

## Survey of Habitat Restoration Efforts and Proposed Areas of Focus for Future Work

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**Requested Action:** The staff requests endorsement of the Issue Paper from the Council. If it is endorsed by the Council, the staff will use the paper to focus its own work and encourage others focus their work in key areas that will spark progress toward implementing habitat restoration portions of the Delta Plan over the next two years.

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### **Recommendation**

The staff has prepared a proposed final draft of an issue paper about habitat restoration and requests that the Council review and endorse the paper. The staff has revised the draft paper presented in January 2014 based on input from stakeholders and agency staff and requests endorsement of proposed areas of focus for the next two years to help implement Delta Plan policies and recommendations regarding habitat restoration.

### **Background**

The Delta Plan calls for restoring the Delta ecosystem while improving water supply reliability and protecting and enhancing the unique values of the Delta, as required by the Delta Reform Act. Habitat restoration is a key element of ecosystem restoration, which also includes management of water operations to provide more natural functional flows, improvement of water quality, and better management of nonnative invasive species, fish hatcheries and commercial and sport fishing.

The Council held an oversight hearing in July 2013 at which the Delta Independent Science Board (ISB) presented its review of the scientific research, monitoring, and assessment programs that support adaptive management of habitat restoration in the Delta (Water Code section 85280(a)(3)). In addition, several agencies reported on their Delta restoration activities (Water Code section 85210(h)). In November 2013, the Council received a staff report on progress toward addressing issues raised at the oversight session, including integration of habitat restoration with other Delta Plan goals and the use of performance measures to track progress and guide adaptive management. In January 2014, the Council received a draft version of this paper, which since has been revised based on stakeholder and agency input. This paper builds on the oversight session by providing additional analysis of needs, progress, and opportunities. It also incorporates ideas from the Delta Science Plan and the draft Delta Restoration Framework, which are described in the paper, and proposes key areas of focus for the next two years.

### **Delta Plan Policies, Recommendations and Performance Measures**

The Delta Plan policies most relevant to habitat restoration include the following:

- **G P1:** Use best available science and adaptive management.

- **ER P2:** Restore habitats at appropriate elevations.
- **ER P5:** Avoid introductions of and habitat improvements for invasive nonnative species.
- **DP P2:** Site habitat restoration projects to avoid or reduce conflict with existing uses, such as agriculture and managed wetlands for waterfowl, where feasible.

Delta Plan Recommendations **DP R11** and **DP R14** encourage state agencies to provide opportunities for public access and recreation at habitat areas where feasible. Delta Plan Recommendation **DP R7** supports subsidence reversal and carbon sequestration, as well as the development of carbon markets, by growing native wetland plants on subsided islands. Such projects frequently provide habitat benefits for birds and other species.

The Delta Plan's performance measures focus on the initiation of pilot projects in the six priority habitat restoration areas designated in the Delta Plan and progress toward achieving the targets of 8,000 acres of tidal marsh and 17,000 to 20,000 acres of floodplain habitat found in the biological opinions controlling long-term operations of the state and federal water projects. The Council will evaluate progress using these performances measures.

### **Issue Paper**

The purpose of the issue paper (Attachment 1) is to survey restoration activities; describe needs, progress and opportunities related to restoration; and propose key areas of focus for the Council and other agencies to advance habitat restoration over the next two years.

In the paper, Council staff has identified several key elements that are needed to ensure efficient and effective habitat restoration in the Delta, and has clarified the Council's role in addressing these needs. First, the Council promotes the use of best available science and adaptive management by helping project proponents ensure the consistency of their restoration projects with Delta Plan regulations and implementing the Delta Science Plan. Second, the Council works with other agencies to track restoration progress by reporting on Delta Plan performance measures. Finally, the Council supports the work of other agencies to identify and promote best practices for stakeholder involvement, agricultural and land stewardship, land acquisition and meeting habitat regulatory requirements, and permit coordination. The Council, agencies and stakeholders have made progress in addressing these needs, but more work is necessary to meet the state's habitat restoration obligations.

Based on the Delta Plan, the ISB review, the Delta Science Plan, and input from agencies and stakeholders, Council staff proposes the following areas of focus for the next two years.

### **Council Staff Actions**

1. Continue to provide early consultation on habitat restoration projects that are covered actions under the Delta Plan in order to advise project proponents on using best available science and adaptive management and avoiding or reducing conflicts with existing uses, where feasible.
2. Report on habitat performance measures by December 2014 and again in December 2015.
3. Work with others to complete at least one of the landscape-scale conceptual models and associated landscape habitat metrics for the priority habitat restoration areas.
4. Convene scientific experts to provide independent review of restoration project designs and adaptive management plans within a landscape context.
5. Provide science support to the Fishery Agency Strategy Team and Suisun Marsh Plan's Adaptive Management Advisory Team in coordinating regulatory and scientific input on project design and adaptive management plans.
6. Engage Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee members in discussions of challenges and potential solutions related to land acquisition and permit coordination.

### **Actions of Other Agencies and Stakeholders**

1. Complete the expansion of EcoAtlas to the Delta. (San Francisco Estuary Institute in partnership with the Delta Conservancy, Central Valley Joint Venture and San Francisco Bay Joint Venture)
2. Complete the Interagency Ecological Program (IEP) Tidal Wetland Monitoring Protocols and include them in the adaptive management plans for Fish Restoration Program projects. (IEP Tidal Wetland Monitoring Project Work Team)
3. Apply Agricultural and Land Stewardship Strategies, as appropriate, to habitat restoration projects. (Department of Water Resources)
4. Address top three Delta community stakeholder concerns regarding land acquisition and management, as discussed in the paper. (Land Management Working Group and Delta stakeholders facilitated by the Delta Conservancy)

### **List of Attachments**

Attachment 1: Issue Paper: Restoring Habitat with Science and Society in Mind

### **Contact**

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