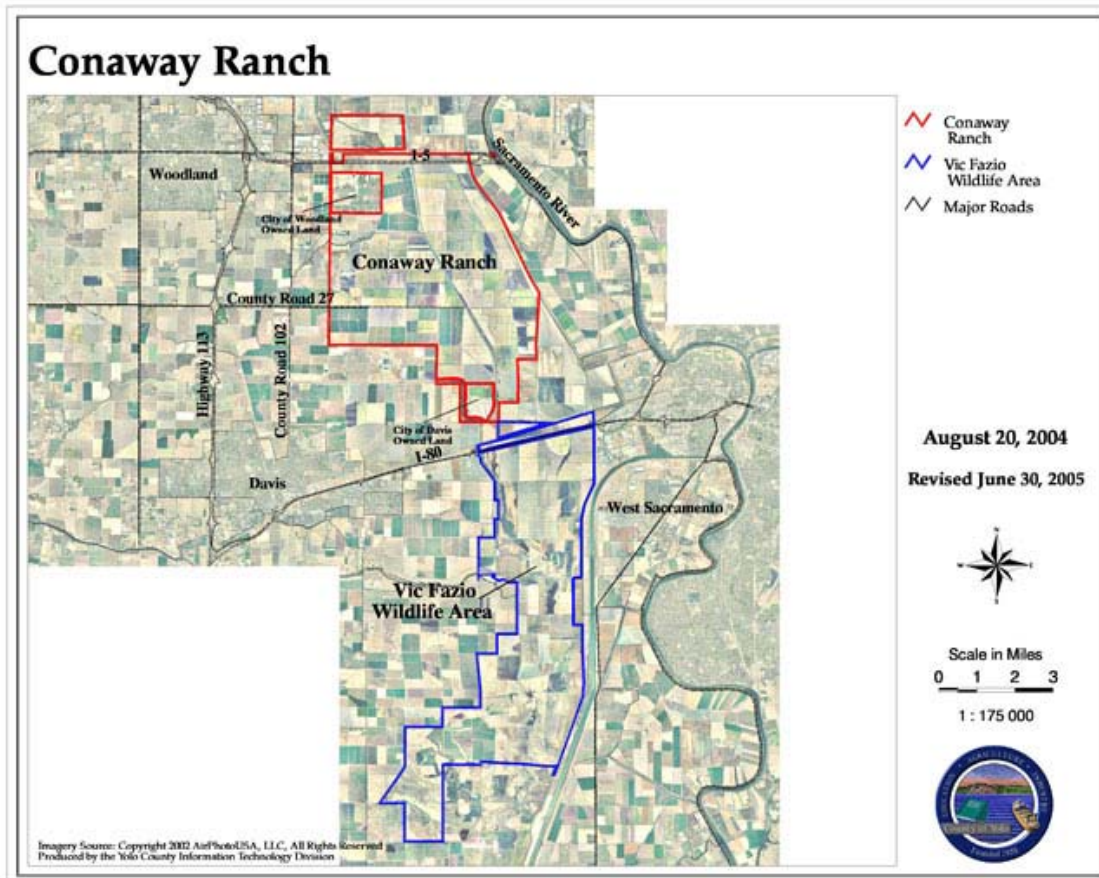


**Conaway Ranch**  
*Growing a Public Vision for the Future*  
April 4, 2006

# Conaway Ranch

## *Growing a Public Vision for the Future*

April 4, 2006



This report assembled by Tuleyome contains a transcription of notes made during discussions held by participants at a public meeting held on March 30, 2006. However, the opinions and recommendations included herein are solely those of Tuleyome.

*Tuleyome is a not-for-profit organization working to protect our wild heritage and our agricultural heritage in the Putah and Cache Creek watersheds for existing and future generations. For additional information visit [www.tuleyome.org](http://www.tuleyome.org).*

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## Executive Summary

Tuleyome sponsored a public vision meeting on March 30, 2006 to address long-term management considerations for the Conaway Ranch. At the meeting we asked participants to envision how they see the Ranch utilized in the future. Issues of flood control, water, agriculture, habitat, recreation, and open space were considered.

