



California Foothills Legacy Area

Planning Update #1 – May 2011



Poppies and lupin. Photo: Tony R. Immoos

Greetings!

This is the first in a series of updates provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to share information on a proposal to begin a new easement program, the California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA). The CFLA was developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, and focuses on protecting rangelands surrounding California’s Central Valley.

This update provides a brief summary of the project, explains the planning process and describes how you can get involved. Through these updates, we plan to share information with you and seek your involvement in the planning process. Your input is very important. It helps us gather information and identify issues affecting you, your community, and the natural resources of California's rangelands. We invite you to attend one of six public scoping meetings during June. Locations, dates, and times of these meetings are shown on the last page.

What is the Fish and Wildlife Service?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses more than 553 refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat.



Grassland near Latrobe Road. Photo: Tony R. Immoos

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What is the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition?

The California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC) is a group of more than 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies that have pledged to work together to preserve and enhance California's rangeland for species of special concern, while supporting the long-term viability of the ranching industry. The goal of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition is to collaboratively work together to protect and enhance the rangeland landscape that encircles California's Central Valley and includes adjacent grasslands and oak woodlands. As a member of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, the Service is studying the proposed California Foothills Legacy Area as a means of achieving our shared goals for rangeland conservation.

What Area is the Service Studying?

The Service has identified four preliminary focal areas in the foothills surrounding the Central Valley and is considering establishing a new easement program focused on these areas. The proposed project complements the efforts of several organizations that are acquiring easements within the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition boundary. Lands within the proposed CFLA are predominantly private working rangelands that include a

rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak savannah, and oak woodlands. Other important habitats imbedded within this landscape include vernal pools, riparian areas, and wetlands.

Why is the Service Interested in Conserving California Rangelands?

California rangelands, including grassland, oak woodland, and oak savanna, are critically important to migratory birds and support numerous threatened and endangered species. Oak woodlands in the State may rank among the top three habitat types in North America for bird richness and California's oak savanna and grasslands support the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America. A total of 197 federally-listed threatened and endangered species have documented occurrences within California's grassland, oak savanna, and oak woodland habitats yet they only account for 18 percent of the State's total land area. These three habitats in California alone have more threatened and endangered species than any other state in the U.S. outside Hawaii.

These rangelands, and the species that rely on them, largely persist today due to the grazing and other land stewardship practices of ranchers who have owned and managed these lands and are committed to a healthy future for their working landscapes. California rangelands are a critical foundation of the economic and social fabric of California's ranching industry and rural communities, and will continue to provide this important

working landscape for California's plants, fish and wildlife if they remain in ranching.

However, California rangelands are among the least protected and most threatened habitats in the State. Intact, privately-owned rangelands face threats from increased rural residential housing development in the foothills and conversion to other uses. Within 50 years, it is estimated that rural residential development (densities > 20 acres/unit) within the study area will increase by nearly 1 million acres.

What is the Planning Process?

The planning process integrates three components: study and planning, public involvement, and environmental compliance. The process is carried out as follows.

- Study initiation, issue identification, information gathering, begin scoping (May 2011)
- Public scoping meetings (June 2011)
- Scoping period ends. Review of public comments begins (July 15, 2011)
- Draft planning documents available for public review and comment. Public meetings held (Spring 2012)
- Final decision on proposed CFLA (Summer 2012)

If established, the CFLA project boundary would define an area where the Service has internal approval to acquire easements. It is Service policy to acquire land only from landowners who are willing sellers. Acquisitions are subject to funding availability.



Foothill rangelands. Photo: USFWS

Public Involvement

You can provide input by letting us know your ideas and concerns for this proposal. Currently, we are seeking input from the public on the number, location, and size of the focal areas and the scope of issues to address in the environmental assessment. Your participation at various stages of the planning process is critical to the success of this plan. You can submit comments in person at the scoping meetings listed below, or via mail, e-mail, or fax.



Corral. Photo: USFWS

Who to Contact

If you have questions and concerns, or would like more information, please feel free to call or write us at the following addresses and phone numbers:

Mark Pelz, Chief, Refuge Planning
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-1832
Sacramento, California 95825-1846
Phone: (916) 414-6500
Fax: (916) 414-6497

E-mail Your Comments

E-mail: fw8plancomments@fws.gov
(Please include "CFLA" in the subject line)

Refuge Planning Website:

<http://www.fws.gov/cno/refuges/planning/>

If you would like to be added to or deleted from our mailing list for this project, please let us know.

Date/Time	Public Scoping Meeting Locations
June 6 / 6-8 pm	Bakersfield - East Bakersfield Veterans Building, Room 1, 2101 Ridge Road
June 7 / 6-8 pm	Porterville - Holiday Inn Express, 840 South Jaye St.
June 8 / 5-7 pm	Le Grand - Le Grand Branch Library, 12949 Le Grand Rd.
June 9 / 6-8 pm	Sonora - Days Inn, 160 S Washington St.
June 14 / 6-8 pm	Red Bluff - Red Bluff Community/Senior Center, 1500 S. Jackson St.
June 16 / 6-8 pm	Hollister - Veterans Memorial Building, 649 San Benito St.

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