Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Annual Report

July 2001 – June 2002

Executive Summary

During the period of July 2001 to June 2002, the Yolo County Resource Conservation District pursued its mission through:

- Testing the benefits of tailwater management practices;
- expanding existing watershed programs;
- Strengthening local partnerships for vegetation and water management;
- Information-sharing and education through hands-on outdoor education for local schools, conservation field meetings, special presentations, conservation guidebooks, and the RCD Annual Dinner; and
- Advocating to local, state, and federal legislators on issues impacting local resources and resource conservation incentives programs.
- Supporting and directing cost-share funding for local private-land conservation work through USDA NRCS cost-share programs, NRCS staff, and Farm Bill conservation funds.

Through CALFED Water Use Efficiency Pilot Program funding, District staff completed its first year of concerted monitoring for the water quality impacts of winter cover cropping, sediment traps, and tailwater ponds. The final report for that Pilot Program details the findings and recommendations from the first year. Additional funding from the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program has allowed the District to extend the monitoring program for three years through summer 2004 in the Lower Union School Slough Watershed in southwestern Yolo County. Additional work now underway with the new CALFED funding includes fall hedgerow plantings along Union School Slough, sediment trap construction, watershed-wide vegetation and water monitoring, wildlife monitoring, and development of an on-line conservation-planning tool, the Yolo OnePlan. The water analysis and the development of the OnePlan are both being accomplished through a subcontract with and considerable in-kind contribution from the USDA Agricultural Research Service. An outgrowth of this work is the development of a farm water-management "EcoLab" with Yolo and Solano County water districts. The EcoLab would work in similar fashion as an Irrigation Mobile Lab, with an emphasis on managing farm tailwater quality.

District partner and watershed collaborator, the California Chapter of the National Audubon Society, also extended their Union School Slough work through CALFED funding to create the Willow Slough Watershed Rangeland Stewardship Program. Work completed over the year included: prescribed burning, native grass seeding, and controlled grazing on rangeland; stock pond and riparian enhancement; and maintenance of existing lower watershed pond, canal and riparian practices.

With California Department of Conservation and now with CALFED Watershed Program funding, the District has served the Cache Creek Watershed Stakeholders Group in Capay Valley through meeting facilitation, development of a 140-page *Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual*, field

meetings, inter-watershed cooperation, and initiation of a Watershed Plan development process to be complete in fall 2003. As has proven effective with the Willow Slough Watershed Integrated Resources Management Plan, creation of a Capay Valley Watershed Stewardship Plan should improve the ability of the watershed group to coordinate their efforts and attract grant funding and permit approval for conservation projects.

The District hosts the Yolo County Weed Management Area (YCWMA) "Weed Warrior" in partnership with the Yolo County Agricultural Department and other local partners. The "Weed Warrior" also serves the District as its Vegetation Management Specialist, and has inaugurated the District's Geographical Information System (GIS) by digitally mapping significant weed populations along Union School Slough and other parts of the county. YCWMA work is funded through the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

FARMS Leadership, Inc. remains a critical partner for District education programs. Both the FARMS Leadership Program and SLEWS Program continued to grow, the latter in collaboration with the above-mentioned Audubon California program. Both bring grade school students out on to local farms to learn about agriculture, resource conservation, and restoration. The District has also produced new educational and outreach materials including *Monitoring on Your Farm*, the above-mentioned *Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual*, and a 1st-place display booth for the Yolo County Fair through the support of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

In cooperation with the Cache Creek Conservancy, the District held its Annual Dinner outdoors in May at the Cache Creek Preserve for over 90 guests, recognizing Assemblywoman Helen Thomson and her aide, Eleanor Fairclough, for their critical support of the Union School Slough Watershed program in fall 2001. It is through such partnerships and grant funding that all of the District programs are possible. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) remains the District's most critical partner for local conservation work on private lands through the provision of office space, Farm Bill conservation funds, and three dedicated, local staff.

During this past year, the District also reviewed and recrafted its long-range plan to cover the five-year period through 2006. This plan serves as a guidance document with measurable goals for effectively implementing the District's mission.

