



## INFORMATION ITEM

### Proposed 2022 Delta Stewardship Council Priorities

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**Summary:** Furthering the coequal goals is an ongoing, Council-led mission that requires leadership on multiple fronts. Much of our work in 2022 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 best available science. Additionally, core Council functions, including support for the Delta Independent Science Board, covered actions consultation and review, and administrative functions, including information technology support, continue to be central to the organization's success. The Council is currently operating under a multi-year work plan presented to the Council in 2019, and the priorities proposed today stem largely from that work plan.

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#### PROPOSED 2022 PRIORITIES

As highlighted during last month's Council meeting, staff made significant progress on many 2021 Priorities. The proposed 2022 Priorities continue the agency's focus on three primary objectives:

- 1) Adaptively Manage and implement the Delta Plan;
- 2) Build capacity for One Delta, One Science; and
- 3) Strengthen Leadership and Communications

#### *Objective 1: Adaptively Manage and Implement the Delta Plan*

Council staff will continue focused efforts and work on amending Delta Plan chapters (described below), as well as improving the tracking, reporting, and implementation of the Delta Plan, consistent with the Delta Reform Act.

***Risk Reduction via the Delta Levees Investment Strategy (DLIS).*** DLIS is the Council's rulemaking process pursuant to the Delta Reform Act requirement directing the Council to lead a multi-agency effort to set 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.

Previously, DLIS rulemaking was withdrawn in March 2020 to evaluate new levee condition (LiDAR elevation) data. Council staff presented the results of the evaluation to the Council in May 2021, and the Council authorized staff to reinitiate the rulemaking process in August 2021. Staff anticipates conducting a public hearing for the rulemaking process in Spring 2022 and an effective regulation date in January 2023.

***Advancing Science-Based Restoration via the Delta Plan Ecosystem***

***Amendment.*** 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 proposed 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 released a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for public review in September 2021, and the public comment period ended in November 2021. Staff anticipates releasing the Final PEIR in June 2022 and conducting a public hearing on the Ecosystem Amendment in Summer 2022, and if approved, to be followed by consideration of initiating rulemaking.

***Planning for a Changing Climate Future via Delta Adapts.*** 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; 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 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. Staff has initiated preparation of the accompanying

Adaptation Strategy, supported by a Stakeholder Working Group and several topic-specific focus groups, which will continue throughout 2022, highlighted by an update to the Council in the summer. Completion of the Adaptation Strategy is anticipated in 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.

Staff presented a work plan for the Environmental Justice (EJ) Issue paper to the Council in February 2021. Since then, staff has been working to implement the work plan, conducting an analysis of public comments, convening an EJ Expert Group to guide the preparation and review of the issue paper, and developing an interview process. Completion of the EJ Issue Paper is anticipated in early 2023.

***Covered Action Appeals Procedures.*** The Delta Reform Act created an appeals process to ensure the consistency of certain State and local public agency actions ("covered actions") with the regulatory portions of the Delta Plan (see Water Code §§ 85225-85225.30). The Council's experience with appeals proceedings for covered actions within the past five years has identified areas where improvements could be made to the Council's Administrative Procedures Governing Appeals (Appeals Procedures), which were not foreseen when the Council was initially created. The Five-Year Review also identified the need to review the Appeal Procedures for possible amendments.

Draft proposed revisions to the Council's Appeals Procedures were released for a 90-day public review and comment period in December 2021. The Council anticipates convening a public Council workshop in early 2022. Following the workshop, staff will present the proposed revisions to the Council for adoption.

***Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC).*** Building on conversations that started in 2021, DPIIC will meet three times this year to discuss, promote, and advance ecosystem-based management, cross-estuary collaboration, and restoration. One of the recommendations in the draft Delta Plan Ecosystem Amendment is the formation of a DPIIC Restoration Subcommittee that focuses on reducing barriers to landscape-scale restoration and increasing coordination throughout the estuary. The initial meeting of the subcommittee occurred earlier this year, and it is anticipated that meetings will

occur quarterly.

***Covered Actions.*** In 2021, the Council received ten certifications of consistency for covered actions. Appeals were submitted by four parties for DWR's Lookout Slough Habitat Restoration Project. The Council's findings remanded this covered action, in part, on issues related to Delta Plan Policies G P1(b)(3) and DP P2. DWR submitted a second certification for this project in December 2021, which has been appealed by two parties. The appeals are currently in process, and the Council is under ex parte restriction for matters related to the Lookout Slough project and the appeals. In 2022, we expect to complete review of the Delta Conveyance Project (DCP) Environmental Impact Report as an important preliminary step to the DCP certification anticipated in 2023-2024.

*Objective 2: Build Capacity for One Delta, One Science*

Council staff will continue building the Delta-wide science community by completing the 2022-2026 Science Action Agenda, publishing the 2022 edition of the State of Bay-Delta Science, convening symposia to advance understanding on several critical management questions, and developing the next generation of Delta scientists through the 14<sup>th</sup> Delta Science Fellows cohort.

