



INFORMATION ITEM

Proposed 2023 Delta Stewardship Council Work Plan

Summary

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009 (Delta Reform Act) (Water Code sections 85000, et seq.) charges the Council with the development and implementation of the Delta Plan to further the coequal goals of providing a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem, which is to be achieved in a manner that protects and enhances the unique cultural, recreational, natural resource, and agricultural values of the Delta as an evolving place (Wat. Code §§ 85300(a) and 85054). Furthering the coequal goals is an ongoing, Council-led mission that requires leadership on multiple fronts. Much of our work in 2023 will be accomplished through continued collaboration with our local, State, and federal agency partners to complete Delta Plan amendments, advance Delta Plan implementation, and ensure that Delta decision-making is based on the best available science. Additionally, core Council functions, including support for the Delta Independent Science Board, covered actions consultation and review, and administrative functions, including contract, budget, and human resources support, continue to be central to the organization's success. Council staff will develop the next iteration of a multi-year work plan based on outcomes of the Delta Plan Five-year review, Delta Adapts, the Environmental Justice issues paper, and other input and considerations.

Proposed 2023 Work Plan

The proposed 2023 Work Plan continues the agency's focus on three primary objectives:

- 1) Implement the Delta Plan;
- 2) Advance One Delta, One Science; and
- 3) Enhance Engagement and Outreach

Objective 1: Implement the Delta Plan

Risk Reduction via the Delta Levees Investment Strategy (DLIS)

DLIS is the Council's rulemaking effort pursuant to the Delta Reform Act requirement directing the Council to prioritize state investments in the Delta levee system to reduce the likelihood and consequences of levee failures, to protect people, property, and state interests while advancing the coequal goals.

Previously, DLIS rulemaking was withdrawn in March 2020 to evaluate new levee condition (LiDAR elevation) data. On August 26, 2021, the Council endorsed the policy direction for DLIS and directed staff to reinitiate the rulemaking process based on the updated data. The notice of proposed rulemaking for the updated DLIS priorities was issued in August 2022; a public hearing on the proposed rulemaking was held at the Council meeting on November 17, 2022. The Council will consider final rulemaking documents for possible adoption in Q1 2023; if adopted by the Council and approved under the Administrative Procedure Act, the DLIS regulations would take effect in late 2023.

Delta Adapts: Adaptation Strategy

In response to climate change, the Council took action at its May 2018 meeting by directing staff to begin a two-phase effort that will result in the following:

1. A vulnerability assessment to improve understanding of regional vulnerabilities to protect the vital resources the Delta provides to California and beyond with state interests and investments top of mind (Vulnerability Assessment); followed by
2. An adaptation plan detailing strategies and tools that State, regional, and local governments can use to help communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems thrive in the face of climate change (Adaptation Strategy).

Together, these two phases form the Delta Adapts: Creating a Climate Resilient Future initiative, a comprehensive, regional approach to climate resiliency that cuts across regional boundaries and commits to collaboration across State, local, and regional levels.

The Council released the draft Vulnerability Assessment in January 2021 for public review and comment and took action to endorse the Vulnerability Assessment final report in June 2021. In 2022, staff initiated preparation of the accompanying Adaptation Strategy, supported by a Stakeholder Working Group and several topic-specific focus groups, highlighted by an update to the Council in the summer. Completion of the Adaptation Strategy is anticipated in late 2023.

Environmental Justice Issue Paper

The 2019 Five-Year Review of the Delta Plan (Five-Year Review) identified environmental justice (EJ) as a key issue for Council focus. The Five-Year Review recommended that staff prepare an issue paper to inform future actions to address EJ and better serve disadvantaged communities in our pursuit of furthering the coequal goals.

During 2022, staff conducted 22 interviews with EJ and community-based organizations to identify current EJ issues in the Delta. Staff presented updates to the Council at the August and December 2022 public meetings and regularly convened the EJ Expert Group throughout the year. Completion of the EJ Issue Paper is anticipated in 2023.

Delta Plan Ecosystem Amendment Rulemaking

The Delta Plan Ecosystem Amendment aims to further the coequal goal of protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta Ecosystem and achieving a dynamic and resilient restored landscape envisioned in the Delta Reform Act. The Ecosystem Amendment includes recommended actions to protect existing ecosystems, restore ecosystems, and enhance working or urban landscapes that provide habitat resources to species.