Introduction

Essentially all District work is accomplished through partnerships with NRCS, Audubon CA, and FARMS, Inc. under grant contracts with specific, discrete objectives. At the same time, District staff managing their respective grant programs "extend" those programs through mutual partnerships with other local organizations and agencies. For simplicity, the following discussion of District activities is organized according to the different grant programs.

All District activities are guided by an Annual and Long-Range Plan to meet the following goals:

Resource Assessment—*monitoring of existing watershed resources and conservation effects*

1. Document the quality, quantity and status of the County's resource base with a watershed approach using maps and Geographical Information Systems.
2. Ensure local agencies are informed and understand the natural resources data of the region.

Land Treatment—*demonstration projects and technical support for private and public conservation projects*

1. Develop and implement watershed stewardship practices in cooperation with the NRCS Field Office staff and other key partners.
2. Develop and implement or support watershed improvement programs within Yolo County.
3. Reduce barriers to local conservation.
4. Provide project review, implementation support and guidance for relevant County projects.

Education & Outreach—*conservation education and communication*

1. Inform and motivate the public and its representatives with new ways of evaluating and solving resource problems and of the central role of farmers in resource conservation and enhancement.
2. Increase our contact and programs with local schools and educational organizations.

Future Planning—*Sustaining regional resources and District service/function*

1. Provide regional resource planning guidance to support long-term sustainability of county agricultural and natural resources
2. Serve the people and natural resources of Yolo County more effectively by building the financial health of the district.

All the District's ongoing projects focus on the long-term, wise use of the county's natural resources. The District board members and staff continue to look for creative, effective ways that individual landowner can solve local and regional resource problems. The District recognizes all individual improvements enhance the collective effort, increasing our county's plant and wildlife biodiversity, improving our water supplies, reducing farm operations costs, providing recreational and open space opportunities, and educating future generations of Yolo County citizens.

Programs

Lower Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program

The Lower Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program (LUSSWIP) was funded through CALFED in September 2001. This is a continuation of a partnership with Audubon California's Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program and their current Willow Slough Watershed Rangeland Stewardship Program. Where the Audubon-Union School Slough project covered the entire watershed, the RCD project is focused on the lower part of the watershed. The $1.4 million project has three main components: practice installation, monitoring and research, and development of the Yolo OnePlan. Interwoven with these are Education/Outreach, Vegetation Management, and Water Quality activities.

Over the life of the three-year grant the LUSSWIP Program will install up to five riparian-edge hedgerows and up to fifteen sediment traps within the watershed. The RCD will be monitoring these projects and selected other practices installed by Audubon for their affects on water quality (sediment and nutrients) and for wildlife use. We are also conducting a research project, in cooperation with the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Corvallis, Oregon, into the benefits of conservation tillage and cover cropping as a means of improving water quality, and a variety of soil quality parameters. The third major component of the overall project is the development of the "Yolo OnePlan," also being done in partnership with the USDA ARS. The OnePlan will be a farm-planning tool available on the Internet that will allow private landowners to develop their own conservation plans, utilizing their intimate knowledge of the land. The OnePlan will utilize methods and practices for conserving and improving natural resource quality that are consistent with the needs of government cost-share programs, should the landowner choose to seek support for projects. The Yolo OnePlan will ultimately be extendable to other areas of California.

During the first year of the project, a significant amount of time was spent on contract development, particularly as it relates to the subcontract with the USDA. That completed, some highlights of project accomplishments include the following:

- We have developed digital maps of the watershed with component layers of soil type, parcels, topography, and others. Historic aerial photos have also been collected and mounted.
- Numerous landowner contacts were made pursuant to implementing projects and conducting water quality and wildlife monitoring
- The entire Union School Slough has been ground-surveyed for selected invasive weeds, in preparation for possible future vegetation management.
- Automated water samplers were purchased and deployed in various locations in the watershed, and water sampling in the slough and in five sediment traps and three ponds is ongoing. Software for data management is being refined.
- Two riparian-edge hedgerow locations have been located and planned, and the sites have been prepared. Plant installation will occur in the fall

- Six monthly topic-specific, outdoor workshops for landowners were held throughout the Willow Slough watershed between September and May.
- Monitoring for wildlife use at selected project sites has begun
- All project reports, invoices, and staff/partner communication has proceeded satisfactorily.
- A three-year research project on conservation tillage was initiated on one farm within the watershed
- The Yolo OnePlan basic framework has been developed using the NRCS "SWAPA +H" (Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals, + Humans) protocol. A web-based map viewer to examine GIS data is complete. The server for presenting the web-interface is nearly complete and has been designed using the existing Yolo RCD website framework (map viewer is being incorporated into the website). Work has begun to determine the best ways to integrate the different SWAPA +H conservation tools.

