



## INFORMATION ITEM

### Council Priorities

#### Summary

The Council has a mission to further the coequal goals for the Delta of “providing a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem ...” 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, § 85054). Furthering the coequal goals requires leadership on multiple fronts. Much of our work in 2024 will be accomplished through continued collaboration with our local, State, federal, Tribal, and community partners to complete Delta Plan regulations, advance Delta Plan implementation, and ensure that Delta decision-making is based on 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.

#### Proposed 2024 Priorities

As highlighted during last month's Council meeting, staff made significant progress on many 2023 Priorities. The proposed 2024 Priorities continue 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 process to lead a multi-agency effort to set and implement priorities for 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. The Council completed the DLIS implementing regulation (for Delta Plan Policy RR P1) in 2023, and the regulation took effect January 1, 2024 (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 23, § 5012).

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) presented a levee funding report to the Council in December 2023 covering the period 2019-2023. In 2024, Council staff will review and analyze the funding detailed in the DWR report and update the Council regarding how levee investments between 2019 and 2023 have impacted island-specific flood risk. Staff will also prepare informational tools describing the value of DLIS and make the DLIS decision-making support tool available on the Council website. Staff's presentation to the Council regarding updated risk profiles is anticipated in Spring 2024. The next annual levee investment report is anticipated in Spring 2025 from DWR.

***Delta Adapts: Adaptation Plan:*** In response to climate change, the Council took action at its May 24, 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; 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.

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 strengthens 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 final Vulnerability Assessment at its June 24, 2021, public meeting. Completion of the Adaptation Plan is anticipated in Spring 2024, with implementation of adopted Delta Adapts recommendations to commence immediately thereafter.

***Environmental and Tribal Justice Issue Paper:*** The Council's 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 in August and December 2022, and regularly convened an EJ expert group throughout the year. Completion of the EJ Issue Paper is anticipated in 2024. It will be presented to the Council upon completion.

***Delta Plan Ecosystem Regulations:*** 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 Council adopted the Ecosystem Amendment to the Delta Plan at its June 23, 2022, public meeting. As part of that action, the Council directed staff to initiate the rulemaking process pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act for the proposed Ecosystem Amendment policies (Ecosystem Regulations).

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for the Ecosystem Regulations will be released in Spring 2024 and a public hearing on the proposal will be held subsequently. Following review of and response to public comments received on the proposed rulemaking, staff will bring the rulemaking package to the Council to consider authorizing the submittal of the rulemaking package to the Office of Administrative Law in Fall 2024. Under this timeline, the updated regulations would take effect in 2025.

***Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC):*** DPIIC met twice in 2023 to advance coordination around ecosystem restoration and integrated modeling. Also in 2023, the DPIIC Restoration Subcommittee convened two times and organized two restoration forums. Additionally, the fourth annual Delta Crosscut Budget Report, compiled in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, was released in November 2023, which serves as a valuable tool to help Delta decision-makers understand how science and restoration are funded. The collection of this data also helps illuminate where additional investments in both science and restoration are needed.

In 2024, DPIIC will meet in April and November. The Restoration Subcommittee will also meet multiple times. DPIIC will also consider re-convening the Delta Agency Science Workgroup—after a multi-year hiatus—to discuss and advance action on harmful algal blooms (HABS), modelling, and science funding.

***Five-Year Review of the Delta Plan:*** The Delta Reform Act requires the Council to review the Delta Plan every five years; the Council may revise it as it deems appropriate [Wat. Code, § 85300 (c)]. Council staff has initiated the 2024 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 past covered actions and appeals and an assessment of past covered action Adaptive Management Plans. Completion of the Five-Year Review is anticipated in Spring 2024.

***Science for Communities 2.0:*** In October 2022, the Council's Planning Division and Delta Science Program held an event at the Big Break Visitor Center in Oakley that focused on enhancing collaboration between scientists and community based organizations to address important Delta issues and data needs. Such workshops aim to boost Delta communities' awareness of, and access to, environmental data, technical tools, and expertise available to them. Given the positive feedback received from participants, staff are designing a follow-up event to be held in Fall 2024.

