



# Yolo Habitat Conservancy

County of Yolo • City of Davis • City of Winters • City of West Sacramento  
City of Woodland • University of California, Davis

To: Lucas Frerichs, Chair  
Members of the Board

From: Chris Alford  
Interim Executive Director

Re: Receive Interim Executive Director's update on proposed staffing approach and provide direction on next steps

Date: March 17, 2025

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## **REQUESTED ACTION:**

1. Receive Interim Executive Director's update on proposed staffing approach and provide direction regarding next steps

## **BACKGROUND:**

Since 2020, the County of Yolo (County) has provided a variety of ongoing administrative services that support the Yolo Habitat Conservancy (Conservancy) and its implementation of the Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP) under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Conservancy also contracts with other entities to provide specialized services and as-needed support. In October 2024, the County staff member acting as the Executive Director for the Yolo Habitat Conservancy left their position at the County. On December 9, 2024, the Conservancy Board appointed Chris Alford to be the Interim Executive Director to oversee implementation of the Yolo HCP/NCCP in the short-term and to evaluate staffing options to ensure the Conservancy has the capacity to address Yolo HCP/NCCP implementation responsibilities in the coming years. A summary of the assessment effort conducted to-date and the recommended staffing approach to share staff with the County's Natural Resources Program is provided below. Staff request that the Board provide their initial input and recommendations regarding the proposed staffing approach and provide direction regarding next steps.

## **CONSERVANCY CAPACITY NEEDS:**

The Conservancy is in its sixth year of implementing the Yolo HCP/NCCP. The Conservancy has maintained a very lean staffing structure that primarily relies on partial FTEs of County staff with support from consultants. Since 2020, the 'key' positions conducting day-to-day management and implementation of the Yolo HCP/NCCP for the Conservancy have consisted of 0.25 FTE of a management-level County staff member to act as Executive Director, 0.4 FTE of a County Planner position to oversee the review and processing of covered activity applications, and a contract with Alford Environmental to

manage conservation strategy implementation with a time allocation that is approximately equivalent to 0.45 FTE of a staff position. In total this equates to 1.1 FTE in annual work hours, spread across three part-time positions.

In the first few years of Yolo HCP/NCCP implementation, staff time was primarily focused on developing policies and implementation structures. In more recent years, the day-to-day staff activities have shifted from putting structures in place to support Yolo HCP/NCCP implementation to conducting key implementation functions such as processing covered activity applications, review and certification of qualified biologist applications, reserve system property identification and enrollment, identification of habitat restoration and enhancement needs within the reserve system, and the procurement and management of contracts to support reserve system site acquisitions, restoration, management, monitoring, and other activities as-needed to support Yolo HCP/NCCP implementation. The Conservancy currently has active contract agreements in place with 14 consultants and contractors that assist in meeting the requirements of the Yolo HCP/NCCP.

The number of applications for take coverage and reserve system site enrollment, management, and monitoring needs have increased substantially in the past few years. A total of 84 projects have received permit coverage under the Yolo HCP/NCCP to-date. In part due to COVID and other economic factors, there were few development projects seeking permit coverage and paying mitigation fees during the first three years of implementation. An average of only 7 projects per year were issued permit coverage during the first three years of implementation. In contrast, an average of 20 projects a year have been issued permit coverage during the most recent three years of implementation.

The Conservancy has steadily increased the number of properties in the reserve system and overall acreage of habitat restoration and enhancement projects conducted within the reserve system consistent with the goals and objectives of the Yolo HCP/NCCP. Currently there are 5,837 acres of land, spread across 28 properties, that are enrolled in the Yolo HCP/NCCP reserve system. The Conservancy is also actively engaged in completing required due diligence and enrollment steps for 9 additional properties that have already been approved as candidate conservation easement sites. Over 18 acres of land across four different reserve system sites have been restored as riparian, wetlands, or lacustrine habitat to meet valley elderberry longhorn beetle mitigation and habitat restoration requirements. Several projects that are anticipated to seek permit coverage within the next two years will require riparian habitat mitigation and the transplanting of elderberries onto reserve system sites. Staff are actively working on enrolling three additional properties in the reserve system that are suitable for riparian restoration and can receive elderberry transplants.