Watershed Coordination Program

The Watershed Coordination Program's year was highlighted by two significant achievements: A successful CALFED Watershed Program grant proposal; and the completion of the *Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual*.

The contract signed in June 2002 provides $118,000 from the CALFED Watershed Program to the Yolo County RCD Watershed Coordination Program. The funding will continue to support Yolo County RCD's full-time Watershed Coordinator through December 2003.

The *Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual* was completed in June 2002. The *Manual*, like other RCD publications, serves as a handbook for landowners seeking to conserve, enhance and restore the natural resources on their land. The 100+ page manual provides landowners with step-by-step guidelines for implementing over 30 conservation and restoration practices. Practices range from weed management and native perennial grass establishment to streambank stabilization and riparian restoration to cover crops and hedgerows. The *Manual* is a culmination of over a year's worth of effort by RCD and NRCS staff that was initially prompted by the Cache Creek Watershed Stakeholders Group.

The Watershed Coordinator continued to work closely with the Cache Creek Watershed Stakeholders Group throughout the year. With his assistance the Stakeholders Group revisited and revised its Operating Charter and developed a Strategic Plan for implementing the Capay Valley Watershed Improvement Program (CVWIP). The CVWIP is divided into four phases: 1. Stakeholder Capacity Building; 2. Resource Assessment and Action Strategies; 3. Comprehensive Watershed Stewardship Action Plan Development; 4. Restoration, Enhancement, and Conservation Project Implementation.

The Watershed Coordinator, with funds from a U.C. SAREP grant, organized two field meetings. The two field meetings were part of a six meeting series focused on on-farm conservation practices that is sponsored annually by the Yolo County RCD. The two field meetings hosted by the Watershed Coordinator were well-attended and well-received. They focused on the topics of Hedgerows and Riparian Buffers.

At the end of June 2002, the Watershed Coordination Program successfully completed its contract with the Department of Conservation Watershed Coordinator Grant Program, which provided the initial funding for the Watershed Coordinator position. The grant manager from the Department of Conservation complemented the RCD's Watershed Coordinator for his professionalism and competency, considering him to be "among the program's best coordinators."

Yolo County Weed Management Area

The Yolo County Weed Management Area (YCWMA) received continued funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture for current WMA projects to be expanded and new projects to begin. We also participated in a competitive grant application through the CDFA and were successfully awarded approximately $50,000 in supplemental funding. The YCWMA has grown from one project in 1999-2000 to thirteen projects in 2002-2003.

In the last 12 months, the YCWMA completed the following projects:

1. A weed-control cost share program with eleven landowners participating
2. Revegetation of three roadsides with native perennial grasses and
3. Maintenance and weed control on newly vegetated roadsides.

The YCWMA also initiated the following new projects:

1. A focused control effort along our highways to control perennial pepperweed.
2. Experimenting with a new roadside weed control technique aimed at reducing fire hazard. This method involves haying and baling annual grass species along I-505.
3. Expanding the railroad rights-of-way for California Northern weed control zone.
4. Initiating comprehensive Yellow starthistle and Perennial pepperweed control at Grasslands Park.

The RCD received a grant on behalf of the YCWMA for $5000 from the Center for Invasive Plant Management out of Montana to:

1. Purchase a highly-accurate GPS unit
2. Map priority weeds along Union School Slough (USWP)
3. Hire a WMA intern to

a. Develop a display board for conferences, fairs, etc. and
b. work on an herbarium collection of weeds and native plants
c. Map all WMA project locations and
d. Monitor all WMA sites with assistance from an international intern

CALFED Water-Use Efficiency Pilot Program

This one-year pilot program was funded by the CALFED Water Use Efficiency Program (WUEP) from December 2000 through December 2001. CALFED staff asked the District to 1) trial and evaluate techniques for assessing the efficacy of several water conservation practices such as tailwater retention ponds, cover crops and filter strips, irrigation evaluation techniques and sediment traps and 2) conduct a survey of water suppliers and conservation professionals regarding successful techniques and partnerships for promoting on-farm water use efficiency.

