

LWVMC LOCAL POSITION: MERCED COUNTY PLANNING
RE: LAND USE, AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION

Sections of the Merced County Planning Position (originally adopted in 2000) which
were updated by concurrence at the April 30, 2014 Annual Meeting

LAND USE, AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION

Statement of Position: **The League of Women Voters of Merced County believes that planning decisions must support the livability of our communities; the economic importance and scenic/open space value of county agriculture; and our irreplaceable natural environments, i.e. wetlands, grasslands, riverine and riparian habitats, oak woodlands.**

Therefore, we believe:

I. Land Use

Continued growth and development in Merced County will present ongoing land use planning challenges.

We support land use decisions that protect:

- prime agricultural land
- the unique ecosystems in the area
- the minimization of negative impacts on current residents of Merced and surrounding urbanized areas.

II. Agriculture

Our farmland is seen as integral to our county's way of life generating economic, environmental, nutritional, and societal benefits for our entire community.

We support the preservation of the rural fabric that sustains the County's:

- economic viability
- cultural integrity
- environmental health

III. Conservation:

Merced County is home to many rare and valuable natural resources and habitats. Many are important not only locally but are of much broader significance. Some are recognized as playing a globally important role in the preservation of rare habitat.

We support:

- the preservation of wetlands and native grasslands
- the protection of unique habitats
- the protection of habitat for listed species and species of special concern.

IV. General Plan:

The Merced County General Plan should contain policies that will serve as the basis for decisions on how Merced County changes and develops.

To support that, we believe:

- Elements related to land use, agricultural land preservation, conservation and the environment should be reviewed and updated as necessary in order to assure they adequately address planning and development challenges facing Merced County.
- In order to have an acceptable plan for future development, the Merced County Board of Supervisors must first identify and develop an inventory of resources and define the carrying capacity of the land for all types of uses. The information should be kept current (or continuously updated) as development and environmental changes occur.
- The County of Merced should offer incentive options to agricultural land owners to conserve and preserve their land for agricultural uses.

V. Role to of the Board of Supervisors:

LWVMC believes the Merced County Board of Supervisors should implement the actions necessary to assure the public always have pertinent and understandable information about the impacts of planning issues and alternatives during the earliest stages of and throughout the decision making process.

Therefore, the Merced County Board of Supervisors should take action to:

- Make public all health, social and economic impacts of planning actions
- Publicly identify the consequences, both positive and negative, for all groups impacted by a planning action
- Heighten public awareness of the national and global impacts of our county's agricultural production and of our unique natural environments
- Utilize local television access for public education and participation about local land use, conservation and environmental issues, including the Merced County Office of Education's METV programming for student education.
- Foster cooperation and assure communication among the various governmental agencies and private groups concerned or impacted by planning actions.

Definition: "Listed Species" (Section III. Conservation) are defined by the Federal Government and the State of California. Some of the listed species identified by the State of California are in addition to those on the federally list.

Federally Listed Species: A species, subspecies, or distinct population segment that has been added to the Federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants. **Federal Species of concern:** An informal term referring to a species that might be in need of conservation action.

Resource: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/about/glossary.html> U.S. (Fish and Wildlife Service)

California Listed Species: Threatened, and endangered plants and animals found within California or off the coast of the State that have been classified as Endangered or Threatened by the California Fish & Game Commission (state list) or by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior or the U.S. Secretary of Commerce (federal list). In addition there is a list of rare species.

Resource: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/biogeodata/cnddb/pdfs/TEAnimals.pdf> (CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife...new name for Fish and Game)

[**Note:** State and National positions include vertical statements on Land Use, Agriculture, and Conservation that may be useful for local League action efforts. Since prior permission may be required, representatives at State and/or National LWV should be consulted.]

RELATED POSITION RE: LAND USE

LWVMC Land Use Position developed following a LWVUS study.

In 1975 the Land Use Committee found three main areas of member agreement, which were added to the State and National Land Use Position to address local concerns:

1. The prime agricultural land of the San Joaquin Valley is an important natural resource which should be preserved.
2. Use of Floodplains for parks, recreation and wildlife preserves and other uses in which flooding is not detrimental should be encouraged as alternatives to dam construction and channelization of streams. Urban development should be discouraged on floodplain land.
3. Urban growth in underdeveloped land where city services are not available and detrimental environmental results will occur as a result of the “leap frog” growth is undesirable.