The short term uses of the property - perhaps during the first 5 years of ownership - are a concern to many Yolo County residents. There are also questions about the evolution of uses over time, covering a time frame of perhaps the next 50 years.

Farming will remain a continued use on the Conaway Ranch into the future. It will help fund the County purchase, provide wildlife habitat, and maintain open space. It is important that there be adequate water on the Ranch for farming and habitat; and that it is not sold out of the county. **As the Supervisors have stated repeatedly, it is their intention that these existing uses will continue and we support that.**

With public ownership of the property the potential to incorporate other uses on the Ranch, over an extended time frame, can also become a reality. This might include better conjunctive surface and ground water management, which can increase the total supply of good-quality water for the Ranch and possibly for urban areas in the county. Habitat can be restored or enhanced on appropriate portions of the Ranch, and recreational opportunities can be phased in over time, including fishing, picnicking, camping, birding, public hunting, hiking, and mountain biking. Community or cooperative farms might be established.

The meeting was well attended, with nearly 60 farmers, recreation users, habitat advocates, and developer spokespersons present. Following initial presentations, breakout sessions were held to explore the opportunities and constraints with respect to the primary issue areas. All comments during breakout sessions were recorded and are included in Appendix A.

It is interesting to note both the areas of strong disagreement and the areas of agreement. As an example, with respect to water some felt that all water should stay on the Ranch, and others felt that water should be used both on the Ranch and for the neighboring cities; yet all agreed they did not want water exported from the County.

Another area of agreement throughout all the breakout groups was that people want a safe place to meet and explore these issues

Tuleyome remains strongly in support of Yolo County's efforts to buy the Conaway Ranch for public use. The Board of Supervisors has shown real leadership in this visionary project for which future generations will always be appreciative.

Tuleyome has reviewed the comments from the meeting and has developed observations that are summarized in this report. These are solely Tuleyome's comments and do not necessarily represent the views of the group of various participants.

We have done our best to accurately record everyone's comments by break out groups in Appendix A. Appendix B categorizes those comments by issues.

# Recommendations

With this summary we are forwarding Tuleyome's recommendations for both the short-term transition period to County ownership and a long-term evolution of uses on the Conaway Ranch. These recommendations are primarily procedural in nature.

We would like to emphasize again that these recommendations are solely those of Tuleyome and do not represent the opinions of the participants at the March 30<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## **Short-Term Recommendation:**

These recommendations cover a transition period prior to and immediately following County acquisition and possession of the Conaway Ranch:

- 1. Hire a farm management consultant:** We recommend that the County hire a farm management consultant during the transition period to County ownership. They should have members with experience in farm management and irrigation and members with experience in habitat management.
- 2. Extend multi-year leases to existing tenant farmers:** Tenant farmers on Conaway Ranch currently operate on one-year leases. This short-term lease duration creates instability and uncertainty in farm operations, and greatly limits incentives to invest in infrastructure improvements by the tenant farmers. We recommend beginning with a 3-year lease period. When master planning for the uses and operation of the Ranch are completed the terms of leases might be extended to a 5-year period.
- 3. Commit to keeping water on the Ranch during the initial 3-year public ownership period.** Future studies will determine water needs on the Ranch for farming and habitat; the potential for enhancing water supplies; and opportunities for use of water in other areas in the County. During the transition period, however, a commitment to retain water on the Ranch will help to ensure the stability and security of tenant farmers and habitat protection.
- 4. Begin an open meeting discussion process:** Our initial March 30<sup>th</sup> meeting clearly demonstrated the desire by all to have a neutral forum in which to discuss the future uses and operations of the Conaway ranch. The forum should be facilitated and be a safe place in which to discuss issues, identify problems, and seek solutions.
- 5. Develop a communication plan to inform the public with respect to Ranch management and planning for the future.** When the Ranch becomes public various user groups will surface to advocate for future uses on the Ranch. The County will need to communicate that current uses will continue at the present time. However, it is important that the County also let all parties know that a management plan will be developed and that that process will incorporate public input and comment.
- 6. Develop a short term recreation management plan:** This plan might include management of public hunting, docent led trips and tours compatible with current farming practices, fishing access, and signage.