The Council adopted the Ecosystem Amendment as part of the Delta Plan in June 2022. As part of that action, the Council directed staff to initiate the rulemaking process pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act for the Council's proposed regulations contained in the Ecosystem Amendment. Staff will initiate work on the Ecosystem Amendment rulemaking upon the conclusion of the DLIS Rulemaking process, anticipated in late 2023.

Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC)

The DPIIC met twice in 2022 to discuss ecosystem-based management, cross-estuary collaboration, and restoration. Also, in 2022, the DPIIC Restoration Subcommittee was formed—staffed by the Council and the Delta Conservancy--convening three times in public meetings. The Subcommittee drafted a vision, mission statement, and workplan and facilitated the first Delta Restoration Forum (held on February 8, 2023), a hybrid, publicly noticed event that included representatives from state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and locals. Additionally, the third annual Delta Crosscut Budget Report – compiled in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation – was released in July 2022.

DPIIC did not meet during the fall to reflect on and consider how to engage during 2023. A plan for 2023 will be announced early this year.

Five-Year Review of the Delta Plan

The Delta Reform Act requires the Council to review the Delta Plan every five years and revise it as the Council deems appropriate. (Wat. Code 85300(c).) Council staff has initiated the 2023 Five-Year Review of the Delta Plan, using Delta Plan Performance Measures as a framework for the review. This second Five-Year Review also includes an analysis of covered actions and appeals and an assessment of Adaptive Management Plans. Completion of the Five-Year Review is anticipated in late 2023.

Science for Communities 2.0

In October last year, the Planning Division and Science Program held an event at the Big Break Visitor Center in Oakley that focused on collaborations between science and community partners on important Delta issues. Given the positive feedback received, staff is designing a follow-up engagement to be held later in the year.

Delta Plan Performance Measures

The Delta Plan contains 38 quantitative output and outcome performance measures and 120 administrative measures to track actions by other agencies. Council staff track and report performance measures annually to inform the Council about the effectiveness of Delta Plan implementation. The mid-year

performance report includes finalized data from the 2022 Water Year. The year-in-review report provides an update on a broader suite of performance measures, including agency actions and programs. In 2023, reporting on the new and revised ecosystem performance measures adopted as part of the Ecosystem Amendment in June 2022 will be included.

Covered Actions and Appeals

In 2022, the Council received seven certifications of consistency for covered actions, submitted 13 comment letters on potential covered actions and Delta-related planning activities, and tracked the progress of 20 ongoing projects ranging from tidal wetland restoration to levee improvement to carbon capture and storage. Two parties submitted appeals for the California Department of Water Resources' revised certification of consistency for the Lookout Slough Habitat Restoration Project. The revised certification of consistency was submitted after the Council remanded portions of the original certification for the project back to the Department in July 2021. This project is essential to system-wide ecosystem restoration and flood control objectives. We anticipate a similar or higher number of certifications of consistency and potential appeals in 2023 and 2024.

Objective 2: Advance One Delta, One Science

2023 Proposal Solicitation Notice (funding call for research)

The Delta Reform Act states that the mission of the Delta Science Program (DSP) "shall be to provide the best possible unbiased scientific information to inform water and environmental decision-making in the Delta. That mission shall be carried out through funding research, synthesizing and communicating scientific information to policymakers and decision-makers, promoting independent scientific peer review, and coordinating with Delta agencies to promote science-based adaptive management" (Water Code section 85280(b)(4)).

In 2023, the DSP will hold its next round of science funding through a proposal solicitation. The DSP's ability to collaboratively advance critical investigations that address gaps in current knowledge is unique and valuable. Since 2004, the DSP, including CALFED Science Program (the DSP predecessor), has funded 79 projects totaling more than \$45 million.

Support Science-Based Decision-Making

Promoting adaptive management principles and synthesizing scientific information for decision-makers is a core function of the DSP. For this purpose, in 2023, the DSP plans the following:

Integrated Modeling Workshop

The workshop will focus on promoting a community of modelers and a set of open-source tools for advancing integrated, transparent modeling to inform resource management decisions better.