The District's interest and intent in participating in the Pilot Program was to initiate more rigorous analysis of the assumed water quality benefits of practices it has long promoted: especially those of tailwater ponds, sediment traps and winter cover cropping. The actual water quality improvements associated with those conservation techniques had never been rigorously quantified. In light of the changing regulatory climate regarding farm runoff water quality, this information could prove particularly useful for informing 1) regulators of acceptable and measurable water conservation techniques that can be used to meet their goals, and 2) farmers and water managers of proven tools that they can employ in their desire to best manage the water under their control. The District is committed to exploring and promoting means of voluntary compliance without direct regulation that allow farmers to continue their business while properly managing public resources such as air, water, and wildlife. While this Pilot Program only provided a single year of analysis for a limited set of these practices, the District is extending this research through other CALFED (Ecosystem Restoration Program) funding.

In this Pilot Program, tailwater ponds and sediment traps entrained as much as 90% of the mass of suspended solids carried in the irrigation tailwater passing through them. Proper design and maintenance were important factors influencing the efficacy of the ponds studied. Most of the traps and ponds studied provided some nutrient capture from irrigation water runoff primarily during early season irrigations, although that aspect of their function definitely bears further study. As nutrients are either soluble or attached to clay particles in the water, means to entrain those finest soil particles that do not easily fall out of suspension without longer residence times than those provided in the subject ponds and traps need to be explored.

The winter cover crop study demonstrated runoff flow attenuation and reduced concentrations of suspended solids in runoff. Future study of the winter runoff attenuation and water quality impacts relative to cover crop planting date and cover crop growth stage would help to gauge the most effective application of this technique. In the context of a processing tomato rotation in the Sacramento Valley, the costs of planting and incorporating a winter cover crop are typically less than the income generated from the slightly (5-7%) increased yields associated with the practice. Since initiating a cover crop runoff and yield impact study in processing tomatoes with UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) in 1997, District staff have observed a gradual increase in the practice in Yolo County.

The water conservation professionals surveyed (8 responses out of 27 surveys sent) as part of this Pilot Program identified several existing tools for promoting on-farm water use efficiency. Of highest regard were local mobile irrigation lab programs and local workshops and publications demonstrating and detailing techniques that farmers can employ. While UCCE and NRCS provide excellent information and technical resources, the most productive agency collaboration appears to be that between local water suppliers and Resource Conservation Districts. In two of the cases surveyed, the RCD and water district function practically as one organization. In a third, multiple water districts each provide funding to an RCD to manage and implement a mobile lab for their water customers. Most regions of the state include significant numbers of farmers who rely in part or in whole on groundwater and do not depend upon a water district for their irrigation water supply. Water use efficiency is compelling for them at the very least because of increasing energy and, therefore, pumping costs. A different source of support for a local water use efficiency program such as a mobile irrigation lab will need to be identified for those regions and farmers. While CALFED may not be fully accepted as a partner by members of the agricultural community, survey respondents suggested

that CALFED support of local work local work, alternatives to regulatory solutions, and effective response to water supply concerns could improve that relationship.

While the District considers the information gathered through the Pilot Program to be useful to CALFED in its aim to promote locally-led, on-farm water use efficiency programs, the Pilot Program also provided an excellent opportunity for the District to refine its on-farm monitoring program and understanding of potential collaborations for promoting water use efficiency in Yolo County.

Bring Farm Edges Back to Life! Field Meeting Series

With grant funding and in cooperation with NRCS, Audubon, and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), District staff hosted seven topical field meetings from October 2001 to June 2002. The topics covered were:

- Hedgerow Establishment for Habitat and Restoration
- Tailwater Return Systems, Ponds and Sediment Traps
- Using Native Grasses to Vegetate Rural Roadsides
- The Benefits of Riparian Buffers
- The Benefits of Cover Crops
- Livestock Pond Habitat Enhancement and Off-Pond Watering Systems
- Rangeland Enhancement with Native Perennial Grasses

In all field meetings, the nuts and bolts costs and benefits of the subject practices are laid out, as are the opportunities for cost-share support, and the positive and negative dimensions of regulatory policies and agencies are described. The meetings are all held at locations where the subject practices have been installed and can be directly observed.