During a transition period it is important to offer a limited form of public access and recreation on the ranch. But, this must be managed and controlled so as not to impact on farming operations.

It is our suggestion with these short-term recommendations that the County focus on stability and provide some assurance of continuity during the transition period from private ownership to public ownership.

The public will know that there will be no immediate change in Ranch management or use, and that the County is committed to efficient business management of the Ranch. Both the general public and the farming community will know that the longer-term discussion of the future of the Ranch will be open and fair.

### **Long-term Recommendations:**

1. **Continue an open discussion process about uses:** We strongly recommend that there be a continuing dialog about the Ranch's use, rather than a continued focus on the Ranch's acquisition. The forum for the discussions should involve a neutral setting, and it may be appropriate to have County staff or paid facilitators act as the leaders of the process in order to assure that members of the public do not perceive that the process is "rigged" in some way toward a pre-determined outcome.
2. **Hold a facilitated stakeholder visioning process to identify key issues with respect to current management and future uses of the ranch:** Tuleyome's meeting was an initial approach to identifying the interests of members of the public for the Conaway Ranch. It is unlikely that all of the interests in the Ranch's future management were present; and the County should develop a stakeholder process to make sure that all of the interests in the Ranch are identified and that elements of the various "visions" for the Ranch are identified.
3. **Begin studies and gather information:** For all of the talk that has occurred about the Ranch's acquisition, there has actually not been very much information presented about some of the resource values that exist within Conaway Ranch. The County should begin planning for conducting or contracting for resource assessment studies that will help in identifying opportunities and constraints for future planning.
4. **Develop a management plan for the future:** When a vision for the Ranch's future is identified, the County needs to move towards developing a Management Plan that reflects the vision, together with addressing operational issues that affect the day-to-day operation of a large piece of land. While we advocate for increased public access and uses on the ranch we recognize that conflicts may arise among various interests in the Ranch's management. However, what may be a conflict in the near term may not be an issue when phased in over time or planned for at a future date. A Management Plan will let people know what to expect and when it will happen.

## Discussion of Comments Received

This section contains a discussion of the comments received at the meeting.

Transcriptions of the comments recorded are in Appendix A.

The comments received fell into five main categories; general, vision/desires, questions/studies, possible conflicts/constraints, and issues to consider.

General comments included what appear to be issues with consensus between those who support and those who oppose the eminent domain action. Though the issue of support or opposition of the method of acquisition of the ranch was not a topic of discussion, it did flavor the discussion of the visions and issues related to the property. Thus, beyond the relatively unanimous opinions found in the general comments, it should be noted that some visions and issues may be found to be polar opposites. However, they do represent facets of the community and should be taken as the views of a broad group of constituents.

Ultimately, it is up to the Board of Supervisors to determine which visions and issues to consider and implement, while acknowledging that all the views deserve respect. The determination of future uses of the Conaway Ranch, beyond a continuation of the current uses of flood control, farming, water use, and open space will necessitate a much more intense public process. However, we hope that the results of this meeting will serve as a beginning.

### General Comments

In general, there was a universal desire that development not occur on the property.

1. All participants wanted to protect the agricultural and related values on the property.
2. Flood control was seen as primary in importance, and while some visions may affect flood control, participants recognized the importance and need for continued flood protection.
3. While desire for recreation was expressed by most of the non-farming community, there was a seeming consensus that recreation should take place in a manner largely compatible with farming.
4. Lastly, all participants wanted future meetings to determine the future of the ranch to be a “level meeting ground,” with an open process that would allow a fair voice for all who participate.

### Vision

We have grouped the visions expressed for the Conaway Ranch into seven categories:

- Status quo
- Habitat
- Ownership
- Recreation
- Water
- Business
- Farming

## **Status Quo**

Visions for the property included the opinion that the land use shouldn't change. It was expressed that development should not occur anywhere on the property. Keeping development off of the ranch was seen as a way to keep water on the ranch, and thus the status quo (6). It was also stated that the landfill and treatment plant should not expand onto the ranch (6). Should the County acquire the ranch, placing an easement on the ranch would be another way to ensure the status quo over the next 50 years (7).

