



Delta Stewardship Council

A CALIFORNIA STATE AGENCY

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MEMORANDUM

Date: December 8, 2022

To: Delta Stewardship Councilmembers

From: Amanda Bohl, Special Assistant for Planning and Science

Subject: Update on Environmental Justice Issue Paper Development

Since mid-2021, Delta Stewardship Council (Council) staff has been laying the groundwork for preparation of an environmental justice (EJ) issue paper as recommended in the Council's 2019 Five-Year Review of the Delta Plan. The purpose of the issue paper is to inform future actions to address EJ as part of the Council's mission of furthering and achieving the coequal goals 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" (Cal Wat. Code § 85054).

Staff last provided an update to the Council at the August 25, 2022, Council meeting, presenting findings from the 22 interviews and other research conducted to inform the Council's understanding of EJ issues and potential recommendations to be included in the issue paper. The staff report from the August meeting, which provides a full background of this initiative, is available here:

<https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/pdf/council-meeting/meeting-materials/2022-08-25-item-9-environmental-justice-staff-report.pdf>.

The summary of interview results is available here:

<https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/pdf/council-meeting/meeting-materials/2022-08-25-item-9-attachment-1-summary-of-delta-environmental-justice-interviews.pdf>.

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For the purposes of updating the Council at the December 15, 2022 Council meeting, this memo: 1) provides an update on work since the August 2022 Council meeting; and 2) outlines the next steps for finalizing the public draft of the paper.

Progress Since August 2022

Over the past four months, staff have participated in four community events, sharing the scope of the EJ issue paper and interview results. Staff participation at these events was intended to raise awareness of the Council's EJ work in Delta communities and to receive additional input from community members on EJ issues that affect them and how they would like to see these issues prioritized to improve their communities. These events have included Restore the Delta's "Where the Future Flows: Next Generation Visioning for the Delta" virtual symposium, Filipino American History Month (FAHM) Fest in Stockton, the Council's Science for Communities workshop at Big Break Visitors Center in Oakley, and the Delta Protection Commission's Delta Heritage Forum in Walnut Grove. Development of materials and plans for engaging in these community events was led by the Council and California Sea Grant summer 2022 Community-Engaged Intern, Eva Pitts.

At each of these events, Council staff shared more about the Council's EJ work with community members, including what key EJ issues were identified in the community interviews. At two of the four events, Council staff conducted interactive, virtual Mural board discussion activities in which participants answered questions about EJ issues that impact their community and their thoughts on solutions to these issues. EJ team staff tabled at two of these community events, displaying an overview poster about the EJ issue paper (Attachment 1), key issues identified from the EJ community interviews, and a set of question prompts for community members asking about EJ issues that impact their community and how they would like to see these issues addressed. California Sea Grant provided funding for gift cards that participants had the chance to win through a raffle, as a token of appreciation for their time and engagement. The raffle encouraged more community members to engage and answer staff's questions, underscoring how small tokens of appreciation can be effective in encouraging community participation. Over 100 people were reached through these events.

Most of the issues identified by workshop attendees were consistent with the issues identified in the community interviews and from other sources staff have reviewed as part of EJ issue paper development, such as past public comments

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received by the Council, scholarly literature on EJ, and EJ Expert Group meetings. For example, issues related to water quality and harmful algal blooms (HABs) were brought up multiple times across these workshops. Multiple community members described the need to increase public awareness about HABs and support more research into understanding how HABs impact air quality, water quality, and human health. Attendees described their concerns about water quality, such as salinity intrusion, aquatic invasive species, dissolved oxygen levels, and associated impacts on drinking water and recreation in the Delta. Other issues raised related to unhoused communities, the importance of improving the accessibility of Delta waterways for individuals with disabilities, the need for more modernized and efficient water management technologies and policies to reduce reliance on the Delta and improve regional water resilience, and the need for better flood management actions, particularly along the San Joaquin River to better protect the cities of Stockton, Manteca, and Lathrop.

Science for Communities workshop attendees emphasized the need for agency and academic researchers and staff to better understand how EJ issues impact their work, as well as the need for required diversity, equity, inclusion and tribal cultural competency trainings for agency and academic staff. Attendees also stressed the need for more connections between local government and State regulatory agency scientists (building on the Science for Communities workshop), so that state scientists can better support local community needs. Furthermore, attendees expressed that researchers and scientists need to better understand decision-making processes to ensure research is relevant in addressing current issues and is used to inform solutions.

In addition to these community events, over the past four months Council staff have been reviewing all information compiled (interviews, academic papers, EJ Expert Group feedback, existing Council documents, etc.) over the past year to begin developing draft recommendations for the EJ Issue Paper. Staff looks forward to sharing draft recommendations with Councilmembers in early 2023.

The EJ Expert Group has continued to meet monthly, providing EJ perspectives on Council initiatives and providing guidance as draft recommendations are developed. The Council has also entered into new, one-year contracts with our EJ partners to continue to support their engagement in this process.

Next Steps

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The work over the next several months will include finalizing the draft recommendations and preparing a public review draft of the EJ issue paper. Release of the public review draft is tentatively expected in early spring 2023. Council staff will keep Councilmembers informed of progress.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: EJ Overview Poster