While site management and monitoring activities are primarily conducted by consultants and project partners, Conservancy staff are responsible for making sure these activities occur, managing contracts, coordinating with landowners and project partners, maintaining documentation and datasets associated with monitoring and management efforts, and summarizing monitoring and management activities in the Yolo HCP/NCCP's annual report. Monitoring activities currently being conducted to meet Yolo HCP/NCCP requirements are extensive and include, among other things, an array of different compliance, species, habitat, and land cover surveys at various frequencies across the reserve system. Additional monitoring activities will also be necessary as the reserve system is expanded by the addition



of new conservation easement sites that include habitat types that are not already part of the existing reserve system.

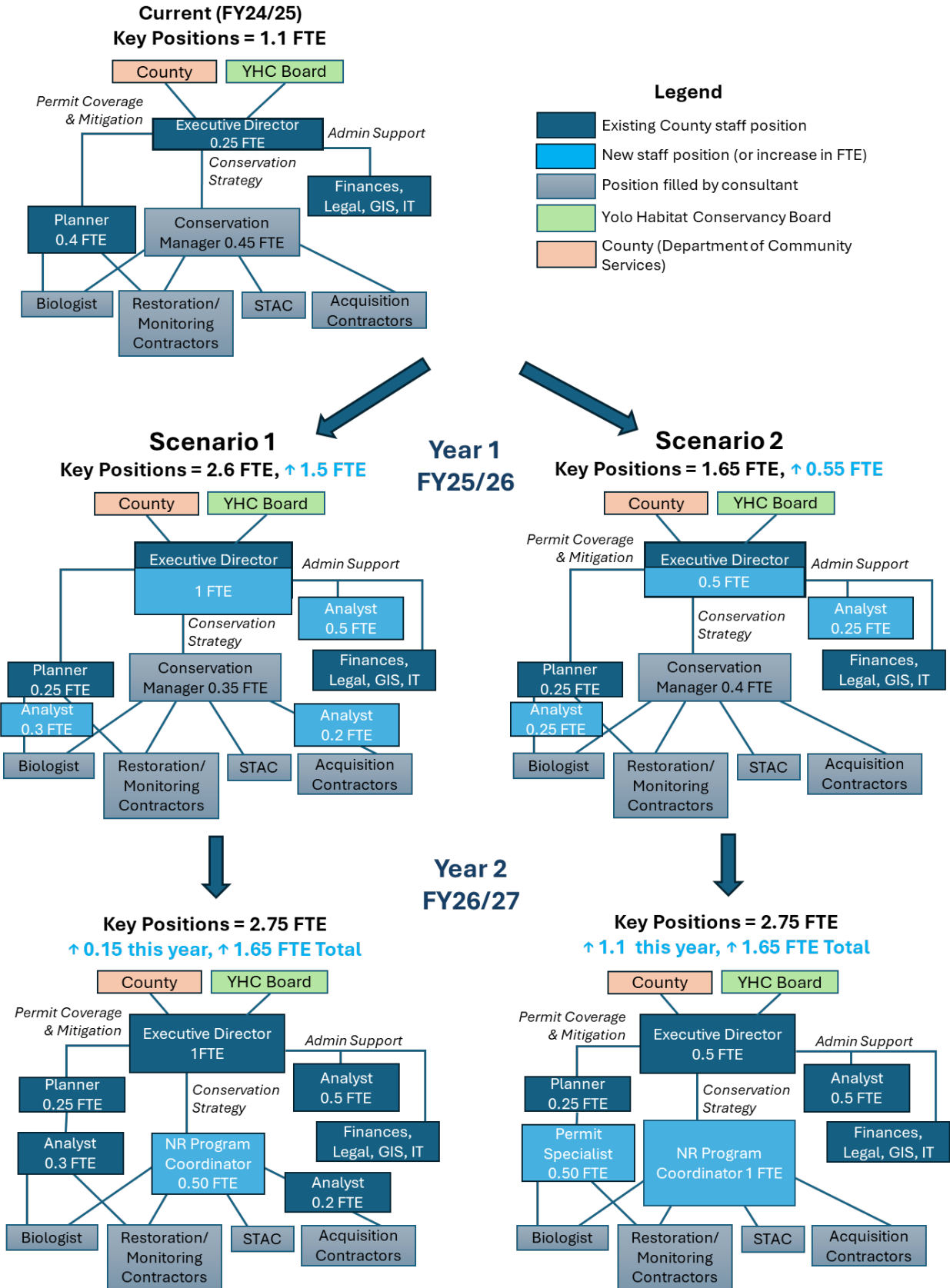
The Conservancy has been able to meet the primary requirements of the Yolo HCP/NCCP permit terms; however, there are some items identified in the Yolo HCP/NCCP that have not been conducted or have been minimally addressed to-date due to the current lack of staff capacity. Activities such as grant writing, development of an annual work plan, convening of the Advisory Committee, and public education and outreach are all activities identified in the Yolo HCP/NCCP that either haven't, or have only minimally, been conducted. There is also the need for the Conservancy to consider amending the Yolo HCP/NCCP within the next few years to include permit coverage for species that are likely to become state or federally listed species and potentially to seek modifications in the amount of temporary impacts that are covered by the Yolo HCP/NCCP. While an amendment is not required of the Yolo HCP/NCCP permits, it may be necessary in order to ensure that the Yolo HCP/NCCP is able to continue to provide the benefits of efficient project permitting and certainty regarding development project fees and pre-established avoidance and minimization measures.