## **Habitat**

One potential thought was to convert 15% of the ranch back to habitat to mimic pre-European settlement conditions, with 85% of the ranch to remain in active farming (8). Habitat could also be created for listed (threatened and endangered) species, potentially as part of the NCCP/HCP process. This should work in concert with agriculture to keep agriculture viable, but also provide habitat (9).

## **Ownership**

Desire was expressed for the ranch to be returned to private ownership, or, at the minimum, to have long-term leases for tenant farmers. If the land was to be re-sold back to private interests, it should be sold to farmers for farming purposes, not development (10). This option was expressed to potentially include conservation easements to ensure it would not be developed (7).

## **Recreation**

Recreation was the area with the most diversity of opinion. Recreation was extensively discussed in the issues section. As far as visions for recreation, they were quite diverse. Hunting was seen as a way to raise revenue for ranch maintenance and habitat restoration (11). Public access was thought to be controlled, in order to provide access, but with less unpredictable impacts to agriculture that may occur with unrestricted access (12). Others saw the area as managed similar to the Consumes River, with less intensive recreational use, and more nature-based recreation (13). Outdoor recreation which was compatible with farming could include the integration of farming, habitat, and recreation (14). This would bring the farming and environmental community together for an educational experience which would be present throughout the farm (15).

## **Water**

The surface and groundwater should stay within the county, and preferably not leave the ranch itself (16). Flood protection is paramount within the bypass, and levees should be raised to 500-year protection, with no development within the flood plain (17).

## **Business**

The ranch operates profitably, both for the owners and present tenants. The vision is that the property be managed like a business, and stay financially viable (18).

## **Farming**

The public could be engaged in the ranch by opening up a small portion for community gardens (19). Priorities for the future include maintenance and improvement of ranch infrastructure, much of which is over 40 years old (20). Farming is a current priority, and is also a significant portion of the vision for the future of the ranch; it needs to remain the primary activity (6).

## **Questions/Studies**

As part of the public meeting, several questions and potential studies were identified by participants. It was questioned as to what the highest and best use of the ranch should be for the next 50 years, and who should determine what that highest and best use should be. (21, 22).

If salmon numbers are increased in Cache Creek, how would that effect flood control, especially as it related to the Cache Creek settling basin and its needs for maintenance and removal of vegetation and sediment. (23)

Water questions were numerous, including the question as to how future water use and cost of the water might affect pressures to remove water from the ranch, and whether the County would feel pressured to sell off of the ranch if the price was high enough (24, 25,26) If the wastewater treatment plants in Woodland and Davis needed to be expanded, would the ranch be a possible area for expansion? (27)

Other questions included:

- Should hunting continue on the ranch? (28)
- Can DFG assess the potential for endangered species if habitat is improved, and how do you keep those species on the ranch? (30, 32)
- How do you deal with mercury, especially in Cache Creek settling basin sediments? (31)
- What will the effect of the loss of property taxes have on the County general fund? (33)
- How much is the County willing to pay, not just for acquisition, but also maintenance, and will it be economical? (24, 36, 37)
- What are the economics of hay growing on the ranch? (35)
- Who will manage and how will the property be managed? (38)

## **Possible conflicts/constraints**

Participants identified a number of potential conflicts and constraints for future management of the ranch. These conflicts include:

- Existing and future oil and gas leases may conflict with farming and other activities (39)
- Habitat restoration may be funded or maintained by hunting. Those against hunting may not want/like this relationship. (40)

- Recreation may be a potential area of conflict. Trespass and vandalism are areas of concern, as well as the potential conflict between recreational activities and ongoing farming operations (e.g. spraying) (41, 42, 43, 46, 47,48,49)
- Habitat restoration and endangered species may compromise certain agricultural operations. (44, 46)
- Different elements of the Yolo County community may want polar-opposite activities within the ranch, and this will create competing demands. (48, 49)

## **Issues to consider**

Participants identified numerous issues, under the categories of flood control, agriculture, habitat, recreation, and water supply. During formulation of a final management plan for the Ranch, the County will need to consider these and other issues raised by the public.