***Delta Plan Performance Measures:*** The Delta Plan contains 38 quantitative output and outcome performance measures and 120 administrative measures to track actions by partner agencies. Performance measures are reported annually to inform the Council about the effectiveness of Delta Plan implementation. The mid-year performance measures report includes finalized data from the 2023 Water Year. The year in review report provides an update on a broader suite of performance measures, including agency actions and programs. In 2024, reporting on the new and revised ecosystem performance measures will be included.

***Covered Actions and Appeals:*** In 2023, the Council received nine certifications of consistency for covered actions. No appeals were submitted. We anticipate a similar or higher number of certifications of consistency in 2024 with ongoing potential for appeals. Throughout 2024, Council staff will continue to engage in early consultation with DWR regarding the Delta Conveyance Project, anticipating certification of that project and any potential appeals in 2025.

### ***OBJECTIVE 2: ADVANCE ONE DELTA, ONE SCIENCE***

The statutory mission of the Delta Science Program (DSP) is to provide the best possible unbiased scientific information to inform water and environmental decision-making in the Delta, and to carry out that mission by funding research, synthesizing and communicating scientific information, promoting independent scientific peer review, and coordinating with Delta agencies to promote science-based adaptive management [Wat. Code, § 85280 (b)(3)]. Together, these "core functions" help to support a Delta science community that works

collaboratively to build a shared body of scientific knowledge with the capacity to adapt and inform water, environmental, and societal decisions—a vision referred to as One Delta, One Science. DSP’s efforts in 2024 would help to advance this vision and further the coequal goals in a manner that enhances and protects the Delta as an evolving place.

***Delta Research Awards:*** In 2024, after the issuance of a competitive solicitation for research projects and a rigorous independent expert and Council staff review of submitted proposals, approximately \$6 million will be awarded to research projects that inform water and environmental decision-making and advance research gaps identified in the 2022-2026 Science Action Agenda. From 2017 to 2021, the Delta Science Program and its partners competitively awarded over \$35 million to critical investigations that advanced the 2017-2021 Science Action Agenda. This upcoming solicitation emphasizes social science, interdisciplinary, and participatory research, in which information is co-produced by both researchers and the communities (including Tribes) affected by the research.

***Delta Science Fellows:*** In 2024, the DSP and University of California, San Diego Sea Grant will issue a competitive call for applications for the Delta Science Fellows Program. The Delta Science Fellows Program provides up to two years of support to early-career scientists, including master’s and doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars, to pursue biophysical and social science research on key topics related to water management and ecosystem health in the Bay-Delta. These early-career scientists work with Council staff, as well as collaboratively with academic and community mentors to address priority issues identified in the 2022-2026 Delta Science Action Agenda.

***Salinity Management Workshop:*** On March 26 and 27, the Delta Science Program will be hosting a virtual workshop to discuss tools and strategies, identify knowledge gaps, and build shared goals for adaptively managing ocean saltwater intrusion in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. This free workshop will include presentations from researchers on modeling tools to assess the

impacts of various management actions and the human dimensions of salinity management.

***Modeling Framework Strategy:*** Building on its February 2023 workshop focused on integrated modeling, DSP is preparing a draft modeling framework strategy for promoting a collaborative community and set of open-source tools for advancing integrated, transparent modeling to better inform resource management decisions.

***DSP-NCEAS Synthesis Working Group:*** Synthesis involves integrating existing data and information in new analyses to address new scientific questions. The Delta Science Program leads and coordinates syntheses on key scientific issues important to management of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. These collaborative efforts aim to update the state of scientific knowledge, guide adaptive management, and identify science needs and data gaps.

In 2024, the Delta Science Program, in partnership with the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), will provide high-quality training in synthetic data science and statistical techniques and offers an opportunity for enhanced collaboration between agency and academic scientists in a focused working group. Products from this working group will focus on how restoration benefits are distributed across the Bay-Delta considering social vulnerability, and understanding the risks and benefits of levees to vulnerable populations across the Delta.

