



ACTION ITEM

Appointment of the Delta Lead Scientist

Summary: The Delta Stewardship Council (Council) appoints the Lead Scientist for the Delta Science Program after consultation with the Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB), (Cal. Wat. Code § 85280(b).) The Delta ISB will provide its recommendation on the appointment of the next Lead Scientist for the Delta Science Program. The Council will discuss the recommendation and consider appointment of the recommended candidate.

Requested Action

After an extensive search and interview process, the Delta ISB recommends that the Council appoint Dr. Laurel Larsen as the Lead Scientist for the Delta Science Program (see Attachment 1). Water Code Section 85280(b) requires that the Council appoint a Lead Scientist after consultation with the Delta ISB. The Delta ISB requests that the Council appoint Dr. Larsen as Lead Scientist for the Delta Science Program.

Background

Pursuant to Water Code Section 85280(b)(2), the term of office for the Lead Scientist shall be no more than three years, and the Lead Scientist can serve no more than two terms. Dr. John Callaway is the current Lead Scientist. Dr. Callaway was appointed by the Council in July 2017. His term started in August 2017 and ends in July 2020. Dr. Callaway is not pursuing a second term.

The Delta Lead Scientist position is funded through a multi-year assignment with the United States Geological Survey (USGS). In July 2019, the Council, along with the Delta ISB and USGS, began the search for the next Lead Scientist.

Because the Lead Scientist is appointed by the Council after consultation with the Delta ISB, the Delta ISB formed an advisory committee, the Delta Lead Scientist Interview Panel (Interview Panel), to help with the selection and interview process. The Interview Panel consisted of three Delta ISB members, three Council representatives, and one representative from the USGS.

Interview Process

The search for the next Lead Scientist began in July 2019. The application period for priority consideration closed on October 15, 2019; six applications were received. Of these six applicants, the Interview Panel selected four applicants for interviews who met the qualifications for the Lead Scientist position required by Water Code Section 85280(b)(1):

- (A) Hold an advanced degree in a field related to water or ecosystem management.

- (B) Have a strong record of scientific research and publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals in a field related to water or ecosystem management.
- (C) Have experience advising high-level managers in science-based decision-making in the areas of water management and ecosystem restoration.
- (D) Have the capability to guide the application of an adaptive management process to resource management policy decisions in the Delta.

Interviews were conducted between January and March 2020. As part of the interview process, each applicant gave a public seminar presentation on their research and experience, how their research and experience are applicable to the position, and their vision for the Delta Science Program. In addition, there was a meet and greet opportunity with stakeholders to allow the public to learn more about the applicants, as related to the position.

On April 3, 2020, in duly noticed closed session, the Interview Panel identified a list of suitable candidates for the position for Delta ISB consideration. On April 7, 2020, in duly noticed closed session, after consideration of application materials, reference checks, brown bag seminars, and a briefing from the advisory committee on the interviews and meet-and-greet opportunities, the Delta ISB identified, by unanimous vote, Dr. Laurel Larsen as the preferred candidate to recommend to the Council for consideration for the appointment (Attachment 1).

Delta ISB Recommended Candidate: Dr. Laurel Larsen

Dr. Laurel Larsen is an associate professor in the departments of Geography and Civil and Environmental Engineering at UC Berkeley and is a fellow in the Berkeley Institute of Data Sciences, an affiliate of the National Center for Earth Dynamics, and an elected fellow in the Geological Society of America. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Colorado and her work focuses primarily on how flowing water structures the form and function of landscapes, with emphases on the Florida Everglades, southern Louisiana, and streams and watersheds across the US, including intermittent streams in coastal California.

Dr. Larsen's Environmental Systems Dynamics Laboratory takes a complex-systems approach to environmental problems, seeking to understand the set of interactions and feedbacks that produce surprising or unanticipated behaviors. The Laboratory's approach to problems integrates fieldwork, data-driven analyses, laboratory experiments, and numerical modeling of physical processes to identify the most critical drivers of landscape-scale change and generate predictions about how landscapes will respond to climate change or changes in management.

Dr. Larsen's experience working on restoration projects in coastal streams in California, the Louisiana coast, the Florida Everglades, and the Chesapeake Bay watershed, along with her current work on boreal peatlands in Finland, is highly relevant to address the many challenges facing the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. If appointed by the Council, Dr. Larsen would be hired directly through USGS and serve a term of three years with an option to serve another three-year term in the future. Dr. Larsen meets all of the

qualifications required for the position, as set forth in the California Water Code (see above), to lead the Delta Science Program.

For more information on Dr. Laurel Larsen's expertise, please refer to her curriculum vitae:

http://www.esdlberkeley.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CV_Dec2019.pdf

Fiscal Information

Funding for the Delta Lead Scientist is secured by a multi-year assignment with the USGS.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1: Letter of Recommendation from the Delta ISB

Contact

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