### **Flood Control**

Because the primary purpose of the bypass is flood control, the ability of the bypass to convey flows cannot be compromised (50). Vegetation from habitat mitigation could potentially impact these flood control benefits, so any restoration activities would need to take this into account (51). The bypass could potentially handle increased vegetation as well as flows, if it were enlarged by moving the western levees to the west (54, 78). The Cache Creek settling basin is filled with sediment and vegetation, which has reduced its flood capacity (52). It needs to be explored as to whether this can be remedied, but the effect of sediment transport into the bypass needs to be considered (53).

### **Agriculture**

Presently the leases on the ranch are year-to-year. This creates instability for the ranchers and some angst that management could suddenly move them from the ranch with little time to relocate. This is a present issue, and it should be looked at whether multi-year leases could be offered, thus meeting the objectives of keeping the land in farming and keeping agriculture profitable (55). The present ranch management team has a history of wildlife friendly management, as well as a good relationship with the farmers. This relationship should continue, to keep the operations smooth and ranch functioning (56, 57, 58). The speed at which ranch needs can be assessed under the present management is a desire for the future, but may not be possible under a process-based bureaucracy. (59)

### **Habitat**

Issues related to habitat include identification of present habitat, as well as impacts from habitat on agriculture and vice-versa. Mitigation banking may impact types of crops, profitability and management (60). The cost of maintaining the habitat could be prohibitive to increasing habitat areas or managing what is there (63, 65). Present management seems to be working, and it is unclear if this relationship can be maintained (61, 65, 66). Water is key to the good habitat on the ranch and the habitat may be compromised if any water is transferred (62, 65).

## **Recreation**

Recreation and the introduction of the public to the ranch will create conflicts or the potential for conflicts with existing habitat and farming activities. It will be up to the County to determine if recreation will occur, as well as how to minimize impacts between uses (67, 69). There is a desire for additional recreational uses, as well as the question as to whether there is a current need for recreation on the property, given the proximity to the Yolo Basin Wildlife Area (68, 72, 73). There is concern that if the area is opened for recreational use, there will be liability transferred to the farmers, as well as issues with vandalism (70, 71). There is a concern that the area will not be adequately policed, or that the County will encumber too much of a liability with access.

## **Water Supply**

The water supply is all used on the ranch presently. If water is transferred, there will be reliance on groundwater, which could lead to impacts beyond the ranch (74). Monitoring and management of groundwater should continue, to make sure subsidence isn't increased (75). The cities may seek to move water from the ranch, and the effects of this must be known (76). Integrated conjunctive use of the water may be a solution to numerous water supply issues (77). The cities may also wish to increase their wastewater treatment plants, and could use the ranch as part of this expansion (79). However, this would conflict with other desires for the property.

# Appendix A

## Summary of recorded comments at March 30, 2006 public meeting

Three breakout groups were formed by self selection at the meeting. Facilitators led the discussions and all comments were recorded. Appendix A records these notes verbatim.

### Group 1

#### General Principles

- No asphalt/impervious surface
- No development
- Should hunting occur?
- If public can't manage, return to private ownership
- County place easement on land
- Protect ag value
- Respect floodplains/flood control functions
- No recreation that is incompatible w/farming
- No landfill land
- No additional treatment plant use

#### Vision

- No development
- 15% habitat to mimic pre-1848 conditions (Willow Grassland) 85% active farming (status quo! – keep ag operations the same – rice, alfalfa...)
- Return to private ownership – or lease (tenant farmers)
- Habitat for listed species/thru nccp/hcp (rare plants-swainson's) – work in concert with agriculture
- Permit for hunting – provides \$, restores habitat
- Control public access – limited – any access needs fees, control, policing
- Surface + groundwater stay in county (keep it on ranch)
- Ranch operates profitably – sustainable \$
- Outdoor rec area (work with farming): variety of uses
- Model farm
- County needs to manage it business-line, financially stay \$ viable
- Bring farming + enviro community together
- Mutual education: ag + environment
- Community garden plots
- Maintain ranch infrastructure – i.e. pumping plant

#### Questions/studies

- What was vegetation in pre-farming time – oaks?
- DFG to assess species potential
- If you encourage species, how do you keep them?
- Concern about tax drain

What is county willing to pay?

