension Conference Room at 2145 Wardrobe Avenue, Merced from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Sixteen stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties.

The objective of the meeting was to continue reviewing potential restoration projects to be implemented in the Encroached and Confluence reaches of the river.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Jennifer Vick announced that the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program's Proposal Solicitation Package is available and would be presented at the next meeting. A workshop sponsored by CALFED will be held on August 27 in Merced to answer questions regarding the Proposal Solicitation Packages.
2. Jennifer Vick announced that the upcoming CDFG-sponsored Stakeholder Group meeting will be rescheduled from August 27 to September 17 from 6:30–9:00.
3. Teri Murrison announced that UC–Davis will be conducting academic reviews of 80 Stakeholder Groups in Washington and California. Chris Wiebel will attend the October meeting and present and distribute questionnaires.
4. Madelyn Martinez (National Marine Fisheries Service) announced that there is currently \$100,000–\$150,000 available in California related to steelhead. She can provide more information if needed.

Joe Mitchell recommended that TAC meeting announcements also be sent to the Stakeholder Group.

#### Stakeholder Group Organization

Jill and Esther Ratzlaff stated that they are concerned regarding the die-off of large valley oak trees on their property following construction of the CDFG–CDWR restoration project there and felt that the agencies hadn't followed-up with them sufficiently. Randy Mager (CDWR) offered to coordinate a field meeting with CDFG and CDWR staff and the Ratzlaff family to evaluate probable causes of the die-off. They will report back to the Stakeholder Group at the next meeting.

The issue of agency turnover regarding the leadership of the Stakeholder Group was discussed. Some stakeholders feel that turnover in personnel at CDFG and CDWR has degraded monitoring and project follow-up at restoration sites on the Merced River. Some stakeholders feel that a Rivertender or Riverkeeper could help provide oversight of conditions in the river. Also, some participants pointed out that a unified Stakeholder Group can play a role in overseeing agency actions in the river and can encourage adequate follow-through.

#### Review of Potential Restoration Projects

Reach-specific restoration actions for the Encroached and Confluence reaches were reviewed during the meeting. An initial list of projects that was reviewed and revised by the TAC at the July 12 meeting was distributed (see attached).

In addition to the actions identified on the attached list, the Stakeholder Group identified the following actions or concerns to be considered for restoration in the Encroached and Confluence reaches and for inclusion in the Restoration Plan:

- Unanticipated effects of restoration projects on vegetation and wildlife need to be considered.
- Local groundwater characteristics and irrigation return flows affect the amount of vegetation in the river corridor, but there is currently a lack of understanding of these issues. Local groundwater and the effects of irrigation return flows need to be studied.
- Conservation of agricultural land uses should be included in the Restoration Plan. It was noted during the meeting that agricultural lands, especially alfalfa, can provide wildlife habitat for species such as hawks and geese.
- Riparian buffer zones should also be established on higher banks, not just adjacent to the river channel.
- Back-water effects of the San Joaquin River need to be assessed before restoration projects are implemented in the Confluence Reach.
- The effects of development on runoff rates is currently not well understood in the Merced River corridor. It is possible that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is assessing this issue. Jerry Ripperda (CDWR) commented that increased runoff from developed areas does not have much of an effect in large rivers because most of the water comes from the upper watershed.
- The removal of bank revetment material should not be done carelessly. Some revetment is vegetated and needed for erosion control.
- Mechanisms to address damage to property and agriculture due to floods should be identified. Lands affected by the Mississippi may already have many such mechanisms available, and could be investigated.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next Stakeholder Group meeting to deliver the draft Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan will be held on September 17, 2001 from 6:30–9:00 p.m.

July 30, 2001

The meeting was held at the Merced County Farm Bureau,

Meeting objective: to review stakeholder accomplishments and discuss if there's a need to continue working as a group past the end of the restoration project planning phase. If the need is identified, what are the issues the stakeholders should consider in proceeding as a group.

Rhonda Reed gave an overview of the Anadromous Fish Program in watersheds in general and the Merced River restoration plan/history of Merced River Stakeholders group over the past 3 years. Original agencies included CDFG, Merced Irrigation District, and Merced County. MRS was formed to incorporate public input into the restoration process.

So far there have been 2 processes:

1. Restoration project: Focus - what has the restoration plan been?
2. Stakeholders process: what the stakeholders want for their river – their vision for the Merced

History:

- December 1998 – 1<sup>st</sup> community meeting
- Facilitator discontinued: summer 2000
- Stillwater – began facilitating, project to be finalized in December 2001, Stillwater not seeking to continue facilitating the Stakeholder process past the completion of the restoration project;
- June MRS Meeting – need identified to chart course for stakeholders process – including self-governance and decision-making process, endorsement of watershed proposals, etc.

Rhonda's Questions: Is there a reason for group to continue? If so, under what structure? The group discussed a number of options, from an all volunteer organization to contracting for staffing services.

