

## INFORMATION ITEM

### Laying the Foundation for a Proposed Ecosystem Restoration Amendment to the Delta Plan

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**Summary:** Two efforts are underway that help lay the foundation for the development of an amendment to the Delta Plan's ecosystem restoration chapter. A representative of the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) will present a preview of *A Delta Renewed: A Guide to Science-Based Ecological Restoration in the Delta*. Representatives of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) will provide an update on the development of the *Delta Conservation Framework*, a 25-year framework that will serve as a continuation of EcoRestore, guide regional-scale planning, and lay a path for integrating stakeholder concerns. Council staff will describe how these two efforts, along with lessons learned from the first three years of Delta Plan implementation, can inform an amendment of the Delta Plan's ecosystem restoration provisions.

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### Background

When the Council approved the 2013 Delta Plan, it adopted policies and recommendations to restore aquatic habitat and improve water quality while respecting local land uses and expanding opportunities for nature-based recreation and tourism. At the time, State and federal agencies and stakeholders were exploring a comprehensive approach to habitat restoration through the Bay-Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) and the Council chose not to duplicate that work in anticipation that the BDCP could be incorporated into the Delta Plan in accordance with the Delta Reform Act (Water Code section 85320).

In May 2015 the Department of Water Resources and US Bureau of Reclamation made a decision not to pursue the BDCP as an integrated approach to water conveyance and ecosystem conservation in the Delta, and decided to pursue two independent projects: EcoRestore and WaterFix. At that time, the Council made a commitment to revisit the Delta Plan to assess the need for an ecosystem restoration amendment.<sup>1</sup>

In June 2016, the DFW announced its intent to develop a *Delta Conservation Framework* that will include new implementation and policy guidance to address elements of the BDCP that were not included in EcoRestore or WaterFix; inform an ecosystem restoration amendment to the Delta Plan; and guide grant making by DFW and others. The *Framework* has a dual focus of ecosystem function and Delta community benefits. DFW has also funded SFEI to produce *A Delta Renewed: A Guide to Science-Based Ecological Restoration in the Delta*, the third in a series of reports that

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<sup>1</sup> Separately, the Council has been investigating a Delta Plan amendment to address conveyance, storage, and operations of the water supply systems, which also originally had been a component of the BDCP. Council staff anticipate presenting a discussion draft of that amendment for Council consideration in late 2016.

has included SFEI's Delta historical ecology report and its Delta landscape metrics report.

These efforts can lay the foundation for a Delta Plan ecosystem restoration amendment that will more comprehensively address the conservation of terrestrial, transitional and aquatic habitats, as well as their integration at the landscape scale, which could improve local acceptance of conservation efforts and facilitate project permitting. These efforts can also provide recommendations regarding adaptation to climate change and other challenges such as tradeoffs between efforts to conserve aquatic and terrestrial species. Council staff has provided feedback to SFEI on its draft report and is collaborating with DFW in the development of the *Delta Conservation Framework* by reviewing draft materials, helping to facilitate stakeholder meetings, and contributing to brainstorming sessions to develop solutions to conservation challenges.

Council staff intends to rely on guidance from these two efforts, along with lessons learned from the first three years of Delta Plan implementation, to inform the development of a proposed Delta Plan ecosystem restoration amendment. At the August 2016 Council meeting, staff provided the Council with a memo that summarized progress made in the focus areas identified by the habitat restoration issue paper, *Restoring Habitat with Science and Society in Mind*<sup>2</sup>, which the Council endorsed in August 2014. The memo also included information about recent headway made in implementing Delta restoration projects and provided a preview of upcoming efforts that will continue to advance the integration of best available science and adaptive management in habitat restoration planning and implementation in a manner that considers local stakeholder concerns.

Over the coming months, Council staff will collaborate with DFW and other planning partners to develop proposals for an ecosystem restoration amendment to the Delta Plan based on:

- *A Delta Renewed* and the *Delta Conservation Framework*;
- Lessons learned from three years of consultation with project proponents, including promoting the use of best available science and adaptive management and reducing conflicts with existing land uses;
- The EcoRestore experience with project permitting;
- The Yolo Bypass and Cache Slough Partnership experience with interagency collaboration on integrated flood management, habitat restoration, and agricultural sustainability;
- The draft *Central Valley Flood System Conservation Strategy*, developed to support the 2017 update of the *Central Valley Flood Protection Plan*;
- The ongoing development of an adaptive management program for EcoRestore, led by the California Natural Resources Agency, with technical leadership by the Council's Delta Science Program;

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<sup>2</sup> The paper is available online at <http://deltacouncil.ca.gov/docs/14-0923-restoring-habitat-science-and-society-mind-issue-paper>.

- The conclusions of the Council's report *Improving Habitats Along Delta Levees*<sup>3</sup>;
- The tool box of strategies developed by the Agriculture and Land Stewardship Working Group<sup>4</sup>; and
- Lessons learned from the refinement of the Delta Plan performance measures and the development of project tracking tools.

### Timeline for Proposed Amendment

Staff recommends the following timeline for the proposed amendment.

- Fall 2016: Comment on scope of ecosystem restoration amendment. SFEI's *A Delta Renewed* report released
- Winter 2016-Spring 2017: DFW *Delta Conservation Framework* completed. DFW identifies potential Delta Plan ecosystem restoration amendment provisions.
- Spring 2017-Summer 2017: Council staff collaborate with DFW, SFEI, and other planning partners to develop proposals for an ecosystem restoration amendment to the Delta Plan. Summer-Winter 2017: Council reviews a discussion draft of the ecosystem restoration amendment and holds public workshops. Staff recommends a draft amendment to the Council.

### Today's Panel

The purpose of today's panel is to brief the Council on two efforts that will inform Council staff's development of a proposed ecosystem restoration amendment to the Delta Plan. Representatives from SFEI and DFW include:

- **Letitia Grenier**, Resilient Landscapes Program Director and Senior Scientist at SFEI, will provide a preview of *A Delta Renewed: A Guide to Science-Based Ecological Restoration in the Delta*.
- **Brook Jacobs** and **Christina Sloop**, Senior Environmental Scientists with DFW, will provide an update on the development of the *Delta Conservation Framework*.

The Council may wish to consider the following questions during this meeting:

- What is new about SFEI's restoration guidance, compared to previous approaches? How does the landscape ecology framework differ from existing efforts focused on mitigation for impacts to endangered species?
- What lessons learned from the BDCP process will inform the development of the *Delta Conservation Framework*? How will this framework lay the foundation for better integrating community concerns into conservation planning and implementation?

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<sup>3</sup> The report is available online at <http://deltacouncil.ca.gov/docs/improving-habitats-along-delta-levees-issue-paper>

<sup>4</sup> The tool box is available online at <https://agriculturalandstewardship.water.ca.gov/>

- How can these documents provide guidance on addressing issues that received less attention in the current Delta Plan, such as restoring and enhancing migratory bird habitat?
- What types of guidance will these documents provide regarding adaptation to climate change?
- What guidance will these documents provide that could lead to smoother permitting processes?

**Fiscal Information**

Not applicable.

**List of Attachments**

None.

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