Delta Social Science Task Force Kickoff Meeting Summary

Meeting date: January 29, 2019
Meeting location: 980 9th St, 2nd Floor Conference Room, Sacramento, CA 95814

Background

The Delta Science Program and the UC Davis Coastal and Marine Sciences Institute have coordinated a Social Science Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force is charged with developing a strategic plan to strengthen and integrate social sciences into the science, management, and policy landscape of the Delta. This effort is in response to recommendations from the Delta Science Enterprise Workshop (2016) and the Delta Independent Science Board's Review of Research on the Delta as an Evolving Place (2017). These recommendations called for increased participation of social scientists in natural resource management actions and integration of social science research with ongoing scientific research in the Delta. This effort will also help fulfill actions supported in the Delta Science Plan and Science Action Agenda, furthering the vision of *One Delta, One Science*.

Composed of individuals with a diverse set of expertise in the social sciences, the Task Force's key goal will be to develop a set of recommendations to be implemented or utilized by the Delta science community. The purpose of the January 2019 kickoff meeting was for the Delta science community to meet and engage in discussion with the Task Force members. Outcomes of the meeting will inform the strategy report and upcoming Task Force workshop in July 2019.

Meet the Task Force Members

- Jim Sanchirico (chair) – agricultural and natural resource economics
- Rob Johnston – environmental economics
- Kelly Biedenweg – human dimensions of natural resource management
- Josue Medellin-Azuara – engineering, business, economics
- Holly Doremus – environmental law
- Chris Weible – political conflict and public policy

Meeting format

The meeting primarily involved agency presentations (15 minutes; 5 minutes of questions) to the task force members and audience. Presenters included: Erik Vink (Delta Protection Commission), Cory Copeland and Jeff Henderson (Delta Stewardship Council), Campbell Ingram (Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy), Evan Sawyer (NOAA Fisheries), Karen Gehrts (Department of Water Resources), Alex Heeren (California Department of Fish and Wildlife), Jeff Caudill (California Department of Parks and Recreation – Division of Boating and Waterways), Janis Cooke (Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board), Stephen McCord (Delta Regional Monitoring Program), and Adam Fullerton (Bay Conservation and Development Commission).

Questions provided to presenters

In preparation for the meeting, we requested presenters to address a series of questions:

- What is your agency's mission, with respect to the Delta region?
- What are current Delta-related management issues your agency or organization is addressing?
- What are some high priority science activities (e.g. monitoring, modeling, research, community outreach) in which your agency is engaged in the Delta?
- Are there particular emerging concerns in the Delta environment and/or communities that your agency hopes to address?
- What are some potential challenges (if any) to implementing your management actions or working collaboratively in the Delta?

Dr. Richard Norgaard (Delta Independent Science Board (ISB) member) kicked off the morning with a presentation on the Delta ISB's report on the Delta as an evolving place and his perspective on natural-social science integration opportunities. Following the agency presentations, Dr. Mark Lubell (UC Davis) presented on governance and resources use in the Delta, including a discussion on networks and cooperation.

Presentation and discussion highlights

The various presentations and discussions highlighted multiple common themes regarding ways to engage more social scientists and stakeholders and provide funding for social sciences in the Delta. Below is a summary of some of these topics.

Engaging stakeholders

- Agencies find it difficult to get groups to the table, such as industry (unless regulated) and public interest groups. What are the most effective approaches for stakeholder engagement?
- There is a lack of trust between stakeholders and agencies.
- Outreach may be neglected in some projects due to larger priorities and limited resources; policymakers may try to work out details internally.

Social science embedded in missions

- Many are unsure how to track the success of agency missions, particularly for the aspects of those missions that relate to social sciences. How do we know if we are achieving our missions?
- Agencies need to use best available science. Eventually, we could synthesize social science findings and use them in development of policy recommendations, performance metrics, etc.
- It is difficult to identify and summarize the relevant underlying social indicators and dynamics of many projects in the Delta, especially when these considerations are addressed after the initial project planning stage.

Delta as an evolving place

- We often neglect the “Delta as place” piece of the co-equal goals, but there is the need to care for those who work, live, and recreate within the Delta.
- Delta values are relevant to the interpretation of the coequal goals – agriculture, recreation, culture, natural resources – and are within the realm of social sciences.

Complexity

- Delta governance is messy and has a high conflict density. There is mutual recognition that the Delta is a socially challenging work environment.
- The Delta science community needs to improve political knowledge and understand how to navigate complicated political processes.
- There is a lack of legislative directives (e.g., for invasive aquatic vegetation control) that can complicate management actions.
- With such a complex system, it is difficult to prioritize efforts. Priorities are often use-driven (e.g., by recreation) or in response to challenges (i.e., less proactive).