Rhonda presented several examples of watershed group structures that are currently successful:

1. Examples of watershed group structures
  - a. Sacramento River Conservation Area (Burt Bundy), formed as result of legislative mandate – plan to conserve floodway meander belt and \_\_\_\_\_, 7 counties, variety of agencies represented, etc. ( diagram distributed). NPO has 15 voting members (2 from each county – 1 is a landowner, the other is appointed by Board of Supervisors, the 15<sup>th</sup> appointed by Secretary of Resources) and 6 ex-officio (non-voting) members,
  - b. MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) ties group together and includes timber interests, recreation, forests, public, etc., all members have vote, 100% consensus, (see attached handout). Created American River Management Institute (nonprofit org.) to implement MOU group's vision, etc. Also have agency group.
  - c. Panoche/Silver Creek CRMP (Coordinated Resource Management and Planning), Bylaws attached – official program to help watersheds solve problems, Nettie Drake, Watershed Coordinator. Problems driving its formation – lack of communication between landowners, etc. Steering Committee

elects chair and determines what gets done, consensus is 50% + 1, elects planning committee to provide technical assistance. Paid coordinator/staff person to carry out tasks and facilitate communication (including quarterly newsletter, minutes, press releases, etc.).

d. Glen Canyon Management Program – federal program precipitated by dam project, science emphasis on what an agency is doing, communication process,

After some discussion, the following questions were raised by stakeholders: Why aren't stakeholders included in technical advisory group? Do we need a technical group? Is the MRS going to be tied in with the NCCP/HCP process and should we?

Rhonda noted the following opportunities for MRS to consider in next few months:

1. \$30K US FWS grant to EMRCD to facilitate MRS,
2. Department of Conservation Watershed Coordinator program funding for EMRCD through June 2002 that could be utilized to coordinate some group communication/tasks
2. Decision-Making Procedures

Rhonda posed the following issues to be considered by stakeholders group if they want to adopt a more "formalized" structure:

Votes Who votes and how carried? Votes of all members or only those present? What is a quorum – how many must be present to decide an issue?

- Majority (50%+1), super-majority (2/3, etc.), Consensus – 100% agreement?
- All agree to support, even if not preferred choice?
- Nonobjecting: all agree to support, or not object (can live with decision)?

Ruling board - Who represents and how are they elected and nominated? Are they truly representative?

Communication Tools - What are effective tools? What? Who needs to know? (from Nettie Drake):

1. personal contact
2. newsletter
3. regular meetings
4. minutes
5. sub-group meetings
6. information

More Questions:

1. Any of these options require funding and staff - how will they be funded?

Stakeholder Observations:

- a. Need for agreement of commitment to participate on regular basis,
- b. Proper notice of meetings (agenda, minutes, etc.) might improve participation,
- c. Maybe determine what the group wants to do first
- d. \$16k doesn't go very far – we need money
- e. Has to be someone who can write grants

- f. You need a neutral party to facilitate/objective
- g. American River model (with AR Management Institute) appears to give all authority to the Management Institute – I don't like that.

### 3. Set Next Meeting & Agenda Items

The next meeting will be held on Monday, August 13, 2001 from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. The agenda will be as follows:

1. Visioning - consider longevity of group

Homework: What is your vision for the Merced River in 50 years? What is your vision for the MRS (in the next 50 years?)?

2. Needs? If there is a reason to continue to meet, what do we need to do it?

Comments:

We are a watershed - everything that goes into the watershed is related to the river and the mission statement should reflect a definition of that.

I'd like to get clarification on the NCCP/HCP issue and how it affects what we're doing here. Rhonda identified this as a "parking lot" issue – "Can we leave it there and come back and get it later?"

Can we get a list of projects being done on the River? How about the bonds?

July 16, 2001

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Cooperative Extension Conference Room at 2145 Wardrobe Avenue, Merced from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Sixteen stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties. The sign-up sheet for the meeting is attached.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Rhonda Reed announced that the June 17, 2001 edition of the Merced Sun-star featured a front-page article on UC-Merced's outreach program to Merced City schools and environmental education program with Italian foreign exchange students.
2. Jennifer Vick announced that the Merced River Technical Advisory Committee met on July 12, 2001 and reviewed what had been discussed at the meeting.

#### Review of Potential Restoration Projects

Potential river-wide restoration actions, as well as reach-specific actions for the Dredger Tailings, Gravel Mining 1, and Gravel Mining 2 reaches were reviewed during the meeting. An initial list of projects that was reviewed and revised by the TAC at the July 12 meeting was distributed (see attached).

In addition to the actions identified on the attached list, the Stakeholder Group identified the following river-wide and reach-specific actions to be included in or addressed by the Restoration Plan:

#### River-wide:

- Review current State actions on NPDES (point-source discharge) permits.
- Preserve the existing wilderness areas along the corridor.
- Recommend riparian buffer widths for aggregate mining.
- Be aware of unintended effects of restoration actions on landowners and conflicts between restoration actions and target species.
- Consider wildfire danger in preservation areas.

#### Dredger Tailings Reach

- Consider the historic current number of spawning riffles in the reach.
- Consider how hatchery operations affect the salmon run.
- Consider whether it is possible to increase spawning habitat by creating multiple river channel, rather than a single channel.
- Consider whether pulse flows provided for upstream migration of salmon are sufficient.
- Consider the value that eucalyptus currently provides for wildlife. Eucalyptus may, for example, provide habitat for a variety of bird species. Where farmers need to plant eucalyptus for wind-breaks or other uses, it may be possible to use a species that is not invasive, such as red river eucalyptus. Consider phasing eucalyptus out rather than immediate eradication.
- Consider the nuisance effects of cottonwoods, such as the need to clean air-borne seeds from window screens.
- Establishing a Riverkeeper could be a useful way to monitor river conditions.

- Water hyacinth control and eradication is a major issue for fish and wildlife as well as for farmers. A recent court decision has hindered CDFG's ability to spray for hyacinth. Rhonda Reed will check with CDFG and report back on the current status of hyacinth control planning.
- The effects of Montgomery Reservoir on Dry Creek need to be better understood and explained in the plan.
- One of the most important issues affecting the valley is population growth and associated development and pollution, including non-point source pollution to the river. It was noted that the Stakeholder Group can provide a unified, community-level voice to protect the river from future threats such as those discussed above.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

Rhonda Reed announced that a meeting to discuss the future functioning and role of the Stakeholder Group is scheduled for July 30, 2001. The next Stakeholder Group meeting to continue the discussion of restoration actions will be held on August 13, 2001 from 6:30–9:00 p.m..

