

## 2015 Priorities

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**Summary:** This report proposes staff priorities for 2015. It emphasizes six key projects or programs and seven core functions. Other activities receiving attention also are noted. The Executive Officer, Lead Scientist and deputy executive officers will discuss these priorities with the Council and be available to answer questions from Council members.

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### **Background**

This report proposes priorities for 2015. In June, 2014, the staff presented the Council with staff's recommended priorities for the remaining six months of 2014, emphasizing staff activities to begin implementing the Delta Plan. Priority projects addressed five Delta Plan and Delta Science Plan topics. Building the agency's core functions that support implementation of the Delta Plan and fulfill the Council's statutory duties was also emphasized.

In January, 2015 the Executive Officer reviewed with the Council the 2014 progress in implementing the Delta Plan and pursuing the priorities that had been set the prior June. She reported that the Council's core functions, such as convening and overseeing the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee and the certification of agencies' actions' consistency with the Delta Plan, had been established successfully. Significant progress also had been made on the five top priority Delta Plan and Delta Science Plan topics, but further work is needed to achieve the outcomes the Delta Plan seeks.

### **Proposed 2015 Priorities**

The Council's executive staff has reviewed the 2014 priorities and January's progress report. Agencies with which we cooperate were consulted and staff resources were assessed. Five principles guided our deliberations:

- Delta Plan and Delta Reform Act Implementation. Activities that implement the Delta Plan, the Delta Science Plan, and Delta Reform Act provide the menu from which priority actions are selected.
- California Water Action Plan. Priority is placed on Delta Plan implementation actions that are also priorities in the Administration's California Water Action Plan, including Proposition 1 funding decisions, recognizing that these efforts offer synergies with other state agencies.

- Delta Stewardship Council Leadership. Precedence is provided for actions where the Council plays a lead role, such as updating priorities for State investment in Delta levees.
- Balancing the Coequal Goals. Maintain a balanced program to address water supply reliability, ecosystem restoration, and the Delta as a place.
- Sustain Core Competencies. Utilize the strengths of the Delta Science Program, Council hearings, and the covered action process. We spent much of 2014 developing fundamental Council skill sets that we can continue using to pursue our objectives now and in the future, rather than developing new methods for conducting the Council's business.

### **Priority 2015 Delta Plan Implementation Actions**

The staff's proposed priorities for 2015 are outlined in Attachment 1.

During 2015, we will emphasize six initiatives to implement Delta Plan and Delta Science Plan recommendations:

- Delta Levees Investment Strategy. To provide priorities for state investments in Delta levees, we are working with a consulting team led by ARCADIS to develop recommendations for State investments in Delta levees, including an update of the Delta Plan's levee investment priorities. In 2015 we will prepare and put through peer review a decision support tool that considers the people, assets, and environmental resources protected by levees; use the tool to evaluate and draft levee investment priorities; review the scientific merits of levee-related actions to protect and enhance fish and wildlife; continue public involvement and agency consultation processes; and draft CEQA documents, in preparation for action on the levee investment strategy in 2016.
- Science Plan Implementation – Actionable Science. Building on 2014's interim Science Action Agenda, we will work with DPIIC agencies to identify high priority science actions. We intend to fund them through a mix of joint proposal solicitation package(s), directed investigations, and science fellowships using funds from our 2015-16 budget or in cooperation with other agencies. In addition, the *State of Bay-Delta Science* report will be drafted and readied for publication.
- Habitat Restoration. The Council's staff will help to accelerate progress toward the Delta Plan's objectives for tidal marsh and floodplain restoration by encouraging nine high priority restoration projects and implementing recommendations of the Council's 2014 habitat restoration issue paper. We will also review the restoration measures of the recirculated BDCP; host a seminar to assess the best science available to support management of invasive aquatic weeds, and support development of a landscape-scale habitat restoration framework.