**Possible conflicts/constraints**

Oil+gas lease – does it conflict?

Habitat/anti-hunters v. hunting?

Public access v. farming?

Trespass, vandalism potential

Recreation v. farming

Sometimes restoration is not compatible w/ production ag.

Water for ranch use only v. other county uses.

**Group 2**

**Overall questions**

Best use(s) next 50 years?

Who determines it?

**Flood Control**

Cannon compromise flood control

Vegetation growth impairs bypass capacity

Settling basin capacity issues (trees)

Sediment load to bypass

Potential bypass enlargement (capacity & levee location)

**Ag**

Multi-year leases (now 1 year)

Keep present ranch manager

Main crop (rice & wild rice) is wildlife-friendly

Need close relationship between owner and farmer/land manager (e.g. need immediate response to management needs; need knowledgeable owner)

Farms can't be run by bureaucracies – infrastructure must be continually maintained, etc. (can this issue be addressed?) (how will ongoing O&M&R be budgeted & paid for?)

Sell farmed land back to private ownership for farming purposes.

**Habitat**

Potential use for mitigation banking & effects on other uses

Continue habitat management that is working now with ag

Water for habitat

Cost of managing habitat

What type of habitat should there be & where should it be

Protect habitat (existing & future) from impacts of public uses.

**Recreation**

How to minimize potential impacts on habitat

Need for more recreational use areas (now & in 50 years)

How to minimize conflicts between recreation and ag

Liability concerns

Vandalism concerns  
Roads

### **Water Supply**

All surface water (+ groundwater) now used by ag – if ag uses continue, water demand will continue

Question – will the County keep the water on the land for ag?

Can we trust that the county will continue to keep the water on the land for the next 50 years?

No sale of water or water rights outside of county.  
Continue groundwater monitoring & management.

### **Group 3**

Sell land back to current farmers

How does presence of salmon affect cache creek flood control – don't lose options

500 year levees for flood protection/don't build in flood plains

What about future water rights/uses/cost – water to stay on ranch

Water available to cities in county

Is there the potential for use of ranch for wastewater treatment?

See it as Consumnes River. Less intensive use (Recreation)

Currently good habitat/ag relationship – good habitat year round

Other integrated uses of water

Increase size of wastewater wetland treatment (combine woodland & davis)

What is economic effect of ag & community.

What are changes to recreation going to do?

Who & how to manage the property

No development/housing

Conflict with recreation & agriculture – can they be compatible?

Economic /cost of hay

Economics of County Management

Economics of ongoing management.

More recreational opportunities

Flood control is a primary issue

Expand the bypass capacity/move western levee west

How to deal with mercury

Stop development to keep water on ranch

(sidebars)

1. Should county buy the property
2. polar opinions
3. process

Uses? Demands Changing? Conflicts?

Primarily ag

Mixed uses  
Integrate farming, recreation/habitat  
Don't want it to change  
Process for discussion – open  
Even meeting ground – a fair voice for all  
It takes time to make it work  
Ag use  
Recreation  
Urban pressures  
Make entire ranch a park  
Don't make the ranch a park  
Compatibility? Ag/habitat/recreation

## Appendix B

All comments from Appendix A were combined where they were identical and then grouped by category. No comments were left out and they have been numbered for reference. The categories include:

- General,
- Vision and Desires,
- Questions and Studies,
- Possible Conflicts and Constraints,
- Issues to Consider, and
- Comments that are Unclear for Categorizing

### General

1. No development - No development/housing
2. Protect ag value
3. Flood control is a primary issue - Respect floodplains/flood control functions
4. No recreation that is incompatible w/farming
5. Even meeting ground – a fair voice for all - Process for discussion – open

### Vision and Desires

#### Status quo

6. Don't want it to change - No development - No asphalt/impervious surface - Stop development to keep water on ranch - No additional treatment plant use - No landfill land
7. County place easement on land

#### Habitat

8. 15% habitat to mimic pre-1848 conditions (Willow Grassland) 85% active farming (status quo! – keep ag operations the same – rice, alfalfa...)
9. Habitat for listed species/thru nccp/hcp (rare plants-swainson's) – work in concert with agriculture

#### Ownership

10. Return to private ownership – or lease (tenant farmers) - If public can't manage, return to private ownership - Sell land back to current farmers - Sell farmed land back to private ownership for farming purposes.