June 14, 2001

Merced River Restoration Plan  
Stakeholder Group  
Final Meeting Minutes

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Cooperative Extension Conference Room at 2145 Wardrobe Avenue, Merced from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Twenty stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties. The sign-up sheet for the meeting is attached.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- (1) review prioritization matrix for potential restoration projects;
- (2) review schedule for completing the Merced River Restoration Plan; and
- (3) review draft Restoration Plan outline and example plans.

Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Rhonda Reed announced the availability of CDFG funding for Stakeholder Group activities. She added that it is time to revisit the facilitation of the group and to discuss the group's role in the watershed in the future after the Restoration Plan is complete.
2. Cindy Lashbrook announced that the Heartland Conference, hosted by the Ecological Farming Association, is scheduled for June 30 to July 1, 2001.
3. Jennifer Vick announced that the proposals submitted to CALFED were not funded under the Watershed Program. The Stakeholder Group will be receiving feedback from the Watershed Program and may be able to resubmit the proposals to CALFED's Ecosystem Restoration Program.
4. One stakeholder questioned whether anything has been accomplished by this process so far. The group responded that the process has raised consciousness of the river, built relationships between stakeholders from different interest groups, and has completed baseline studies.

Mineral Resource Policy General Plan Amendment Update

Bill Nicholson (Merced County Planning and Community Development) updated the group on the amendment of the Merced County General Plan to include mineral resource recommendations of the California Department of Conservation Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) Mineral Resources Classification report. The CDMG mapped the mineral resources of Merced County. By state law, the County must amend the general plan to:

- recognize mineral information classified by CDMG;

- assist in the management of land uses which affect areas of statewide and regional mineral resource significance;
- emphasize the conservation and development of identified mineral deposits; and
- incorporate information and maps provided by the mineral classification report into the General Plan.

Mineral resources in eastern Merced County are located primarily along the Merced River. In western Merced County, mineral resources are most prevalent around the Los Banos area. Available permitted supplies of mineral resources in the westside of the County are adequate to meet demand, but the eastside has only 2–3 years supply of permitted mining operations. New mining permits require about two years for approval. The County, therefore, must begin to identify additional resources.

A public process is being implemented as part of the General Plan amendment process and includes a series of public workshops and hearings. To date, there have been three public workshops, which have focused on prime agricultural lands. The next step in the amendment process is to develop a list of alternative policies. This list will be presented at a public workshop at the end of July, will undergo environmental review, and then will be presented through a public hearing process at the County Board of Supervisors.

The following questions and answers followed Bill’s presentation:

- How many meetings will there be in July [Art Hardin]? Probably three meetings all near the end of July [Bill].
- Can we make comments to the amendment now [Art Hardin]? Yes, by the 1<sup>st</sup> week of July [Bill].

#### Review of Draft Restoration Plan Outline and Example Plans

Jennifer Vick distributed outlines from two recent restoration plans that have been developed in the Central Valley: the Tuolumne River Restoration Plan (McBain and Trush 2000) and the Sacramento River Riparian Restoration Handbook (Sacramento River Advisory Council 2000). These plans are very different in their level of detail and content. The Tuolumne Plan is very detailed and contains extensive technical analyses. The Sacramento Handbook is more general in the information presented, contains more information on land use and stakeholder issues, and is targeted toward a less technical audience. Jennifer proposed that the Merced plan be developed as a hybrid of these approaches. She recommended that the Merced Plan be targeted toward an informed public (rather than a technical audience) and refer to the detailed technical reports that have been produced during the baseline studies process. In addition, the plan will identify both broad conceptual projects that can be implemented (e.g., develop a public outreach program through existing institutions and agencies) as well as site-specific restoration actions.

Rhonda Reed recommended changing the “Agency Contacts” section to a “List of Resources” and include information on conservancies, RCD programs, etc. Also, change “High Priority Action” to “Recommended Actions”.

#### Review of Proposed Prioritization Matrix

Jennifer Vick distributed a proposed prioritization matrix. The purpose of this matrix is to provide a means of comparing projects and identifying the highest priority actions to be implemented under the plan. Stakeholders felt that a prioritization was not necessary and that the ranking, despite the matrix, would still be objective. As an alternative, the group decided to revise the prioritization criteria (as indicated below) and use the criteria as a general checklist rather than a prioritization matrix. Also, the plan should include a narrative description of how each project meets or does not meet these criteria. The evaluation should be

approached as a general comparison of projects and how they meet or do not meet objectives. It should not become a cumbersome ranking process, which may not prove to be useful.

The following criteria should be added to the list:

Does the project ...

- generate revenue to the County (i.e., through recreational revenue)?
- provide flood management benefits?
- utilize a watershed approach?
- address water quality concerns (include point sources and non-point sources)?

Another criteria that should be considered is whether there is a project in each of the five reaches.

Miscellaneous

Pat Ferigno expressed concerns regarding who gets to use the Stakeholder Group name. She felt that it was inappropriate that the Stakeholder Group was identified as an applicant in one of the CALFED watershed proposals but had actually had little involvement in developing the proposal. The group agreed that this is a concern and could likely arise again in future projects. This discussion was tabled until the July 30 meeting.

Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting is scheduled for July 16, 2001 6:30–9:00 p.m.. The objective of the meeting will be to review restoration actions to be included in the draft plan.

An additional meeting will be held July 30 to discuss future facilitation and direction of the Stakeholder Group. Jennifer Vick will not be present at this meeting. The meeting will be coordinated and facilitated by Rhonda Reed, California Department of Fish and Game.

April 30, 2001

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Board of Supervisor's chambers at 2222 M Street, Merced from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Seventeen stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties. The sign-up sheet for the meeting is attached.

1. Learn about conservation easement opportunities from Malia Ortiz of NRCS;
2. get an update on the WOW field trip;
3. follow up on the April 21, 2001 public workshop; and
4. discuss topic issues identified at the April 2 meeting.

#### Introductions and Announcements

1. Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:
  2. Chris Robinson announced that two full proposals had been submitted by the Stakeholder Group to CALFED for funding. The proposals were for the Lower Merced River Water Quality Baseline Assessment and the Merced River Education Initiative.
  3. Jack Uren handed out Chapter 10 of the California Public Resources Code, which describes the Urban American River Parkway Preservation Act.
4. Jennifer Vick distributed the final Volume 1: Identification of Social, Institutional, and Infrastructural Opportunities and Constraints report and Volume II: Baseline Evaluations; Geomorphic and Riparian Vegetation Investigations report.

#### Presentation by Malia Ortiz (NRCS)

Malia Ortiz described several conservation easement programs offered through the USDA, including the Farmland Protection Program (FPP), the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and the Floodplain Easement Program (FEP).

The FPP provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural use. The FPP provides up to 50% of the fair market easement value to combine with existing State, Tribal, or local government acquisition programs. To qualify for FPP funding the farmland must: be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe, or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan in place; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services; and have surrounding parcels that can support long-term agricultural production.

The WRP is a voluntary program to restore and protect wetlands on private property and is an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal agricultural land. Through the WRP, landowners voluntarily limit future use of the land, yet retain private ownership, and may sell a conservation easement or enter into a cost-share restoration agreement with USDA to restore and protect wetlands. Once an agreement or easement is entered into, the landowner and NRCS develop a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the wetland. Land eligible for the WRP must have a high likelihood of successful restoration of wetland functions and values for waterfowl and other wetland dependent species, and 50% of the land offering must have hydric soils and have an agricultural history. Other eligible lands include: farmed wetlands, prior converted cropland, farmed wetland pasture, land substantially altered by flooding, riparian areas which link protected wetlands, and some commenced conversion wetlands. Wetlands converted after December 23, 1985 are not eligible for the WRP.

The WRP offers the landowner three options: a Permanent Easement, a 30-year Easement, or a Restoration Cost-share Agreement. The Permanent Easement is a conservation easement in perpetuity. The easement payment is the lesser of the agricultural value of the land, an established payment cap (\$2,000/acre), or an amount offered by the landowner. USDA pays 100% of restoration and miscellaneous costs. The 30-Year Easement lasts 30 years and pays 75% of what would be paid for a permanent easement. USDA pays 75% of the restoration costs and 100% of miscellaneous costs. To be eligible for conservation easements, the landowner must have owned the land for at least one year prior to enrolling the land in the program. Restoration Cost-share agreements are for a minimum of 10 years to reestablish degraded or lost wetland habitat. No easement is placed on the property, and the landowner provides the restoration site without reimbursement. USDA pays 75% of the cost of the restoration activity. To be eligible for a cost-share agreement, the landowner must show evidence of ownership.

The FEP is part of the Emergency Watershed Protection Program and was authorized for agricultural lands in the 1996 Farm Bill. Landowners can enter into a floodplain easement if the land has had a history of flooding within the past year or a history of repeated flood damage, a history of agricultural use, and the landowner can provide clear title to the property. Only a permanent easement is offered through the FEP, and once entered into, the land is no longer eligible for future federal disaster assistance. In California, only one category of easement is available, with some compatible uses such as haying, grazing, and timber harvest allowed on lands under easement. This category pertains to floodplain lands that are considered to be at high risk due to the likelihood of frequent flooding.

The NRCS funds up to 100% of agricultural value of the land used for floodplain easements, to restore wetland functions and values, and of the cost of establishing the easement. NRCS looks for partners, such as the American Farmland Trust, USFWS, TNC, and Ducks Unlimited, to help offset NRCS costs.

#### Wild-on-Watersheds Merced River Tour

Lydia Miller presented the Wild-on-Watersheds Merced River Tour, which will be held on May 16, 2001 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.. The goal of the tour is to raise the level of watershed awareness among legislators and decision makers. 130 invitations were sent out, although attendance will be capped at 60 participants. On the tour, Diedre Kelsey (EMRCD) will present the opening welcome and introduction, with Glenda Umeston will be the keynote speaker. Tour stop sites are still being developed. Lunch will be held at the Bettencourt property. Co-sponsors include the California Association of RCDs, San Joaquin Valley Conservancy, Merced River Stakeholder Group, WOW, and others. UMPOG is providing music, CDFG will provide a video of the tour, USFWS will be providing the program brochure, and Bettencourt Ranch, CMI, and Santa Fe Aggregates are providing breakfast and lunch.

#### Discussion of the Water Supply Management Plan

Ted Selb provided a review of the Water Supply Management Plan update. The original plan was adopted in 1995. The update, which began in 2000 is being prepared by the City of Merced, Merced ID, and UC-Merced and their consultant, CH2MHill. The City of Merced is dependent on groundwater for its municipal supply, but regional groundwater use has resulted in substantial declines in water table elevation. North of the Merced River (in the Eastside Water District) groundwater has declined 60–80 feet from historic levels. The draft update will be presented to the Merced County Board of Supervisors in July 2001.

