

## Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area

---

**Requested Action:** The Council is requested to endorse the Delta Protection Commission's proposal to establish a National Heritage Area in the Delta, including the Suisun Marsh, Rio Vista, and the Carquinez Strait.

---

### **Background**

The proposal that the Delta Protection Commission (DPC) submitted to the Council to protect the values of the Delta as an evolving place included, pursuant to Water Code Section 85301(b)(1), a draft feasibility study for a National Heritage Area (NHA) in the Delta. The final draft Delta Plan recommends that the DPC complete its application for designation of the Delta and Suisun Marsh as an NHA and that the federal government should complete the process in a timely manner (DP R1). Since the Council's consideration of the DPC's proposal in February, its feasibility study of the NHA has been completed, reviewed by the National Park Service, accepted by the DPC, and submitted to Congress. Action by the Council to endorse the NHA's creation would contribute to the movement supporting the area's establishment.

#### ***A. What is a National Heritage Area?***

NHAs are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage. Through public-private partnerships, NHAs support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Each NHA's local managing entity develops a management plan with comprehensive policies, strategies, and recommendations for telling the story of the region's heritage and encouraging long-term resource protection, enhancement, interpretation, funding, management and development. Designated NHAs receive federal matching funds to develop and implement the management plan.

NHAs are not national park units. Rather, the National Park Service (NPS), which administers the NHA program, partners with a local managing entity to provide technical assistance, and dispenses federal funds for the NHA. NPS does not assume ownership of land inside heritage areas or impose land use controls. Because all NHAs are lived-in landscapes, the program emphasizes community collaboration and partnership projects to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs. It offers a collaborative approach to conservation that does not compromise traditional local control over, and use of, the landscape. The partnership approach creates the opportunity for a diverse range of constituents to come together to voice a range of visions and perspectives.

There are 49 NHAs in diverse locations, including southwest Pennsylvania's Rivers of Steel NHA honoring Ohio River steel industries, the Sangre de Cristo NHA commemorating Hispanic,

Anglo and Native American cultures and settlements in Colorado's San Luis Valley, and Iowa's Silos & Smokestacks NHA that interprets farm life, agribusiness and rural communities.

### ***B. DPC's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area proposal***

The DPC's NHA feasibility study recommends the area be established to "recognize, enhance, and promote 'Delta as a Place' to help cultivate and retain appreciation and understanding of the Delta as an ecological, agricultural, recreational, historical, and cultural treasure". Its vision for the NHA is "a regional network of partner sites with interpretive/educational components that will be linked where possible and serve as the primary attractions, on existing public properties or on private properties with the voluntary consent and involvement of the landowners". DPC recommends that the NHA include much of the Legal Delta as well as Rio Vista, the Carquinez Strait and the Suisun Marsh (Figure 1). It recommends that the DPC serve as the NHA's management entity with technical and stakeholder advisory committees.

Mike Machado, the DPC's executive director, and his staff will be present at the Council's hearing to describe the proposed NHA. The executive summary of DPC's NHA feasibility study is Attachment A of this report. The full study is at <http://www.delta.ca.gov/FeasibilityStudyforaSacramento-SanJoaquinDeltaNHA.htm>.

### ***C. How Does an NHA Contribute to the Co-Equal Goals?***

The co-equal goals must be achieved in a manner that protects the unique values of the Delta as an evolving place (Water Code 29702). The Delta Plan acknowledges, however, that not all Delta users, visitors, or residents recognize or appreciate the Delta's values. Because the Delta is unique, it is too easily unappreciated and misunderstood. Without a clear message about the Delta and its importance, the region and its resources can suffer from inattention or misuse. If the Delta's unique cultural, recreational, and agricultural values are not recognized, they are unlikely to be protected and enhanced.

The NHA's goal is to identify the Delta as a region of national significance, to educate the public about 'Delta as a Place', and build more support for preserving, protecting, and enhancing the Delta. Designating the Delta as a special place can increase public recognition of the Delta and its unique resources, building the awareness and understanding that are essential foundations for wiser use of the Delta's water supplies and restoration of its ecosystem.

### ***D. What Are Stakeholders Views of the NHA?***

Creation of an NHA was recommended in Governor Schwarzenegger's *Delta Vision Strategic Plan* and in California State Park's *Recreation Proposal for the Delta*.

The DPC incorporated public involvement throughout its study's process. Activities to acquire stakeholder input included public meetings, public presentations, stakeholder interviews, public review memos, and project study team meetings. DPC's feasibility report includes letters of support from Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo Counties; the cities of Benicia, Rio Vista, Vallejo, and West Sacramento, California State Parks, Visit California (the state tourism office), the State Office of Historic Preservation, the Suisun Resource Conservation District, the California Delta Chambers and Visitors Bureau, the Isleton Chamber of Commerce, and many Delta recreation and history groups.

Some local landowners expressed concerns that additional tourism and recreation in the Delta will conflict with agricultural operations and that the NHA may have unintended effects on their property. The DPC's feasibility report on the NHA responds to these concerns in part by reiterating the Constitution's protections of private property, proposing an opt-out provision that lets any landowner withdraw his property from the NHA on written request, and emphasizing agriculture as among the unique Delta values to be conserved and interpreted in the NHA..

### ***E. What are the next steps in creating a Delta NHA?***

Only Congress can designate an NHA. Senator Feinstein and Representative Garamendi have introduced legislation (S. 29 and H.B. 486) to create a Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA. These bills are assigned to committees in their respective houses. Noteworthy provisions of both bills are that the heritage area's management plan shall incorporate an integrated and cooperative approach to agricultural resources and activities, flood protection facilities, and other public infrastructure; ensure participation by appropriate federal, State, tribal, and local agencies, including the Delta Stewardship Council; and shall not be approved until the Secretary of Interior has received certification that the Delta Stewardship Council has reviewed the NHA management plan for consistency with the Delta Plan.

The Congressional committees considering these bills typically request testimony from the National Park Service about the NHA's creation prior to action on the authorizing legislation. National Park Service wrote to DPC in July 2012 stating that the feasibility study met the NPS' criteria. NPS uses these criteria to develop its testimony about an NHA's designation.

### **Fiscal Information**

The draft legislation to establish the NHA authorizes \$10 million for preparation and implementation of the NHA's management plan, of which not more than \$1 million may be made available for any fiscal year. A non-federal cost share of at least 50 percent is required for activities carried out through the NHA. The non-Federal share may be in the form of in-kind contributions of goods or services. DPC anticipates that \$150,000 annually, at a minimum, would be granted for the first three years after designation, with higher levels of funding after approval of the NHA's management plan

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends the Council authorize the Chairman to communicate to Congress, the National Park Service, and other interested parties its support for creation of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area as described in the DPC's feasibility study.

### **List of Attachments**

Attachment 1: Figure 1. Proposed NHA boundary

Attachment 2: *Feasibility Study for a Sacramento - San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area – Executive Summary*

### **Contact**

Dan Ray  
Chief Deputy Executive Officer

Phone: (916) 445-4294