#### Recreation

11. Permit for hunting – provides \$, restores habitat
12. Control public access – limited – any access needs fees, control, policing
13. See it as Consumnes River. Less intensive use (Recreation)
14. Outdoor rec area (work with farming): variety of uses - Integrate farming, recreation/habitat - Model farm
15. Bring farming + enviro community together - Mutual education: ag + environment

## **Water**

16. Surface + groundwater stay in county (keep it on ranch) - No sale of water or water rights outside of county.
17. 500 year levees for flood protection/don't build in flood plains

## **Business**

18. Ranch operates profitably – sustainable \$ - County needs to manage it business-line, financially stay \$ viable

## **Ranching**

19. Community garden plots
20. Maintain ranch infrastructure – i.e. pumping plant

## **Questions and Studies**

21. Best use(s) next 50 years?
22. Who determines it?
23. How does presence of salmon affect cache creek flood control – don't lose options
24. What about future water rights/uses/cost – water to stay on ranch
25. Question – will the County keep the water on the land for ag?
26. Can we trust that the county will continue to keep the water on the land for the next 50 years?
27. Is there the potential for use of ranch for wastewater treatment?
28. Should hunting occur?
29. What was vegetation in pre-farming time – oaks?
30. DFG to assess species potential
31. How to deal with mercury?
32. If you encourage species, how do you keep them?
33. Concern about tax drain
34. What is county willing to pay?
35. Economic /cost of hay?
36. Economics of County Management?
37. Economics of ongoing management?
38. Who & how to manage the property?

## **Possible Conflicts and Constraints**

39. Oil+gas lease – does it conflict?
40. Habitat/anti-hunters v. hunting?
41. Public access v. farming?
42. Trespass, vandalism potential
43. Recreation v. farming
44. Sometimes restoration is not compatible w/ production ag.
45. Water for ranch use only v. other county uses.
46. Compatibility? Ag/habitat/recreation
47. Conflict with recreation & agriculture – can they be compatible?
48. Make entire ranch a park
49. Don't make the ranch a park

## Issues to Consider

### Flood Control

50. Cannot compromise flood control
51. Vegetation growth impairs bypass capacity
52. Settling basin capacity issues (trees)
53. Sediment load to bypass
54. Potential bypass enlargement (capacity & levee location)

### Agriculture

55. Multi-year leases (now 1 year)
56. Keep present ranch manager
57. Main crop (rice & wild rice) is wildlife-friendly
58. Need close relationship between owner and farmer/land manager (e.g. need immediate response to management needs; need knowledgeable owner)
59. Farms can't be run by bureaucracies – infrastructure must be continually maintained, etc. (can this issue be addressed?) (How will ongoing O&M&R be budgeted & paid for?)

### Habitat

60. Potential use for mitigation banking & effects on other uses
61. Continue habitat management that is working now with ag
62. Water for habitat
63. Cost of managing habitat
64. What type of habitat should there be & where should it be
65. Protect habitat (existing & future) from impacts of public uses.
66. Currently good habitat/ag relationship – good habitat year round

### Recreation

67. How to minimize potential impacts on habitat
68. Need for more recreational use areas (now & in 50 years)
69. How to minimize conflicts between recreation and ag
70. Liability concerns
71. Vandalism concerns
72. Roads
73. More recreational opportunities

### Water Supply

74. All surface water (+ groundwater) now used by ag – if ag uses continue, water demand will continue
75. Continue groundwater monitoring & management.
76. Water available to cities in county
77. Other integrated uses of water
78. Expand the bypass capacity/move western levee west
79. Increase size of wastewater wetland treatment (combine Woodland & Davis)

## Comments that are Unclear for Categorizing

(sidebars)

4. Should county buy the property
5. polar opinions
6. process

Uses? Demands Changing? Conflicts?

Primarily ag

Mixed uses

It takes time to make it work

Ag use

Recreation

Urban pressures