Integrated resource management success depends on engaged co-operators and practical long-range thinking. Our field meetings introduce ideas and basic philosophy and offer real-world, successful models. Meeting attendees included landowners, farmers, students, resource specialists and agency staff. Public field meetings are touchstones between our team of innovators - drawn from many disciplines and organizations - and prospective co-operators.

Outreach Materials and Press

District staff developed two new guidebooks in the past year: *Monitoring on Your Farm*, a low-tech, low-cost guide for monitoring on-farm improvements in soil, water, plant and animal resources; and the *Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual*, described under the Cache Creek Watershed Coordinator's activities. Other guidebooks continue to be in high demand, and District staff oversaw reprinting of both *Know Your Natives* and *Bring Farm Edges Back to Life!* to meet that demand. Other community efforts include regular media placements (newspaper columns, press releases on projects and major awards received, farm newsletters about our projects and meetings), and the District's Annual Dinner (held this year at the Cache Creek Preserve in May).

The District continues to maintain and expand its Web site, http://www.yolorcd.ca.gov. The site maintains current and updateable information on our recommended practices, grants, staff, research, and partners. It also includes sample copies of District educational materials and a calendar of upcoming events.

PARTNER-LED PROGRAMS

NRCS Conservation Support

Through the provision of office space and amenities, Farm Bill conservation funds, and three local (and one regional) full-time staff, the NRCS is critical to the District's success in promoting the development and proliferation of innovative conservation practices in Yolo County. All District programs (as well as those of our partners below) are dependent upon the availability of NRCS staff and cost-share programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to fund, plan, and engineer their individual projects.

Through Farm Bill Conservation funding, the Woodland NRCS Field Office hosted local work groups to prioritize conservation concerns for application of the EQIP in Yolo County. Because of the office's successful track record and the high level of local interest in the program, Field Office staff were able to award over $200,000 in EQIP contracts for farmers throughout the county this past year alone. In the meantime, the Field Office staff also oversaw the implementation and management of prior years' conservation program contracts, gauged at roughly $250,000 of conservation work implemented per year. Practices supported by the NRCS include conservation tillage, cover cropping, irrigation water management, grazing management, pasture fencing, tailwater and wildlife pond development, wildlife habitat development, hedgerow establishment, and integrated pest management among many others.

Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program and Willow Slough Watershed Rangeland Stewardship Program

This watershed program is a partnership between Audubon-California and the District to implement many of the recommendations of the Willow Slough Watershed Plan in the Willow Slough watershed. In 1999 Audubon-California received a grant from the CALFED Bay-Delta Ecosystem Restoration Program that is funding the Union School Slough Watershed (a sub-watershed of Willow Slough) Improvement Program. The program successfully completed three years of activities and completed many restoration and conservation projects with landowners throughout the watershed. This year Audubon expanded the program into the upper watershed rangelands of Willow Slough under the Willow Slough Watershed Rangeland Stewardship Program. This second-phase grant from CALFED was initiated in August 2001. This was Audubon's second year collaborating with Farms Leadership Inc. on the SLEWS program. High school classes adopted restoration sites and assisted in implementing and monitoring the project sites.

Under the program, Audubon staff provide direct technical and financial assistance to individual landowners in the watershed to implement conservation and restoration activities. This year, projects implemented under both grants include:

- Continuation of rangeland enhancement in upper watershed on 5 ranches, including prescribed fire, seeding with native perennial grasses, and controlled grazing.
- Enhancement of two stock ponds on one ranch with fencing to control livestock grazing, installation of an off-pond solar-powered stock watering system, and establishment of native vegetation.
- Continuation of riparian enhancement along upper watershed seasonal drainages on five ranches, including prescribed fire, seeding with native perennial grasses, establishment of native trees and shrubs, and controlled grazing.

- Continuation of tailwater pond establishment and vegetation of an irrigation canal on one lower watershed farm.
- Continuation of wildlife pond and wetland establishment on two lower watershed farms.
- Continuation of riparian enhancement along slough on one lower watershed farm: including excavation of floodplain bench, and establishment of native vegetation.