High priority topics

- Invasive (aquatic) species – the spread of aquatic invasive species in the Delta impacts the ecosystem, often requires extensive and costly management, and can negatively affect uses (e.g., recreation).
- Recreation – recreation is highly valued in the Delta and is often a major driver of management actions.
- Agriculture – agriculture is a primary land use and economic source within the Delta region.
- Ecosystem health and restoration – the declining health of the Delta ecosystem is causing concern to many. Agencies have mandates and regulations in place to preserve the ecosystem, protect endangered species, restore habitats, and support fish populations.
- Levees – levees are the foundation on which all the Delta values are built (i.e., no levees, no culture).
- Subsided lowlands – subsidence reversal and management to protect or restore subsided lowlands in the Delta is challenging to address.
- Socioeconomic indicators – we want to improve the precision of usable social indicators, beyond and in addition to tracking economic measures.

Emerging concerns

- Sea level rise (protecting land uses and communities)
- Climate change (widespread implications)
- Degraded ecosystem (water quality and fish decline)
- Water quality (mercury, pesticides, toxicity, nutrients, contaminants of emerging concern)
- Reliance on Delta watershed (reducing reliance)
- Environmental justice (protecting disadvantaged communities)

Collaboration and partnerships

- The Delta science community needs to identify partnerships and collaborations outside of Federal and State agencies.
- Currently there is no funding or incentive for NGOs to participate (i.e., no carrot).
- Many additional players (e.g., local government, Delta communities, research agencies) should be involved in the effort to increase social science funding and use.
- The Delta science community should make an effort to reach out to universities and establish relationships with social scientists.

Funding social science

- Existing social science efforts are underfunded. In order to be effective regionally, we need adequate staff and resources.
- It will be useful to investigate the (funding) avenues that allowed for existing social science-related projects and programs to be created in the Delta science community.
- An existing funding challenge is that agencies are constrained by some funding mechanisms (e.g., slow prioritization process within State agencies) and limited by the language in funding mechanisms (e.g., Prop 1 cannot easily fund social science projects).
- We need social science, natural science, and policy champions! Who are they?

Strategy document

- We want a high level strategy document with overarching guidance to be written for agency directors and managers that includes specific examples (e.g., ways to increase social science funding and how to integrate social and natural sciences into the Delta science community).
- The strategy may consider providing small steps to move us in the best possible direction, given limited existing resources.
- There are many levels at which we can support social science. We want to support more social science research, particularly applied research.
- The Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (Delta Stewardship Council) may be a test model for incorporating social science into a planning study.

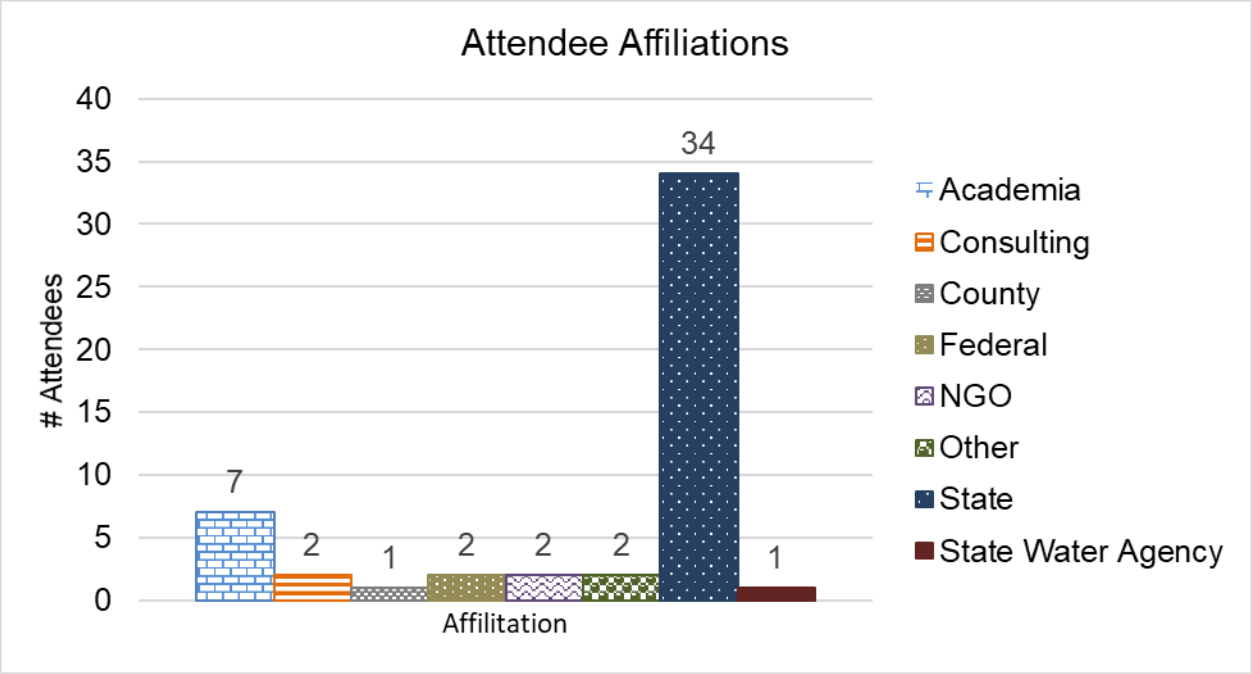

Figure 1. Number of kickoff meeting attendees grouped by generalized affiliation.