- Flows. Updating the flow objectives of the State Water Resources Control Board's Bay-Delta Plan remains a key to providing more certainty about the water available for beneficial use and to restoring the Delta ecosystem. The Delta Science Program will continue to provide science to support the Board's decision-making in response to the Board's requests. Staff also will continue its participation in the Collaborative Adaptive Management Team (CAMT) to support flow management by the state and federal water projects consistent with the relevant Biological Opinions. The Council will receive the Delta Independent Science Board's report on the research, monitoring, and evaluation that supports adaptive management of Delta flows in the context of the Delta's many ecosystem stressors. A Council hearing on the ISB's report may suggest potential follow-up actions.
- Land Use. Experience over the past year confirms that land use decisions affecting the Delta require continued attention. Staff tracks and comments on local agencies' land use plans and actions and on regional transportation plans and sustainable community strategies. The update of San Joaquin County's general plan requires attention this spring. As the Delta Protection Commission (DPC) begins to update its land use and natural resource plan, we will coordinate as needed to encourage compatibility with the Delta Plan. We are gathering information about Delta energy facilities and plans, in consultation with the Energy Commission and Public Utilities Commission, to better understand how they may affect Delta Plan implementation. Staff also contributes as asked to activities of the DPC and Delta Conservancy to protect the "Delta as Place".
- Water Supply Reliability. In 2015 we will place greater emphasis on actions to enhance water supply reliability. We will focus on reviewing progress in implementing the Delta Plan's recommendations about water transfers, improving local agencies' water use reporting and planning to help reduce reliance on Delta water supplies, reviewing the recirculated BDCP's Delta conveyance alternatives, and examining the Delta implications of water storage, groundwater management, and integrated regional water management activities authorized in 2014 or funded through Proposition 1.

### **Conducting Core Functions that Support Delta Plan Implementation**

Continuing to carry out the core staff functions that support Delta Plan implementation is essential and also staff-intensive. By attending to these fundamental responsibilities, the Council fulfills its duty to coordinate the Delta Plan's implementation and the Delta Science Program's long-standing duties.

- Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee. The Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC) will meet in May and again in the fall. Interagency work groups, especially the group currently identifying priority science

actions for near term funding, will be used to coordinate with DPIIC agencies. New work groups may be convened if needed.

- Covered Actions. We are continuing to support certification of covered actions with early consultation, science support, comments on CEQA documents, trainings for agencies and citizen groups, and the on-line certification system. Improving coordination of State agencies' regulatory activities affecting Delta projects will be emphasized.
- Delta Science Plan Implementation. Appointing and orienting a new Lead Scientist will be a key activity. The Delta Science Program will provide science support when requested by federal and state agencies, particularly scientific peer review and facilitating collaborative science activities, such as the recent "Delta Challenges" workshop – the "One Delta, One Science" philosophy. To implement the Delta Science Plan, the Delta Science Program will continue to consult with its science advisory committee, work to build the "science infrastructure" called for in the Delta Science Plan, and respond to the Delta Independent Science Board's reviews of the research, monitoring, and evaluation supporting adaptive management. Important events include the recently completed "Science: Being the Messenger" training, a modeling workshop that we are helping to plan, and the fall State of the Estuary conference. We also will scope a Delta science tracking system for development in 2016.
- Federal Approval. Our consultants will assist in securing approval of the Delta Plan as an amendment to California's coastal zone management program. We will consult with the Administration, confirm the support of the state's other coastal agencies, work with federal Office of Coastal Resource Management, and draft a submittal to secure federal approval of the Delta Plan for consideration by the Governor and the Department of Commerce.
- Performance Reporting. We will complete the review of the Delta Plan's performance measures and report on the data sources available to track the Delta Plan's implementation, including recommendations of refined or new performance measures as needed. We will train Delta agencies to report budgets and activities to implement the Delta Plan using the DeltaView system we have repurposed from the outdated CALFED tracking program. The performance measures and DeltaView information will be used in the 2015 annual report to describe progress in implementing the Delta Plan.
- Communications. Updating the Council's communications strategy will be an early task. The staff is revisiting its current strategy now so it can be discussed with the Council this spring. Meeting support, an annual report, newsletters and other publications, seminars, and speaking engagements are ongoing assignments,

- Council, Independent Science Board, and Implementation Committee Support. Support for meetings of the Council, the ISB, and the DPIIC includes logistics, preparing reports and briefing panels, and post meeting follow-up.

### **Other Activities**

Attention will still be paid to other activities that advance the Delta Plan, as time and staff resources allow. Emerging opportunities or crises may necessitate responses by the Council that could shift emphases. The Council staff will continue to track other activities that affect the Delta. Through this monitoring, it will alert the Council to actions that may significantly affect Delta Plan implementation, so that priorities can be adjusted when necessary.

### **List of Attachments**

Attachment 1: 2015 Updated Priorities

### **Contact**

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