***Independent Scientific Peer Review:*** Scientific peer review and advice by independent subject matter experts is widely recognized by the science community as an effective tool to ensure the quality and integrity of scientific information used to inform natural resource decision-making. Independent reviews build trust and ensure high-quality science by providing rigorous, transparent, and objective feedback from experts on the scientific foundation of a project, plan, or product.

In 2024, DSP will facilitate the following peer reviews:

- The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s fish and aquatic effects analysis, which serves to inform its biological assessment for the long-term operations of the Central Valley and State Water Projects.
- The Department of Water Resources’ monitoring and science plans for supporting critical summer-fall habitat actions for delta smelt.

***State of Bay-Delta Science (SBDS):*** The SBDS is a collection of papers that represents a synthesis, or summary, 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 next edition of SBDS features individual chapters synthesizing our understanding of extreme climatic and weather events, including atmospheric rivers, droughts, heatwaves, wildfires, and governance as related to these events. The edition will be completed in 2024 with an anticipated release of peer-reviewed publications in late 2024 or early 2025.

***Bay-Delta Science Conference:*** DSP is gearing up to co-host , along with the U.S. Geological Survey, the 12th biennial Bay-Delta Science Conference in-person at the Safe Credit Union Convention Center in Sacramento, CA, from September 30 to October 2, 2024. This year’s theme, “Cultivating Connections in a Dynamically Changing Environment,” recognizes the need for diverse perspectives to confront the multiple challenges in a dynamically changing environment such as the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. To cultivate this more holistic approach for conservation, the conference will include talks and sessions that encompass a wide variety of disciplines such as the use of traditional knowledge, identifying contaminants within and around the watershed, identifying needs of a variety of species, and exploring ways to mitigate climate change impacts, among other topics.



***HABs Monitoring Strategy:*** At the request of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and State Water Resources Control Board, and following an information-gathering workshop in November 2022, DSP has supported the development of a draft Delta harmful algal blooms (HABs) monitoring strategy. With the increasing frequency and severity of HABs in the Delta, and the growing number of monitoring and research efforts, the draft strategy seeks to improve coordination and provide a foundation for designing a Delta HABs monitoring program.

***Delta Science Plan Update:*** The Delta Science Plan is a shared framework providing vision, principles, and approaches to better coordinate Delta science and more effectively communicate the outcomes of science activities and their management implication to policy makers. The DSP is in the process of developing the third iteration of the Delta Science Plan since 2013. The next Delta Science Plan will be framed around grand challenges with the goal of focusing collaborative efforts on a few key problems with the highest potential for impact. In 2024, DSP will be soliciting public input on the framing and contents of this update.

***Delta Science Tracker:*** The Delta Science Tracker is a tool developed by the DSP to improve coordination and collaboration of science activities in a way that is valuable to scientists, decision-makers, and managers in the Delta. The Delta Science Tracker allows users to explore and visualize recent research and monitoring efforts through the lenses of science activities, organizations, and people. Since its public launch in January 2023, DSP staff have worked to grow the community of users contributing projects to its database of science activities. In 2024, DSP staff will continue fostering community use of the tool through several outreach and engagement opportunities, and the tool will be used as a resource to assess progress being made on implementing the 2022-2026 Delta Science Action Agenda.

***Delta Independent Science Board Support and Collaboration (Delta ISB):***  
The Delta ISB finalized its 2024 Workplan and Chair Lisa Wainger presented it to

the Council at its January 25, 2024, meeting. In 2024, the Delta ISB is slated to finalize three reviews on food-webs, subsidence, and decision-making under deep uncertainty. In addition, the Board will prepare a memo assessing DWR's responses to Delta ISB comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Delta Conveyance Project.

The Delta ISB is also continuing its role in the recruitment of the next Delta Lead Scientist through its subcommittee, the Delta Lead Scientist Interview Panel, which includes Delta ISB, Council, and USGS representatives. The Council appoints the Delta Lead Scientist after consultation with the Delta ISB. The Delta ISB expects that it will be able to provide a recommendation on the appointment to the Council in April 2024 after candidates are interviewed in February and March 2024.