The update focuses on developing Conjunctive Use Program alternatives to prevent further decline and/or reverse historical declines in regional groundwater tables. The goal of the plan is to maintain groundwater at 1999 elevations. Measures identified in plan alternatives thus far include promoting surface water sales from Merced ID during years when excess water is available for intentional groundwater recharge, providing subsidies to growers to switch from groundwater to surface water, increasing efficiency in the Merced ID delivery system to reduce the time required to meet water orders, and other measures.

The plan also addresses the effects of the University of California–Merced (UC–Merced) campus on water supply. The campus is expected to have a negligible effect on water demand. The UC–Merced campus is expected to comprise 1% of the total project water demand for the year 2040. Projected 2040 water demand is shown in the table below.

Demand Category	Projected 2040 Demand (1,000s acre-feet)
Urban	118
Agricultural	
-- inside Merced ID	384
-- outside of Merced ID	658
TOTAL	1,160
UC–Merced	9–12 (<1% of total)

The following are questions from Ted Selb’s presentation:

- Would the reservoir be drained for hydropower? No, the facility is for irrigation. PGE generates energy as compatible with irrigation flows, not vice versa [Ted Selb].
- What is the purpose of the Eastside Canal? To deliver water from Folsom Reservoir via Eastern foothills to San Joaquin River and drop water into eastside tributaries [Ted Selb].

Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting is scheduled for June 14, 2001 6:30–9:00 p.m.. Agenda items will include the following:

- Restoration project prioritization

April 2, 2001

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Sam Pipes Room of the Merced Civic Center at 678 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Thirty-four stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties.

The objective of the meeting was to learn about ongoing restoration projects on the Tuolumne River and conservation easement opportunities on the Merced River from presentations by three speakers, and to discuss the location of the April 21, 2001 public workshop.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Lydia Miller announced that the date of the Wild on Watersheds tour of the Merced River is being changed to Wednesday May 16, 2001. Lydia also asked the Stakeholder Group if they would object to using \$500 to hire students from Modesto Junior College to videotape the tour; there were no negative votes.
2. Jon Kelsey thanked the Bettencourt family and CMI for providing food and the reception for the Wild on Watersheds tour.
3. Students from California State University of Fresno who are working with CDFG on the Merced River Ranch property distributed a questionnaire to members of the Stakeholder Group.
4. Jon Kelsey announced that the East Merced RCD has officially hired Teri Murrison as its watershed coordinator.
5. Rebecca Fawver (CALFED) announced that CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program's annual solicitation will be distributed in late April or early May.

#### Public Workshop

The group discussed potential locations for the April 21 public workshop. At the March 5th meeting, the group decided to have the workshop on the river at Henderson Park. Stillwater (Jennifer Vick and Zoey Diggory) checked the facilities at the park and felt that they could not accommodate the workshop, particularly if the weather was bad, and proposed having the workshop at the Multicultural Center in Merced. In addition to more appropriate space, the Merced location may provide better access to the workshop for the broader public, who may not be represented in the Stakeholder Group meetings. The majority of the group preferred a river location (the vote was 8 to 4), but in the end decided that the Merced location was appropriate and acceptable.

#### Presentation by Wilton Fryer (Turlock Irrigation District)

Wilton Fryer presented restoration projects that are currently being implemented on the Tuolumne River. The following are questions and answers from the presentation:

- What if there are no willing sellers [Pat Ferrigno]? The projects couldn't go forward [Wilton Fryer].
- Flooding can be caused by encroachment into the flood pool. Flood control rules are often not followed [Joe Mendes].

- Could TID condemn private property; what if a miner elects not to participate [John Hardin]? EID would not condemn private property, but condemnation can be used as a tax advantage to a willing seller [Wilton Fryer].
- Where is fill being imported from [Joe Mitchell]? From lands with aggregate permits. TID is trying to use lower grade material to not have such an impact on county aggregate supplies [Wilton Fryer].
- Why didn't the miners repair the damage to the river rather than taxpayers [Joe Mitchell]? The miners met reclamation standards of the time [Wilton Fryer].
- Is there a multiple use element in FERC licensing? The rainbow trout fishery was big in the 1960's, but now there are few rainbow trout left in the Tuolumne River. [Ken Jensen]? One reason for high summer flows is boating and fishing [Wilton Fryer].

Presentation by Randy Riviere (Riviere and Associates)

Randy Riviere presented the ongoing easement process at the Stevinson Corporation property and other easement opportunities. Urban encroachment and population growth have increased the need for easement programs. Land resources can be protected through fee title purchase and conservation easements. Easements are a great form of land protection, with the landowner staying on the land and the land remaining on tax rolls. An example is an agricultural easement on Joseph Gallo Farm property, which supports the growth of wildlife-compatible crops and exemplifies the value of agriculture as a buffer between wildlife areas and urban and suburban development.

The Stevinson Corporation has owned 5 miles along the Merced River and 18 miles along the San Joaquin River since 1852. The Kelley family, who owns and operates the Stevinson Corp., are interested in placing approximately 9,000 acres of their property in conservation easements. The strategy for acquiring easements is multifaceted. A 1,200-acre portion of the Kelley landholdings, which is within the National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) acquisition boundary, is being placed under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) conservation easement. 1,400 acres of the property is currently being placed under easement through the NRCS Floodplain Easement Program. The remaining Stevinson acreage will be protected through programs yet to be identified.

