

Communicating the Council's 2015 Priorities

Summary: At its March meeting the Council discussed 2015 priorities, including communications actions both in support of priority actions, and as a core function of the Council. This report is intended to add more detail about that support, as well as provide background on the Council's overall communications program in response to questions during the Council's January discussion of the Annual Report.

Background

The 2009 Delta Reform Act created the Council primarily to develop and implement a sustainable long-term management plan for the Delta based on furthering the coequal goals, and to coordinate among State, federal and local agencies to oversee implementation of that plan. The Council also was to house and appoint leadership for the Delta Science Program, which is directed to provide the best possible unbiased scientific information to inform water and environmental decision-making in the Delta. Thus the Council itself is a showcase for science and policy integration, and the Council's communications plan is intended to support that.

From the start, the Council's communications have been broadly aimed at those most directly affected by its actions, with the intent to:

- 1) Build awareness of, and interaction with the Council;
- 2) Build understanding of, and support for, the Delta Plan;
- 3) Increase awareness and influence of the Council's Delta Science Program; and
- 4) Improve coordination and awareness of integration among Delta agencies.

California is a vast and diverse state and, even in a crisis such as the current drought, it is difficult and expensive to gain the attention of the general public, especially for a prolonged period. Thus the Council's communications have been aimed at smaller subsets of engaged stakeholders. These include:

1. **Key Decision Makers**, including federal and State administration officials, Congress and the Legislature, and in-Delta project proponents.
2. **Key Influencers**, including the media (includes traditional print, television and radio, as well as internet communicators such as bloggers); social media such as Twitter and Facebook; local elected officials, and policy advocates.

3. **Key Stakeholders**, including statewide and regional water associations, major water agencies, environmental coalitions and organizations, Delta residents and representatives, and State and federal tribal entities.
4. **Government Interest Groups**, including governmental associations, business associations, and civic organizations.
5. **Delta Science Community**, including academics, local, State and federal agency staff, and consultants.

The Council uses a variety of communication tools to reach its audiences collectively and separately. Among these are:

1. **Public Meetings.** Stakeholders are keenly interested in the actions of the Council, the Independent Science Board and the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee, as well as the range of issues they consider. Many attend in person, an average of 300 usually watch meeting webcasts (it has been as many as 650), and actions and issues are summarized for all stakeholders through media coverage, Twitter feeds, and newsletter articles. In addition to regular business of the Council, agendas are crafted to highlight issues of broad current interest and how they relate to the Delta and implementation of the Delta Plan.

Emphasis for 2015: Focus Council meetings more tightly around one or two issues.

2. **Media.** Staff works with traditional media (newspaper, television and radio reporters) to gain coverage of Council actions as well to educate and inform stories about the Delta from the Council's perspective. Press releases, issue-specific visits to editorial boards, letters-to-the-editor and commentary pieces all work to inform the media and help stakeholders, policymakers and scientists to more fully understand issues from the Council's perspective.

Emphasis for 2015: Increase awareness of Council's long-term Plan and relevance to drought responses through four topical Opeds; work with partner agencies to publicize new projects (especially restoration) in the Delta.

3. **New / Social media.** Increasingly Californians keep apprised of issues not by reading a newspaper or watching the news, but by turning to news aggregation sites on the internet (such as Maven's Notebook or Rough & Tumble), by reading blogs (such as California Waterblog and ValleyEconomy), or by keeping up with

organizational and individual Twitter feeds and Facebook posts. Council staff identifies and works with individual aggregators, bloggers and posters to help them understand current issues and events from the Council perspective.

Two key tools for keeping stakeholders and others apprised of Council activities and perspectives are Twitter feeds (742 followers) and list-serve email (2,600 subscribers). Although this is somewhat generational, with Twitter hitting primarily a younger subset of our stakeholders, both are useful and broadly recognized ways for instant communication. Council staff uses both to encourage Twitter followers and/or list-serve subscribers to learn about the Council through announcements and links back to other communications tools such as events, newsletters, science studies and other items on our website.

Emphasis for 2015: Increase number of Twitter followers and improve the numbers of followers who take action in response by retweeting and/or going to the Council's website. Improve list-serve response to website postings and Promote use of #deltascience hashtag as a way to promote online discussion and sharing of Delta science news and information.

- 4. Events & Tours.** Council staff has participated in media tours and briefings hosted by other agencies and stakeholders. In addition, the Council hosts a number of Brown Bag seminars (lunch time lectures) to highlight science relevant to current policy issues, as well as day-long symposia and workshops allowing scientists and policymakers to more fully understand issues and help science inform decision-making. The Council also hosts a bi-annual science conference (even years) and helps sponsor the bi-annual Estuary Conference (odd years) that each bring nearly 1,000 scientists and policy makers together to explore the latest in Bay-Delta science and generate media interest.