The program also includes extensive monitoring by Audubon as well as five research subcontracts with U.C. Davis, Michigan State University, and the USDA Agricultural Research Service to study the effects of the conservation activities on watershed resources.

FARMS Leadership Program

In February 2002, FARMS Leadership, Inc., Board of Directors developed the following mission for the organization, which houses both the FARMS Leadership Program and the SLEWS Program:

Utilizing the talents and resources in our local communities, we provide youth with hands-on learning experiences in natural and agricultural systems to develop their personal strengths, critical thinking skills, social responsibility, and respect for the critical interplay of food production, culture, and nature.

The FARMS Leadership Program was started in 1994 by Winters walnut farmer Craig McNamara, now President of FARMS Leadership, Inc. Five high schools from Yolo, Solano, Sacramento, and Marin counties were selected to participate in the first FARMS program with a total of thirty students and six teachers involved in the project. Since 1994, eight more FARMS Leadership Program sites have been initiated around California; Orange and Sonoma in 1998, Riverside in 1999, Ventura and North State in 2000, and San Luis Obispo, San Diego, and Contra Costa in 2001.

Also in 2001, the SLEWS Program (see below) was formed in partnership with Audubon California. The result of this dramatic growth and increased demand led to the formation of FARMS Leadership, Inc., a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, in February, 2001. FARMS then moved from its four-year home and lead organization, the Yolo County RCD, to its own office and associated Farm and Nature Center at 5265 Putah Creek Road in Winters. This Center provides FARMS with the opportunity to host a variety of educational field days for both FARMS Leadership and SLEWS students in the areas of sustainable agriculture, natural resource conservation, and ecological restoration.

FARMS Leadership, Inc. continues to add new FARMS Leadership Program sites around California and develop new partnerships with high schools in the Sacramento Valley to participate in the SLEWS Program. A Fresno-Area FARMS Leadership Program will be added in the fall of 2002, and new programs are expected in Los Angeles County, San Joaquin County, and Monterey County within the next three years. The FARMS Leadership Program continues to be a highly-demanded model both in-state and nationwide. FARMS staff are continuing to develop the model, the partnerships, and the educational curriculum to fit statewide standards and increase the effectiveness of the student learning.

All of this growth (reaching almost 2,000 students a year!) could not have been possible without the incredible partnerships that have been formed in the last nine years. From teachers and students to farmers and ranchers, from Universities and Colleges to Farm Bureaus and Resource Conservation Districts, and from local, statewide, and federal funding sources – FARMS looks forward to even more partnerships and opportunities in the educational realm in the future.

SLEWS Program

Through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding, the SLEWS, the Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship, Program has been in operation for two years. The program has grown in that period to reach more students and expand geographically to cover sites in the Willow Slough and Putah Creek watersheds.

The SLEWS Leadership Team incorporated training from the Adopt-A-Watershed Institute to generate ideas about how to improve the program, specifically, how to work with the teachers to integrate field days with classroom activities. This should help keep students more engaged both in and out of the classroom.

SLEWS developed a partnership with the Davis Police Department in summer 2001. Youth offenders assisted the program with field duties as a part of their community service. They successfully undertook a project to convert an old barn behind the FARMS office into a teaching site/native plant nursery.

The program went into full swing again in the fall of 2001, hosting an average of two student field days a week, on which high school students began various ecological restoration projects on farms and ranches in the Union School Slough Watershed.

The SLEWS Program added five new classes bringing the total number of classes up to 12, from 11 different schools. In the fall of 2001 alone SLEWS hosted a total of eighteen field days, and reached over 350 different students. The majority of these projects were completed in May 2002, but many of the schools committed to long-term stewardship of their sites beyond the 2001-2002 school year.

Overall, SLEWS has been successful in reaching an extraordinary number of students since its first field day over a year and a half ago. Even more extraordinary, however, has been the diversity of the SLEWS audience. Participating schools range from the most urban (Grant, Sacramento and Berkeley High Schools) to the most rural (Esparto, Clarksburg and Winters) and suburban (Davis and Woodland). But perhaps most impressive has been the work that these students have accomplished—over 4,000 volunteer hours during 44 field meetings held throughout the year.