Conservation easements can be very different. The easements under the FWS prohibit development on the property without permission, but pay the property owner about half the value of the land in a lump sum. NRCS easements are more restrictive, but the owner is paid approximately 100% of the highest agricultural value of the land. Easements outside of the FWS and NRCS jurisdiction could be coordinated with CDFG, The Nature Conservancy, or others. If a landowner is interested in easements, they should get help to negotiate easement value and management guidelines. To determine the tax advantages of placing property under an easement, the landowner should consult an accountant.

The following are questions and answers from the presentation:

- Can you give an example of smaller landowners banding together to put property under an easement? Yes, since the Gallo easement, several smaller landowners have protected irrigated pastures [Randy Riviere].
- How are all parties protected if, for example, a farmer is borrowing for crops? A lending agency subjugates to the easement [Randy Riviere].
- With NRCS, how does the easement affect an owner trying to sell the land? With most easements, the easement stays with the land forever. Some programs may be available that aren't perpetual. The NRCS has a 30-year easement, but it hasn't been funded [Randy Riviere].
- If an easement precludes public access, does that last in perpetuity [Pat Ferrigno]? Yes [Randy Riviere].

There was not enough time for the presentation by Malia Ortiz (NRCS) on NRCS conservation easement programs, and her presentation was delayed until the next meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 30, 2001 6:30–9:00 p.m.. Agenda items will include the following:

- A presentation by Malia Ortiz (NRCS) on conservation easements
- Discussion of CALFED proposals
- Review of the April 21, 2001 public workshop
- Presentation by Lydia Miller on the WOW field trip
- Update on the Water Supply Management Plan
- Discussion of the use of dredger tailings for restoration projects.

March 5, 2001

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Sam Pipes Room of the Merced Civic Center at 678 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Over thirty-three stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties. The sign-up sheet for the meeting is attached.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the meeting, the following announcements were made:

1. Jennifer Vick announced that Randy Riviere, who was scheduled to give a presentation on conservation easements that evening, would not be able to attend and would postpone the presentation until the next meeting.
2. Ken Jensen announced that the state Department of Boating and Waterway will not be treating water hyacinth in the Merced River this year due to a law suit being filed by the Delta Keepers. Currently, water hyacinth is well controlled in the Merced River, but if it is not treated regularly there could be flare ups which could block channels, ditches and pipes. Ken invited those interested to write letters to pertinent officials to ask for continued treatment of water hyacinth in the Merced River.
3. Lydia Miller announced that Wild on Watersheds, the East Merced RCD, and co-sponsors are organizing a guided bus tour of the Merced River corridor. The tour is primarily to educate elected officials on river issues. The tour will also feature a presentation in Snelling with a variety of speakers and a lunch. Lydia asked if the Stakeholder Group would endorse the tour and/or contribute to its planning. As a condition of support, the Stakeholder Group wants to participate in planning the tour. Terry Howard, Ray Gene Veldhuis, Michelle Langmaid, and Ken Jensen volunteered to help plan the tour.
4. Rhonda Reed introduced Natalya Anfilofyeva, one of the Fresno State students working with CDFG on their Merced River Ranch property. The CDFG acquired approximately 300 acres adjacent to the river and is working with Fresno State students to develop some conceptual alternatives for restoring the site. Natalya distributed a questionnaire to members of the Stakeholder Group.

#### CALFED Watershed Program Proposal Update

Rhonda Reed (CDFG) announced the submittal of three concept proposals to the CALFED Watershed Program. One proposal was to conduct a series of river town-hall meetings where expert speakers would address the stakeholder group and discuss a variety of river issues. Another proposal, based upon Chris Robinson's developing river curriculum, was for river education and outreach to K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The third proposal was for continued water quality research and data collection to develop consistent monitoring and baseline information on the river. All three proposals were distributed at the meeting.

Jennifer Vick announced that Stillwater Sciences also submitted a conceptual proposal to the CALFED Watershed Program to assess the concentration and distribution of mercury in the dredger tailings. Stillwater Sciences is still working with individual landowners to develop specific testing areas and protocols. This proposal was also distributed at the meeting.

#### Conceptual Restoration Projects

The discussion of the conceptual restoration projects continued from the previous January 29 meeting. Jennifer Vick reviewed the concept for the Encroached reach. This concept included placing voluntary conservation easements on the river banks and floodplains. The width of the easement would be coordinated with property owners, but a minimum width of 300 feet on each side of the river could be an initial target. Once the easements were in place, the river could be allowed to form its own floodplain and meander pattern (within a set distance) or a functional floodplain could be excavated. The easements would need to be large-scale to allow channel meander and to increase flood attenuation. The following are questions and answers from the discussion of the Encroached Reach:

- Could the material excavated to form the new floodplain be used for aggregate [Chris Robinson]? The excavated material would be mostly sand and may not be valuable as an aggregate product [Jen Vick].
  - How many, if any, landowners are interested in the easement process [Scott Spaulding]? Some landowners have expressed an interest, and others have not [Jen Vick].
  - Is there any program that would provide funding for increasing flood attenuation [Bill Nicholson]? There is a state program through Proposition 13 that would could be used for that [Jerry Ripperda].
  - What if landowners feel pressured into entering into an easement agreement [Pat Ferrigno]? All easements would be voluntary and designed with the specific site objectives in mind. Implementation would need to be sensitive to such pressures [Jennifer Vick].
  - How will restored floodplains affect downstream levees and neighbors [Mendes]? Projects would be designed so that they would not affect downstream levees and structures [Jen Vick]. Burt Bundy discussed taking out revetments as a part of restoration on the Sacramento River because old fashioned revetment often affects downstream neighbors [Lydia Miller].
  - How will public access and recreation be addressed during the development of easements [Jack Uren]? The upcoming public workshop will provide more of a forum for the recreation discussion. Public access will be addressed during the development of individual projects [Jen Vick]. There will be money available in the near future for planning and developing a parks and recreation plan for the river that could be piggy-backed onto the restoration plan [Bill Nicholson].
  - Can anyone present restoration ideas [John Hardin]? Yes [Jen Vick].
  - How will you prevent erosion with the suggested floodplain restoration [Mendes]? Erosion could be allowed up to a particular point (the easement would allow this) and then streambanks may need to be protected, ideally using biotechnical methods [Jen Vick].

