

Mid-Year Status Update on 2014 Priorities

Summary: This report is a mid-year update on the status of staff priorities for 2014 which were presented to the Council at the December 2013 Council meeting. The Executive Officer, Lead Scientist and deputy directors will discuss these priorities and the activities supporting them with the Council and be available to answer questions from Council members.

Background

This report is a mid-year update on the status of staff priorities for 2014. In December, 2013, the staff presented the Council with staff's priorities for 2014, emphasizing staff activities to address 20 of the Delta Plan's 87 policies and recommendations, as well as key elements of the Delta Science Plan and legislative directives from the Delta Reform Act. In response, the Council directed the staff to "prioritize its priorities", expressing a preference for a more focused approach to Delta Plan implementation.

Updating the 2014 Priorities

The Council's executive staff has reviewed the priorities proposed in December. Agencies with whom we cooperate were consulted and staff resources were assessed. Five principles guided our deliberations:

- Delta Plan and Delta Reform Act Implementation. Activities that are key to implementation of the Delta 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, 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 overall program to address water supply reliability, ecosystem restoration, and the Delta as a Place.
- Build Core Competencies. Utilize the strengths of the Delta Science Program, Council hearings, and the covered action process. Because the organization is still in its infancy, continued fostering of the Council's core programs is essential.

Priority 2014 Delta Plan Implementation Actions

The staff's proposed priorities for the remainder of 2014 are outlined in Attachment 1. The activities proposed build on the Council's roles in implementing the Delta Plan as depicted in the Delta Plan's Figure 2-1 and cited in the attachment.



During the remainder of 2014, staff will emphasize these five initiatives to implement Delta Plan recommendations:

- Delta Levees Investment Strategy. To provide priorities for state investments in Delta levees, we have engaged ARCADIS to develop a tool that considers the people, assets, and environmental resources protected by levees and apply it to recommend levee investments. After much preparation, this work will formally launch in July.
- Interim Science Action Agenda. The Interim Science Action Agenda, intended as a shared list of priority science actions common to multiple stakeholders, will be essential to the coordination and alignment of scientific research, monitoring, and evaluation activities in the Delta. The Delta Science Program will identify and recommend Delta science priorities upon review of prior assessments of needs and after conducting surveys of, and seeking advice from, scientists and agency leaders.
- Habitat Restoration. The Council's staff facilitates progress towards the Delta Plan's objectives for tidal marsh and floodplain restoration through several activities: early consultation on restoration projects, including advice on monitoring and adaptive management; coordination through the Delta Restoration Network and other forums; other science support; and tracking of restoration actions that contribute to the Delta Plan's objectives. Completing the Council's habitat restoration white paper offers the opportunity to pull together suggested best practices to speed progress and enhance the success of restoration projects.
- Flows. Updating the flow objectives of the State Water Resources Control Board's Bay-Delta Plan is a key step in efforts to provide more certainty about the water available for beneficial use and to restoring the Delta ecosystem as well as a

directive of the Delta Reform Act. The Delta Science Program provides science to support the Board's decision making in response to the Board's requests. Staff also participate in the Collaborative Adaptive Management Team (CAMT) to support flow management decision-making by the state and federal water projects under the current Biological Opinions.

- Land Use. Experience over the past six months reveals 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 (GHG emission reduction plans). As the Delta Protection Commission (DPC) begins to update its land use and natural resource plan, we will coordinate as needed to ensure compatibility with the Delta Plan. We are beginning to gather information about Delta energy facilities and plans, in consultation with the California Energy Commission and California Public Utilities Commission, to better understand how they may affect Delta Plan implementation. Staff also contributes to a range of coordination efforts intended to reduce conflicts between habitat and agriculture.

Developing Core Functions that Support Delta Plan Implementation

Continuing to develop core functions that support Delta Plan implementation is essential. Only by attending to these fundamental responsibilities can we foster the Council's role as coordinator of the Delta Plan's implementation.

- Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee. A second Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC) meeting will occur in November. Existing interagency work groups are being used to coordinate with DPIIC agencies and new work groups may be convened if needed.
- Covered Actions. We are continuing to support certification of covered actions with early consultation, trainings for agencies and citizen groups, and the on-line certification system.
- Delta Science Plan Implementation. In addition to the development of the Interim Science Action Agenda, to continue Delta Science Plan implementation, we will report recommendations from the Delta Data Summit, continue to provide peer reviews of scientific reports, maintain our support for seminars and publications that synthesize and communicate Delta science, and continue supporting the Delta Independent Science Board.
- Maintain the State of Bay-Delta Science. The *State of Bay-Delta Science* report will be updated and published. The biannual Bay-Delta Science Conference will convene scientists to share and report new findings and discuss ongoing investigations.

- Performance Reporting. The online tracking and reporting system developed for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program is being repurposed to track Delta Plan implementation. Data gathered by DPIIC agencies and others will be reviewed to assess its value in monitoring progress towards Delta Plan performance measures. The 2014 Annual Report will describe outcomes using representative performance measures across selected Delta Plan goals.
- Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). We will complete our review and analysis of the draft BDCP by reviewing the recently released implementation agreement. We will continue to consult with BDCP agencies as they consider the Council's comments.
- Federal Approval. Consultants will be engaged to assist in our effort to secure approval of the Delta Plan as an amendment to California's coastal zone management program. We will confirm the support of the state's other coastal agencies' for amending the coastal management program to include the Delta Plan, and begin working with federal Office of Coastal Resource Management to secure its approval of the Delta Plan.

Other Activities

Attention will still be paid to other activities that advance the Delta Plan, as time and staff resources allow. For example, coordination with the Department of Water Resources and the SWRCB can encourage progress on the Delta Plan's provisions to reduce reliance on the Delta. We will also monitor and encourage activities to complete plans for increased water storage, manage groundwater, and improve water transfer processes. Actions to address other stressors can be encouraged by our convening seminars to report and synthesize scientific findings and by reviewing, and where necessary, commenting on significant actions by the Regional Water Quality Control Boards. Support will be provided to the DPC's National Heritage Area when it is helpful.

In addition, 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: 2014 Updated Priorities

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