In this time the students initiated restoration projects on seven wildlife ponds, four riparian corridors, three hedgerows, two eroded gullies, and a wetland. In doing so, they were introduced to an array of topics ranging from ecological restoration, plant ecology and wildlife monitoring, to sheep and cattle ranching and walnut farming. It is our hope that they have also witnessed the power of working cooperatively to find solutions to our most pressing ecological problems.

Planning

Yolo County Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management Program

District staff together with Yolo County Supervisor Lois Wolk convened meetings with county personnel in 2001 to develop an integrated roadside management policy and implementation program for the County. The Yolo County Agriculture Department has since initiated a modified roadside herbicide program that reduces the use of higher-toxicity preemergence herbicides and is compatible with future roadside native vegetation projects. Also, Planning Department and District staff have developed a draft roadside encroachment permit to coordinate and set standards for maintaining vegetated as well as 'no-spray' roadsides in the County. County staff have also gathered samples of roadside management policies from other California counties, and RCD staff have gathered information on IRVM programs and policies in Iowa. In the coming year, the group endeavors to initiate the draft policy and strategic plan for Yolo County roadside management.

Regional Conservation Planning

Throughout the year, the District organizes individual meetings and communicates with various agencies, legislators and private organizations on critical resource issues, and participates in and provides commentary to local planning efforts. Issues on which the District provided input this past year included the conservation chapter of the 2002 Farm Bill, the 2002-03 California state budget (especially regarding impacts on county programs and CALFED), and State Assembly and Senate bills concerning natural resource management. The District also participated with other watershed groups and RCDs around the state in two "Days in the Capital" events organized by the Watershed Council and the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts. Both events provided updates on pending state legislation and opportunities to visit with state legislators in their capitol offices. Locally, the District provided commentary on land projects and parcel changes throughout the county and participated in the ongoing development of the Yolo County Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Planning Program and the Yolo County Integrated Water Management Plan.

District Strategic Planning

The District Board and staff and NRCS staff met in January 2001 to review and update the District's long-term plan, and to set short-term agendas. A new 5-year plan was developed and approved by the board in July 2002 and will serve as the basis for District annual plans through 2006. Those plans are available upon request.

The District is actively seeking participation from the community as Associate Directors and project volunteers. The District recognizes that a healthy organization requires a diversity of skill, experience and background in its leadership and welcomes those interested to join the Board as Associate Directors. The District can also provide volunteer opportunities for individuals interested in gaining planting and on-farm monitoring experience. We hope to develop a proper volunteer program pending grant funding by 2005 that will afford more consistent opportunities for public participation and learning in local, voluntary resource conservation.

About the Yolo County Resource Conservation District

The Yolo County Resource Conservation District is a legal subdivision of the State of California, organized to support landowners with resource management solutions, primarily through close partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The District is guided by a 5-member Board of Directors, which consists of local landowners, most of whom are farmers. All of them undertake conservation practices on their properties and work within the community to promote resource conservation. According to our mission statement:

> "The Yolo County RCD is committed to protecting, improving, and sustaining the natural resources of Yolo County. We promote responsible stewardship by:
>
> *Demonstrating conservation practices through cooperative land users,*
> *Educating the public in resource conservation and enhancement, and*
> *Providing information and expertise."*

Yolo County Resource Conservation District Board of Directors

Tom Muller, *Chairman*
Scott Stone
Jim Mayer
Robert Becker
Wyatt Cline
Dave Scheuring, *Associate Director*

RCD Staff

Paul Robins, *Executive Director*
Jeanette Wrysinski, *Program Manager*
William Spong, *Water Quality Specialist*
Vance Howard, *Cache Creek Watershed Coordinator*
Katherine Laddish, *Watershed Education Coordinator*
Jennifer Drewitz, *Vegetation Management Specialist*
Susan McCloud, *Administrative Assistant*

USDA NRCS Woodland Field Office Staff

Phil Hogan, *District Conservationist*
John Weatherford, *Soil Conservationist*
Stephen Jaouen, *Range Conservationist*
Ha Truong, *Agricultural Engineer*

FARMS Leadership, Inc.

Mary Kimball, *Statewide FARMS Program Manager*
Daniel Leroy, *SLEWS Program Manager*

Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program Staff (Audubon California)

Judy Boshoven, *Program Manager*
Jeanne Wirka, *Restoration Ecologist*
Chris Rose, *Restoration Specialist*