Jennifer also presented information on the Confluence Reach restoration concept, which is the same as the Encroached reach (placing conservation easements on the streambanks and allowing the formation of or excavating a functional floodplain), but with a focus on preserving the riparian resources in that reach. Jennifer stated that the goal of protecting existing resources is almost completely met through the Stevinson Corp. conservation easement. Jennifer asked the group if they agree with or could potentially support the restoration alternatives they had discussed this evening. The group tentatively agreed.

#### Potential Speakers for Upcoming Meetings

The following people or topic areas were identified by the group to potentially come and speak or be discussed at a future meetings:

1. On conservation easements: Randy Riviere (Riviere and Associates), NRCS or property owner associated with Grayson River Ranch;
2. On restoration project implementation: Wilton Fryer (Turlock Irrigation District Tuolumne River Restoration Project Manager);
3. A biotechnical erosion control practitioner;
4. Public access models: Tuolumne River Regional Park, American River Parkway, Rogue River, San Joaquin River Parkway;

5. On hydraulics and USACE flood control: Jerry Ripperda;
6. On sport fishing restoration: CDFG, someone from Boating and Waterways;
7. Fish screens;
8. NMFS 4(d) rules;
9. On broader wildlife implications: Woody (DWR), John Fulton (San Joaquin River Nation Wildlife Reserve).

#### Public Workshop

It was agreed upon that the next public workshop should be near the river on Saturday April 21, 2001. Rhonda Reed suggested that a tour of the Ratzlaff site be given before the workshop.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The revised draft of the Opportunities and Constraints report was distributed for review. All comments must be received by April 2, 2001. The Merced River Landowners Group may need additional time and will coordinate with Jennifer.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 2, 2001 6:30–9:00 p.m.. Agenda items will include the following:

- presentations on conservation easements; and
- discussion of public workshop format and objectives.

January 29, 2001

Merced River Restoration Plan  
Stakeholder Group  
Final Meeting Minutes

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Farm Bureau office at 646 South Route 50 from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Thirty-six stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, Upper Merced River Water Users Association, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, individual landowners and other interested parties. The sign-up sheet for the meeting is attached.

The objective of the meeting was to begin to identify appropriate types of restoration and enhancement projects that could potentially be implemented in the Gravel Mining 1 and 2 reaches of the river.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Pat Ferrigno announced the submittal of a letter to the Merced County Board of Supervisors protesting public access at Shaffer Bridge (see attached). The County Department of Public Works will have a public meeting on the issue and anyone wanting to protest is invited to attend.
2. Pat Ferrigno also announced that the Snelling Municipal Advisory Council has been extended to Oakdale Road. She opposes this extension and invites other interested parties to coordinate with her on this issue.
3. Glen Anderson, East Merced Resource Conservation District, announced a proposal by Jennifer Allen, Project Coordinator of Wild on Watersheds (WOW), to conduct an outreach field trip on the Merced River. Information on WOW is attached. Funds are available through WOW. It has not yet been determined who would be included in the field trip or where planned field trip stops would be located. The field trip will be further discussed at future Stakeholder Group meetings.
4. Rhonda Reed (CDFG) announced the recent releases of a solicitation for proposals from the CALFED Watershed Program. Three areas of focus are applicable to the grant program: (1) building community capacity; (2) improving upon watershed assessments; and (3) implementing restoration projects. Pre-proposals are due by February 23, 2001. Rhonda is willing to work with a subgroup of stakeholders to develop a proposal and suggests proposals to (1) assess water quality in the river and (2) provide funds to get expert speakers. The following volunteered to participate in the subgroup: Sally Magnuson, Pat Ferrigno, Rich Lundin, Lydia Miller, and Chris Robinson. Issues identified by the group for the water quality proposal include nutrients, agricultural returns and Merced ID spills, litter, stormwater, geochemical baseline, mercury. Joe Mendes commented that during the past 10 years, water clarity in the river has improved. In the 1940s, the river was clear but became murkier over the years. He also pointed out the water quality assessment would need to address the entire area draining to the river, including through storm drains. Ted Selb pointed out that storm drains are point source discharges and will be required to obtain NPDES permits by 2003.

#### Projects

The discussion of the conceptual restoration projects continued from the previous January 8 meeting. Jennifer Vick reviewed the concept for the Dredger Tailings reach. This concept included re-

contouring the dredger tailings to create a more functional channel and floodplain. The width of the restoration would be coordinated with property owners, but a minimum width of 300 feet on each side of the river could be an initial target. Art Hardin voiced concern about locking in a set corridor width. Rich Lundin suggested an leaving the pond edges and vegetation alone. Pat Ferrigno stated that she felt that the stakeholders could support this concept as a goal, so long as implementation is based on landowner and stakeholder support and that the timeline is not yet determined.