Adaptive Management Forum

The Delta Science Program hosts biennial Adaptive Management Forums to allow the Delta community to share knowledge and promote collaboration on adaptive management across the estuary. The 2023 Forum will synthesize lessons learned from ecosystem restoration and water management projects and research efforts, strengthen science-management interactions, and stimulate dialogue around a shared vision of adaptive management.

DSP-NCEAS Synthesis Working Group

In 2022, the Delta Science Program partnered with the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) to lead a collaborative working group to synthesize data on flood management and food web dynamics in the San Francisco Estuary. Building on the success of this collaboration, the Delta Science Program will initiate a second working group that will focus on integrating and analyzing social, economic, and environmental data to provide insight on issues at the human-environment interface in the Estuary.

Salinity Management Workshop

The Delta Science Program is convening a second salinity management workshop in 2023 to advance understanding of the range of issues associated with salt intrusion into the Delta, discuss different salinity management tools and strategies, identify knowledge gaps that could be filled with future research and modeling and conduct a demonstration scenario modeling exercise. The long-term goal of the workshops is to catalyze a collaborative, adaptive management approach to controlling salt intrusion in the Delta in the face of severe and sustained drought and sea-level rise.

Science Communication

The State of Bay-Delta Science (SBDS) is a collection of papers that represents a synthesis of the current scientific understanding of the Delta on a given theme. Together the papers emphasize the progress made on key research questions and identify remaining knowledge gaps. The 2022 edition of SBDS will include chapters on many of the most pressing ecological challenges in the Delta: aquatic vegetation ecology, aquatic weed control, harmful algal blooms, the role of primary producers in carbon sequestration and subsidence, advancement in remote sensing technology for plants and algae, and the historical, current, and future contribution of aquatic plants to carbon production. The 2022 edition of the SBDS will be published in early 2023.

Later in 2023, DSP staff will begin planning the 2024 Bay-Delta Science Conference, a forum for presenting scientific findings and analyses relevant to the management of the Bay-Delta.

Delta Science Tracker

Currently, there is no centralized way to track all science activity across the Delta and broader estuary. Consequently, the Delta Science Plan (2019) calls for developing a web-based tracking system of science activities in the Delta to facilitate enhanced coordination and collaboration and increased transparency in science funding streams. In the Spring of 2020, the DSP undertook an effort to develop the Delta Science Tracker under the guidance of an interagency working group to help ensure that it met the needs of the Delta science enterprise. This tool will be launched in the early summer of 2022 and maintained by the DSP with continuing input from the working group. The development of a shared tracking system for science activities of the Delta was also a recommendation from the white paper "Funding Science to Meet Tomorrow's Challenges," developed at the DPIIC's request in 2019.

The Delta Science Tracker was launched on February 7. The Tracker's information is populated by policy managers and scientists throughout the Delta; DSP staff will spend the rest of 2023 promoting this new tool among various audiences and user groups.

Independent Scientific Peer Review

The DSP is a lead coordinator of independent scientific peer review in the Delta scientific community. The peer review process uses independent scientific experts and established guidelines to ensure credible and legitimate science can be used by water and environmental decision-makers.

In 2023, the DSP will be facilitating the independent peer review of the Department of Water Resources State Water Project Delivery Capability Report, the US Bureau of Reclamation's (USBR) Biological Assessment of the Long-Term Operations of state and federal water projects, and USBR's Water Temperature Modeling Framework for the federal water project.

Delta Independent Science Board Support and Collaboration (Delta ISB)

The Delta ISB will finalize its 2023 workplan in the first quarter of the year. As part of its planned work, the Delta ISB is planning a "decision-making under deep uncertainty" initiative that seeks to raise awareness of new scientific approaches and provide recommendations for incorporating them into scenario analysis to better account for deep uncertainties in the Delta. The Delta ISB and DSP are jointly organizing this effort.

Recruitment for the next Delta Lead Scientist is expected to begin in mid-2023.

Objective 3: Enhance outreach and engagement

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)

In 2020, staff-led conversations on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) began in earnest. Since that time, the Council's internal Delta Diversity Team has been meeting regularly to identify how to better integrate JEDI practices with the Council's work and organizational culture. In 2023, the Council will develop and implement a charter for its JEDI Committee, undergo additional all staff trainings on JEDI topics, and begin the development of an annual workplan to fulfill its mission in a manner that promotes equity.