#### **STAFFING APPROACH SCENARIOS:**

The staffing evaluation conducted thus far assumes the Conservancy would continue to maintain an MOU with the County to provide administrative and other support services. Other options include hiring employees for the Conservancy or contracting with a different member agency, but these options are not further considered herein due to concerns with feasibility, costs, and other practical concerns.

Assuming an ongoing County/Conservancy collaboration, the amounts budgeted in the tables below are based on County position classifications and include an 8% annual increase that accounts for a 3% automatic inflation increase and a 5% merit increase based on current County practices. In terms of the type of staffing needed, the most immediate needs of the Conservancy are to: 1) fill and increase the time allotment of the Executive Director position to provide leadership and overall management, and 2) add staff to provide administrative support. The two scenarios provided below take different approaches to address these needs. Scenario 1 assumes that any new staff to the Conservancy established within year one (FY25/26) are entirely assigned to the Conservancy. Scenario 2 assumes new staff to the Conservancy established in year one are shared 50/50 with the County's Natural Resources staff which implement the Cache Creek Area Plan (related to ongoing gravel mining). These two scenarios were initially chosen to provide the Board and County staff with a relative comparison of what staffing structures and associated costs would look like under different scenarios that result in a similar number of work hours per year assigned to key staff at year 2.





Key YHC Staff Roles	Current staffing (FY24/25)		
	FTE Allocation	Hours/Year*	Cost/Year
Executive Director (staff)	0.25	438	\$68,382
NR Planner (staff)	0.4	700	\$84,382
Conservation Manager (contractor)	0.45	915	\$160,000
Sr. Admin. Services Analyst (staff)	-	-	-
NR Program Coordinator (staff)	-	-	-
Associate Administrative Analyst (staff)	-	-	-
NR P C - Permit Specialist (staff)	-	-	-
Totals:	1.1	2,053	\$312,764

**YEAR 1: Comparison of staffing options evaluated for FY25/26**

Key YHC Staff Roles	Scenario 1: New positions in Year 1 are not shared			Scenario 2: Conservancy & Natural Resources Staff Share		
	FTE Allocation	Hours/Year*	Cost/Year	FTE Allocation	Hours/Year*	Cost/Year
Executive Director (staff)	1	1,750	\$248,660	0.5	875	\$124,330
NR Planner (staff)	0.25	500	\$52,739	0.25	500	\$52,739
Conservation Manager (contractor)**	0.35	700	\$133,000	0.4	800	\$152,000
Sr. Admin. Services Analyst (staff)	1	1,750	\$182,486	0.5	875	\$91,243
NR Program Coordinator (staff)	-	-	-	-	-	-
NR P C - Permit Specialist (staff)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals:	2.6	4,700	\$616,885	1.65	3,050	\$420,312
<b>Increase compared to FY24/25:</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2,647</b>	<b>\$304,122</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>\$107,549</b>

