

Near-Term Strategies for Implementation of the Delta Plan

Summary: In order to achieve the coequal goals of the Delta Reform Act in a timely manner, the Delta Stewardship Council (DSC) needs to immediately begin carrying out or supporting a number of strategies for implementation of the Delta Plan. The purpose of this Staff Report is to describe these strategies and highlight examples of projects and programs that illustrate the guiding principles that the Council has endorsed. The staff recommends that the Council open a public hearing, take testimony, and provide direction to the staff about near-term strategies that will be presented for action at the November 2012 Council meeting.

Background

Any new water conveyance system in the Delta, if approved, may take more than a decade to construct. Meanwhile, the reliability of the state's water supplies and the health of the Delta ecosystem continue to decline. Action to address these problems cannot await the construction of major new facilities, but must be addressed in the near term, i.e., in the next five years. At the same time, there is an urgent need to reduce risks to people, property, and state interests in the Delta by promoting effective emergency preparedness, appropriate land uses, and strategic levee investments. There are several agencies and stakeholders that have proposed such actions, and the Final Draft of the Delta Plan describes numerous actions for which implementation should begin now.

In August, the Council considered and agreed upon principles and criteria for selecting near-term actions. The Council directed the staff to avoid selecting specific projects proposed by agencies and stakeholders as near-term actions, but to return to the Council with a framework for evaluating projects and programs. The staff, in consultation with other agencies and stakeholders, has developed a set of near-term strategies, which are essential to begin carrying out the Delta Plan. The staff is using the framework of near-term strategies to highlight the importance of specific projects and programs and to provide input to the state budget process. The staff recommends that the Council open a public hearing, take testimony, and provide direction to the staff about near-term strategies that will be presented for action at the November 2012 Council meeting.

Near-Term Strategies

DSC staff proposes that the Council, in consultation with other agencies and Delta stakeholders, endorse a set of near-term strategies that the DSC will either undertake directly, or encourage other state or local agencies to initiate now to begin early implementation of the Delta Plan.

These strategies will be intended to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Address statewide interests through achieving the coequal goals;
2. Address critical needs for water supply reliability, ecosystem restoration, protection of the Delta as a place, protection and enhancement of Delta water quality, and flood risk management;
3. Serve as a test of new governance approaches proposed in the Delta Plan for water resources and environmental restoration programs; and
4. Demonstrate how science can guide water resources and environmental restoration actions.

The actions will be derived from relevant sections of the Water Code and the Final Draft Delta Plan.

I. Guiding Principles

The staff recommends the following principles to guide the selection of near-term strategies:

1. Pursue both coequal goals with initiatives that are concurrent, comparable, and coordinated;
2. Direct real funds by prioritizing actions to be implemented with existing fund sources;
3. Demonstrate new governance strategies, best available science, adaptive management, and payment of costs by the beneficiary or “stressor;”
4. Carry no regrets; i.e., actions that meet both near-term needs while we wait for BDCP, and which are compatible with the preferred BDCP alternative.

II. Proposed Near-Term Strategies

Potential near-term strategies are organized into categories that correspond to the coequal goals, protection of the Delta as a place, and coordinating Delta activities, i.e., strategies that will be undertaken directly by the DSC. They are organized as follows:

1. Improve the Reliability of California’s Water Supplies
 - 1.1 Reduce Vulnerabilities of the Current Water Delivery System
 - 1.2 Reduce Reliance on the Delta
 - 1.3 Make Decisions Regarding the Future Water Delivery System
2. Restore the Delta Ecosystem
 - 2.1 Accelerate Progress toward Habitat Acreage Targets
 - 2.2 Complete the Flow Standards Update
 - 2.3 Manage Non-native Invasive Species
 - 2.4 Use Ecosystem Science to Support Delta Water Operations

3. Protect the Delta as a Place
 - 3.1 Designate the Delta as a National Heritage Area
 - 3.2 Promote Wildlife-Friendly Farming and Subsidence Reversal
 - 3.3 Improve Emergency Preparedness and Cost-Sharing on Levee Upgrades
 - 3.4 Accelerate Progress on the Lower San Joaquin River Flood Bypass

4. Coordinate Delta Activities
 - 4.1 Convene the Delta Plan Implementation Committee
 - 4.2 Ensure Agency Actions Are Consistent with the Delta Plan
 - 4.3 Use Science to Guide Management through the Delta Science Plan
 - 4.4 Identify Funding Sources for Implementation through the Financing Plan

Attachment 1 describes near-term strategies in more detail and provides examples of actions that might be undertaken to achieve the strategies. The staff compiled them using the policies and recommendations of the Final Draft Delta Plan, along with proposed actions by other agencies.

III. Proposed Examples of Projects and Programs

To illustrate how the state can begin immediately to implement these strategies, the staff has chosen examples of actions that are underway or ready to go in each category.

Improve the Reliability of California's Water Supplies

Example Action: Through the Integrated Regional Water Management Program, fund projects identified in local water management plans that reduce reliance on Delta water supplies.

Restore the Delta Ecosystem

Example Action: Habitat restoration in one or more of the following areas: McCormick-Williamson Tract, Dutch Slough, Prospect Island, Hill Slough West, and Lower Putah Creek

Protect the Delta as a Place

Example Action: Carry out the emergency preparedness and risk reduction recommendations of the Multi-Hazard Coordination Task Force Report.

Coordinate Delta Activities

Example Action: Convene the Delta Plan Implementation Committee

If the Council accepts the staff recommendation, the staff will continue to consult with Delta agencies and stakeholders to further evaluate these and other potential near-term strategies to begin implementing the Delta Plan. The example actions may change: actions that prove non-viable may be eliminated, while other actions may be added as appropriate. Implementing the near-term strategies will not only begin to remedy critical water supply and Delta ecosystem problems, but will also help strengthen the public's

trust in the state's ability to manage these problems by demonstrating progress in the near-term.

IV. Updated Implementation Process and Schedule

1. Staff consults with agencies and stakeholders to refine the proposed near-term strategies and example projects and programs (October-November);
2. Council directs DSC staff to initiate Delta coordination activities consistent with its budget and staff capacity (November);
3. Staff will report to the Council on how these strategies are being used to highlight the importance of specific projects and provide input to the state decision-making processes (December).

List of Attachments

Attachment 1: Summary of Proposed Near-Term Strategies

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