Social Science Integration

Delta Residents' Survey

Led by the Council and California Sea Grant's co-sponsored position for Social Science in the Delta, the Delta Residents' Survey aims to establish, collect, and track

social data and information about human communities of the Delta. The survey was developed with an advisory committee that includes staff from the Delta Protection Commission, local governments, and social science researchers. The survey is expected to be mailed to residents in February 2023.

In addition, staff will be providing an update to the Council on the efforts of the Social Science Integration Team and holding a Social Science Community of Practice seminar later this year to further advance research on the human dimensions of the Bay-Delta.

Implement Public Participation Plan and Tribal Consultation Policy

The Council endorsed its Public Participation Plan in 2020; the Council had adopted its Tribal Consultation Policy in 2015. The Public Participation Plan calls for the Plan to be updated after completing the EJ Issue Paper to incorporate its findings and identified equity best practices. After the Environmental Justice Issue Paper is completed, Council staff will begin reviewing and scoping the process for considering potential updates to the Council's Public Participation Plan and Tribal Consultation Policy, including early consultation with California Native American Tribes.

Policymaker Outreach and Partnership

The Council will continue targeted and proactive outreach to federal, State, tribal, and local policymakers and organizations to enhance awareness of the Council's role and identify partnership opportunities that advance the coequal goals. This will take the form of briefings on the Council and Delta Plan, meet and greets, and other opportunities for spreading awareness of Council initiatives.

Core Functions

The Delta's policy and science priorities cannot succeed without a strong agency foundation. To that end, Council staff will continue to perform the core functions that support Delta Plan and Delta Science Plan implementation, including but not limited to providing excellent information technology support to staff and Council Members, as well as providing administrative and legal services on a range of complex issues. Staff will continue to keep the Council apprised of other activities that could impact the Council's work, such as significant covered actions and significant legislative and policy initiatives at the State and federal levels.

Delta Plan Performance Measure Tracking and Reporting

Staff tracks and reports on performance measures, funding, programs, and related activities in the Delta to inform the success of Delta Plan policies and recommendations. The Council provides several public-facing database systems to track Delta Plan implementation and will further incorporate best practices for environmental data management in 2022. In addition, the Delta Plan identifies output and outcome performance measures, which are tracked by staff, to measure the progress in furthering the coequal goals. These indicators rely heavily on quantifiable targets and data analysis from partner agencies.

Adaptive Management

Staff utilizes adaptive management in early consultation to support covered actions in the certification process and provides resources, advice, and technical support through the Interagency Adaptive Management Integration Team and the Suisun Marsh Adaptive Management Team. In addition, Council staff supports the Delta ISB in its efforts to review adaptive management programs in the Delta. Staff also informs and reports to the Council on a wide range of issues.

Independent Scientific Peer Review, Advice, and Synthesis

The Delta Science Plan emphasizes the importance of independent scientific peer review for increasing the credibility of scientific information for decision-making in the Delta and for determining the best available science, as required by the Delta Reform Act. Independent scientific advice uses outside experts to provide guidance at key points in project planning, implementation, or evaluation. The DSP will continue to provide peer review, advice, and synthesis services to support informed decision-making for the Delta.

Ongoing Agency and Science Communications

Staff will provide meeting support, the development of an annual report, publications, blogs, factsheets, website updates, and presentations. This also includes science communications support for seminars, brown bags, symposia, and workshops that serve the entire Delta science community. Staff will also continue to support meetings of the Council, the Delta ISB, and the DPIIC, including presentations and logistics. Communications staff will also continue to support program staff in utilizing the agency's communications strategy and Public

Participation Plan to develop and implement communications and outreach plans. Fiscal, Acquisitions, Information Technology, Business Operations, and Human Resources Staff will continue to provide the day-to-day administrative functions to support the priorities and core activities of the Council.

Other Activities

Staff will also engage in other activities that further the coequal goals and implement the Delta Plan as time and resources allow. Emerging opportunities or circumstances may necessitate responses by the Council that could shift emphases. As Council staff track other activities that affect the Delta, we will alert the Council to actions that may significantly affect Delta Plan implementation so that priorities can be adjusted as necessary and desired by the Council and Chair.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1: 2023 Proposed Council Priorities Matrix

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