Jennifer also presented addition information on the Gravel Mining 1 and 2 reached concept, which focused on reconstructing a functional channel and floodplain in area that have been converted to in-channel pits. Henry TeVelde pointed out that the pits on his property are filling in with sediment (sand). Jennifer responded that Dry Creek is delivering large amounts of sand to the river. Project downstream of Dry Creek would need to be designed in recognition of this issue.

Pat Ferrigno asked what the optimal floodplain width between the channel and isolated pits would be and who would be responsible for maintaining berms constructed as part of restoration projects? Jennifer responded that this depends on the situation and who is implementing the project. On the Tuolumne River, Turlock Irrigation District is implementing and will maintain the projects. Each project would have to be tailored to and negotiated for the specific site.

To take an initial look at prioritization and cost, Jennifer presented a very preliminary cost estimate for reconstruction at each pit. Estimated cost for fill material alone ranged from \$50,000 to \$4.5 million for each pit. Additional factors considered for prioritizing projects included connectivity with other projects or intact river reaches, expected project benefits, access by equipment and crews, potential for conservation easements, landowner and interest. Additional factors suggested at the meeting include length of the project, time period until the benefit is observed, and whether the project might be impacted by adjacent land uses (such as pesticide applications on agricultural lands).

Henry TeVelde wanted to know how much maintenance is involved in these types of projects. Jennifer responded that ideally projects would function without much maintenance, but the reality is that maintenance and project repairs or modifications would likely be required in the early years following construction. Also, monitoring would be required for these projects.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting is scheduled for March 5, 2001 6:30–9:00 p.m.. Agenda items will include the following:

- identification of potential speakers to make presentations at Stakeholder Group meetings or a Stakeholder Workshop (as suggested by Lydia Miller);
- distribution of the revised EDAW report; and
- discussion the Encroached and Confluence reaches.

January 8, 2001

Merced River Restoration Plan  
Stakeholder Group  
Final Meeting Minutes

The Stakeholder Group meeting was held at the Merced County Farm Bureau office at 646 South Route 50 from 6:30 until 9:00 p.m.. Twenty four stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives of the Merced River Landowners' Group, Upper Merced River Water Users Association, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Merced Irrigation District, and individual landowners and interested parties. The sign-up sheet for the meeting is attached.

The objective of the meeting was to begin to identify appropriate types of restoration and enhancement projects that could potentially be implemented in each reach of the river.

#### Introductions and Announcements

Jennifer Vick (Stillwater Sciences) opened the meeting. During the opening, the following announcements were made:

1. Randy Mager (CDWR) announced that the Environmental Impact Report for the Robinson Reach of the Salmon Habitat Enhancement Project will be available this week. He passed around a sign-up sheet for those interested in receiving a copy. The public review period will be 30 days.
2. Chris Robinson provided an update on the Merced River education and outreach project that he is developing the Merced City Schools. He is working with a professors from University of California–Santa Barbara and University of California–Santa Cruz, and teachers from the school district to develop a river curriculum. To kick the project off, a 2-day workshop will be held at the USDA conference room on Friday January 12 (6:30–9:00 p.m.) and Saturday January 13 (9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.). Pat Ferrigno suggested also tying into the Merced River School District and including private property issues as part of the curriculum. John Hardin suggesting using the new Roberts Ferry Bridge (on the Tuolumne River) as an example of river-oriented education.

#### Workshop Follow-up

Jennifer Vick provided a brief overview of the workshop and attendance. At the workshop, questionnaires were distributed get input to project objectives and process. These questionnaires were also mailed out to the Stakeholders with the meeting announcement. Jennifer requested that questionnaires be returned by the January 29 meeting.

#### Projects

Using annotate aerial photographs posted around the room, Jennifer Vick reviewed the river reach delineations presented in the baseline evaluations report and summarized issues in each reach (see attached). The group began discussing potential conceptual projects for each reach. The goal of this discussion was to describe types of projects that could be supported by the Stakeholders. Specific projects would have to be coordinated with individual property owners.

For the Dredger Tailings Reach, Jennifer proposed excavating the dredger tailings from the river corridor to restore floodplain elevation and prove an area for replanting riparian vegetation. The width of the restoration would be coordinated with property owners, but a minimum width of 300 feet on each side of the river could be an initial target.

For the Gravel Mining 1 and 2 reaches, Jennifer proposed focusing on reconstructing the channel and floodplain in areas affected by in-channel mining pits. Chris Robinson requested a cost:benefit analysis for each pit before considering filling pits in. Jennifer will pull together some prioritization criteria for addressing pits, but cautioned that not all necessary information to conduct a cost:benefit analysis will be available within the timeframe of developing the restoration plan. The group will continue discussing the Gravel Mining reaches at the next meeting.

For the Encroachment Reach, Jennifer expressed that the reach was so constrained by agricultural land uses adjacent to the river that it may not be possible to implement channel and floodplain restoration projects there. One potential approach would be to excavate functional floodplains adjacent to the river channel. This would, however, impact adjacent land uses and landowners and is, therefore, likely not feasible.

In the Encroachment Reach, Jennifer suggested focusing on conservation easements, such as is currently being pursued by the Stevinson Corporation, and looking for opportunities to implement a pilot project to remove bank revetment. Joe Mendes pointed out that the river in this reach hasn't changed since the 1950s and that the Corps of Engineers told landowners to put revetment on their banks to prevent erosion.

#### Wrap-up and Schedule for Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting is scheduled for January 29, 2001. The main agenda item for the meeting will be to continue discussion of potential projects.

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