Emphasis for 2015: Work with implementing agencies to design and host events to highlight accomplishments for specific projects and programs in and around the Delta. Improve coordination of Brown Bags and other public symposia and workshops in support of Council and DPIIC priorities.

- 5. Website.** User surveys and click tracking analytics show that the Council's website is used primarily to find out about events, to view current science studies and view Council meeting agendas and supporting materials. The recent redesign, based on both user analytics and a desire to improve graphic presentation, were intended to help users find what they are looking for within three clicks. Over the past three months the Council's website has averaged

about 10,000 visitors per month. The website also is intended to provide brief background on the major issues the Council is working on, with links to fact sheets, scientific studies and other relevant information on other websites. We also used Twitter and the Council's list-serve to preview new postings and remind users of prior information on the web site still relevant to current breaking news.

Emphasis for 2015: Improve "freshness" or timeliness of website front-page content, work with list-serve and Twitter feeds to engage stakeholders in content relevant to current issues. Improve graphics and content on issue pages.

6. **Publications (supported and in-house).** Council staff produces a number of issue papers, fact sheets and other collateral materials designed to help readers understand current issues and how they are addressed by the Delta Plan and best available science. In addition, the Council produces a semi-monthly newsletter that allows readers to more fully understand the people and the issues they are working to resolve. The newsletter reaches more than 2,600 through the Council's list-serve, and its stories also provide hooks to bring readers to other relevant articles and scientific studies on the Council's website and elsewhere. And the Council publishes an Annual Report detailing achievements of the Council and progress made by other agencies helping to implement the Delta Plan.

In addition, the Council provides funding and editorial advice for three outside publications. *San Francisco Estuary and Watershed Science* is a quarterly open access, peer-reviewed, academic journal that publishes research about the science and resource management of San Francisco Bay, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, its watersheds, and adjacent coastal ocean. It has 508 subscribers. *Estuary News* is a quarterly publication of the San Francisco Estuary Partnership and others, including the Council. In print since 1991, it tells the history of efforts to restore, manage, and understand the ecology of, and human impacts on, the West Coast's most urbanized estuary. The physical magazine goes to more than 1,700 individuals and in PDF form to another 500; an additional 500 copies are placed in staff mailboxes or in reception areas at several state and federal agencies. The Council also supports the online website *Maven's Notebook*, which is both a water news aggregator and site with original reporting about the Council and the Delta Science Program. It has approximately 1,400 subscribers, and an average of 15,000 monthly visitors to her site.

Emphasis for 2015: Work with publications we support, especially Estuary News, to improve coverage of Delta issues and readership among Delta officials and stakeholders.

7. **Outreach / Speakers Bureau.** Council staff prepares and presents talks about Council activities and programs, as well as issue-specific presentations on the drought, development of the Delta Levee Investment Strategy, the relevance of science and adaptive management to decision-making in the Delta and other topics.

Emphasis for 2015: More fully prepare and engage the staff and Council members in stakeholder outreach. Use website, Twitter and list-serve to increase awareness of speakers on current issues.

At the March Council meeting, staff discussed communication activities related to the 2015 priorities, as well as activities considered to be “core functions” detailed in the following chart.

COMMUNICATIONS		<u>Division Lead:</u> Keith Coolidge
<p>Guiding Language: “The Council is committed to open communication of current understanding gained through the evaluation of performance measures, monitoring, science, and adaptive management. This communication will be continuous as the Council receives and produces information that will be used to adapt its strategy toward meeting the coequal goals and updating the Delta Plan.” (Delta Plan, p. 46)</p>		
<p>Ongoing Tasks</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council Meeting Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Solicit and contract for appropriate venues for Council, ISB, DPIIC meetings and special workshops. ● Solicit and contract for webcasting services for FY15 and FY16. ● Oversee webcasting with timely posting of meeting video. ● Arrange and handle logistics for Council and ISB field trips. ● Develop public awareness of – and media coverage for – priority issues presented at Council meetings. 2. Annual Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Produce 2015 Annual Report. 3. Newsletter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Produce periodic newsletters; content includes stories about the Council, its Delta Science Program, and the people and actions leading the efforts to implement the Delta Plan. 4. Media Relations and Outreach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain contact with reporters and editors to inform them about the Delta Plan and its relationship to current events, key Council decisions, and pending issues/actions. ● Prepare fact sheets and other informational materials. ● Coordinate with other agencies to educate media and key audiences about Delta issues. 5. Speaking Engagements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support for external speaking engagements about the Council, Delta Plan and Science Plan including speechwriting, PowerPoint and handout materials. 		
<p>Scheduled Tasks</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update Council communications strategy 2. Develop Council Speakers Bureau to solicit and support speaking engagements 3. Determine feasibility – and coordinate implementation – of Delta Field Trip to inform target audience about relevant Delta Plan actions. 4. Prepare, publish and distribute Annual Report 		

Contacts

Keith Coolidge
 Executive Manager, External Affairs

Phone: (916) 445-4503