***Interweaving Traditional Knowledge Assessment:*** In consultation with a local Tribal partner, the Delta Science Program has been undertaking an assessment of interweaving Traditional Knowledge within the Delta science and management enterprise. To date, this has entailed a literature and best practices review, interviews with representatives of agencies with roles in the Delta, and, most importantly, interviews with Tribal representatives and practitioners. The Delta Science Program expects to complete and release the findings from this assessment in mid-2024.

### ***OBJECTIVE 3: ENHANCE OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT***

***Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI):*** Council staff continue to explore how to better integrate JEDI practices within the Council's work and organizational culture. In 2023, Council staff finalized a charter for its internal JEDI Committee that outlines the committee's purpose and preliminary objectives, which include: equitable outreach, engagement, research, and funding; building an inclusive workplace and workforce; and recommending policy that considers equity in a manner that furthers progress towards the State's coequal goals. In 2024, the

Council plans to hire a JEDI officer who will be tasked with leading the Committee's activities and development of an equity action plan for the organization.

### ***Social Science Integration***

***Delta Residents' Survey:*** The Delta Residents' Survey was a collaborative research effort led by California Sea Grant and California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), with funding from the Delta Science Program and collaborators from the Bay-Delta Social Science Community of Practice. Initiated in 2021 and mailed to 82,000 households in and adjacent to the Delta in February 2023, the Delta Residents' Survey aimed to establish, collect, and track social data and information about communities of the Delta. The survey was developed with an advisory committee that included representation from the Delta Protection Commission, local governments, and social science researchers. An initial report with survey results is available online, and additional analysis and result dissemination will be conducted in 2024.

In addition, staff will continue internal efforts of the Social Science Integration Team, manage contracts to support social science research, and host the Social Science Community of Practice<sup>1</sup> quarterly meetings to further advance network-building and research on the human dimensions of the Bay-Delta.

***Continued Tribal Outreach and Update Tribal Consultation Policy:*** Following the Council's first Tribal listening session at its public meeting on April 27, 2023, Council staff have and will continue to pursue opportunities that ensure meaningful consultation on Council initiatives. In addition, with the Environmental and Tribal Justice Issue Paper nearing completion, it has become prudent to consult with Tribes to assess the Council's current Tribal Consultation Policy and explore updates. The policy was last updated in 2015. During 2024, Council staff will initiate

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<sup>1</sup> A gathering of social science scholars, practitioners, and allies who are committed to advancing applicable and relevant research on the human dimensions of the Bay-Delta.

consultation with Tribes with the expected presentation of an updated Tribal Consultation Policy for Council consideration by the end of the year.

***Policymaker Outreach and Partnership:*** The Council will continue targeted and proactive outreach to federal, state, and local policymakers and organizations in order to enhance awareness of the Council's role and identify partnership opportunities that advance the coequal goals. This will take the form of briefings and engaging the legislature on the Delta Plan's policies and recommendations, dissemination of Delta Science Program findings, meet and greets, and other opportunities for spreading awareness of Council initiatives.

### ***CORE FUNCTIONS***

Core functions are tasks that provide the necessary foundation for the Council to achieve its prescribed objectives and goals. 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 support on a range of complex issues. Going forward, staff will continue to keep the Council apprised of other activities that could impact the Council's work, such as major covered actions and significant legislative and policy initiatives at 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 2024. In addition, the Delta Plan identifies output and outcome performance measures, which are tracked by staff, to measure the progress made in furthering the coequal goals. These indicators rely heavily on quantifiable targets and data analysis from partner agencies.

***Adaptive Management:*** Staff provides adaptive management guidance in the early consultation phase of the certification of consistency 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.

***Ongoing Agency and Science Communications:*** Staff will continue to provide support for meetings, the development of an annual report, publications, blogs, factsheets, website updates, and presentations. This also includes science communications support for seminars, informal lunchtime meetings, symposia, and workshops that serve the entire Delta science community. Staff will also continue to support meetings of the Council, the Delta ISB, and DPIIC, including logistics, preparing reports and briefing panels, and post-meeting follow-up. 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.

## List of Attachments

Attachment 1: 2024 Proposed Council Priorities Matrix

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