***2022-2026 Delta Science Action Agenda (SAA).*** The SAA is a four-year science agenda for the Delta that prioritizes and aligns science actions to inform management decisions, fills gaps in knowledge, promotes collaborative science, builds the science infrastructure, and achieves the objectives of the Delta Science Plan. Publication of the final 2022-2026 SAA is anticipated by April 2022.

***State of Bay-Delta Science.*** The State of Bay-Delta Science 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 State of Bay-Delta Science 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. All chapters will be submitted to the *San Francisco Estuary and Watershed Sciences* journal for independent peer review. Pending acceptance to the journal, the edition will be published in late 2022 and will provide the latest scientific foundation to inform

management decisions and further research.

***2022 Delta Science Fellows Cohort.*** The Delta Science Program oversees the Delta Science Fellows Program in partnership with California Sea Grant. With Council funding, the Delta Science Fellows Program provides up to two years of support to awardees to pursue research on key topics related to water management and ecosystem health in the Bay-Delta. These early-career scientists work collaboratively with academic and community mentors to address priority issues identified in the Science Action Agenda.

Since its inception in 2003, the program has supported over 100 graduate and post-graduate scientists to pursue management-relevant research in the Bay-Delta. The 2022 Fellows will be the 14th cohort, and for the first time, this funding opportunity includes a dedicated track for the social sciences.

***Delta Science Tracker.*** Currently, there is no centralized way to track all of the science activity happening across the Delta and Estuary. Consequently, the Delta Science Plan (2019) calls for the development of 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 Spring 2020, the Delta Science Program undertook an effort to develop the Delta Science Tracker under the guidance of an interagency Advisory Team. This tool will be launched in the early summer of 2022 and maintained by the Delta Science Program with continuing guidance from the Advisory Team. 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 DPIIC's request in 2019.

***Delta Science Symposia.*** Delta Science Program Independent Science Workshops and Brown Bags provide public venues for dialogue that advance the science for critical Delta management topics. In 2022, the Delta Science Program will host a Brown Bag series that will be an educational opportunity regarding frameworks for environmental, collaborative, and adaptive governance. A second workshop series on Delta salinity management will investigate knowledge gaps and explore the process of scenario-based planning for this critical management issue of the Delta. A final workshop topic will be Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), with the goal of developing a framework for cohesive monitoring and reporting for HABs in the Delta.

***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 will be developed with an advisory committee that includes representation from the Delta Protection Commission, local governments, and social science researchers. A pilot effort will be launched in Summer 2022 with support from California State University. The results of this pilot effort will inform future survey efforts, with a goal of developing a continuing and consistent source of data on Delta human communities.

***Modeling Summit.*** In recent years, state and federal agencies involved in Delta decision-making processes have expressed a need for greater coordination among model developers to advance the status of integrated modeling. Based on a recommendation from the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee, the Council formed an Integrated Modeling Steering Committee to help guide these efforts. Advancement of model integration is also noted as a key action in the 2019 Delta Science Plan and is recommended by the Delta Independent Science Board.

The Delta Science Program will convene a Modeling Summit to bring together members of the Delta science and modeling community to discuss the vision and development of a virtual modeling collaboratory.<sup>1</sup> for the Delta. The Summit will build on previous work of the Integrated Modeling Steering Committee that identified the need for a collaboratory. Expected outcomes from the Summit include a refined plan for the development of the collaboratory and identification of potential funding avenues, including competitive solicitations.

***Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB).*** While the Delta ISB is independent from the Council, its work and reports to the Council remain integral to furthering the State's coequal goals for the Delta.

The Delta ISB will complete its reviews of Water Supply Reliability and the Monitoring Enterprise Review in the first half of 2022. Both reviews have received public comment. In the first quarter of 2022, the Delta ISB will also be charting a course for new thematic reviews. Potential topics include subsidence reversal, food-webs, and environmental flows. The Chair of the Delta ISB will present on Delta ISB

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<sup>1</sup> A server or cloud-based repository of information related to modeling, including codes, data, and training resources and that could be accessed by interested participants regardless of physical location.

work plan priorities to the Council in the first quarter of 2022.

*Objective 3: Strengthen Leadership and Communications*

***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 2022, the Council will host internal JEDI training, undergo an assessment to ascertain gaps in the Council's JEDI efforts, and develop a JEDI strategic plan.

CORE FUNCTIONS

Policy and science priorities for the Delta cannot be successful without a strong agency foundation. To that end, Council staff will also 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. 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 2022. 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 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 their efforts to review adaptive management programs in the Delta and provides advice 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 and determining 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 Delta Science Program will continue to provide peer review, advice, and synthesis services to support state and federal agencies' 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 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.

#### FISCAL INFORMATION

Not applicable.

#### LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2022 Priorities Matrix

**CONTACT**

Jessica R. Pearson  
Executive Officer  
Phone: (916) 445-4500

Ryan Stanbra  
Chief Deputy Executive Officer  
Phone: (916) 445-0641