**YEAR 2: Comparison of staffing options evaluated for FY26/27**

Key YHC Staff Roles	Scenario 1: New positions in Year 1 are not shared			Scenario 2: Conservancy & Natural Resources Staff Share		
	FTE Allocation	Hours/Year*	Cost/Year	FTE Allocation	Hours/Year*	Cost/Year
Executive Director (staff)	1	1,750	\$268,553	0.5	875	\$134,276
NR Planner (staff)	0.25	500	\$56,958	0.25	500	\$56,958
Conservation Manager (contractor)**	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sr. Admin. Services Analyst	1	1,750	\$197,085	0.5	875	\$98,542
NR Program Coordinator (staff)	0.5	875	\$80,460	1	1,750	\$160,920
NR P C - Permit Specialist (staff)	-	-	-	0.5	875	\$80,460
Totals:	2.75	4,875	\$603,056	2.75	4,875	\$531,157
<b>Increase compared to FY24/25:</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>2,822</b>	<b>\$290,292</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>2,822</b>	<b>\$218,393</b>

\* Annual hours for staff positions are considered working hours such that standard vacation allotments are not included

\*\* Assumption is that this position, which is currently filled by a contractor, would be eliminated/replaced by staff positions. The Executive Director may choose to utilize the contractor for special projects or as-needed but they would no longer be fulfilling a key YHC staff role.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Of the two scenarios provided above, Scenario 2 is the proposed as the preferred staffing approach for the following reasons:

- Both of the Conservancy’s most immediate needs (leadership and administrative support) are addressed immediately without causing a potential strain on the Conservancy’s overall budget
- Staff sharing between the Conservancy and Natural Resources provides an opportunity to



increase communications and coordination amongst the two programs and provides increased staff capacity to each program that may not be financially viable for either program on its own

- The Natural Resources Manager position, which was allocated an 0.25 FTE to serve as the Conservancy's Executive Director during the past and current fiscal year has historically been funded primarily with County General Funds. For example, this staff position billed approximately 70% of its time to the County General Fund in FY23/24. The new composition of this staff position will increase staff support to both the Yolo Habitat Conservancy and Natural Resources by approximately 25-35% for each program, while eliminating all reliance on the County's General Fund.
- The incoming Executive Director will have the opportunity to become familiar with the operations of the organization and have the ability to be directly involved in the hiring of more key staff in year 2 and/or adjust the approach as needed for year 2 to accommodate capacity needs, economic climate, and financial conditions at that time
- This approach includes one additional partial staff position for the Conservancy in year 2 as compared with Scenario 1, which slightly improves the overall ability to build institutional knowledge amongst staff

The two scenarios have been discussed with the County's Director of Community Services and Chief Assistant Director of Community Services. Community Services staff are supportive of the proposed staff sharing recommendation and have tentatively included a Natural Resources Manager position and a new Administrative Analyst position that would both be split 50/50 between the Conservancy and the Natural Resources Division in their draft Department budget for FY25/26, pending Yolo Habitat Conservancy Board approval. The Community Services Department's budget is also still subject to review and approval by the Board of Supervisors.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

Staff request that the Board provide input regarding the proposed staffing approach and direct staff regarding the Board's desired approach for finalizing the approval of a staffing approach for FY25/26. If the Board is comfortable with the proposed staff sharing approach, the Board may choose to direct staff to coordinate with the Executive Management Committee and County staff to finalize the details of the staff positions prior to when the County's budget goes to the Board of Supervisors for an update on April 29<sup>th</sup> and return to the Board at the Conservancy's May Board meeting with a proposed FY25/26 Conservancy budget that incorporates the staffing recommendations. Alternatively, if the Board would like additional staffing options evaluated for consideration they may choose to direct staff to evaluate additional scenarios and schedule a special Conservancy Board meeting in April in order to review and discuss additional staffing approach options.

