

Near-Term Strategies for Implementation of the Delta Plan

Summary: At its October 25, 2012 meeting the Delta Stewardship Council provided direction to the staff about refining the approach to near-term strategies to be presented at the November 2012 Council meeting. The Council directed staff to provide a narrower selection of strategies, with justification for these choices. This staff report provides the information as directed. The Council is requested to provide further guidance on the proposed “short list” of strategies, and the criteria used to develop it.

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. 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.

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 2012, the staff presented a summary of these projects and others outlined in the Delta Plan or other reports that might provide a short term action agenda to begin implementing the Delta Plan. At the time, 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. In October the staff presented a set of 21 near-term strategies and sub-strategies essential to begin carrying out the Delta Plan. Staff proposed using them as a framework to highlight the importance of specific projects and programs and to provide input to the state budget process.

After discussion, the Council directed the staff to revise its proposal in the following ways:

1. Focus on a few strategies, and provide the criteria used in their selection. Several criteria were suggested by Council members, including:
 - All strategies must promote achievement of the coequal goals.
 - All strategies should be achievable and produce measureable results within five to ten years.
 - All beneficiaries should participate financially.
 - Some of the strategies should test the Draft Delta Plan’s requirement to use the best available science, including adaptive management.
 - Strategies should address both statewide and Delta community interests.
2. Assume that roughly \$1 billion from existing state and other funding sources will be available.

3. Create a list of strategies that the state and federal governments could use for approving actions to be undertaken in the next five to ten years.
4. Let the elected officials determine how to allocate funds among projects.

I. Proposed “Short List” of Near-Term Strategies

The staff has identified a set of near-term strategies as directed by the Council, using the Council’s suggested criteria and three others:

- Support by one of the ad hoc coalitions created to support Delta projects (i.e., the “Delta Projects Coalition” and the “Combined Delta Counties Coalition and California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley”).
- Readiness to proceed (“shovel ready”).
- Incorporates “innovative governance”, including accountability for outcomes.

All are either ongoing or can be started now, and would result in significant progress toward achieving the coequal goals in the next five to ten years. These strategies are described in the following bullets.

1. Improve the Reliability of California’s Water Supplies
 - a. Improve protection for “freshwater pathway” by improving levees on islands adjacent to channels that convey water through the Delta to export pumps. This will provide also improve flood protection for the central Delta.
 - b. Reduce vulnerabilities in the current State Water Project delivery system by removing institutional barriers that prevent timely repair and maintenance.
 - c. Through the Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP) and similar programs, fund projects identified in regional water management plans that reduce reliance on Delta water supplies. Such projects may include local groundwater recharge/banking, conjunctive use of groundwater and surface water, local surface water storage, water use efficiency improvements, etc.
2. Restore the Delta Ecosystem
 - a. Accelerate progress toward tidal marsh and floodplain habitat restoration acreage targets required by the biological opinions regarding the state and federal water projects.
 - b. Manage existing nonnative invasive species and prevent the introduction and establishment of new nonnative species in the Delta.
 - c. Improve the use of science in making state and federal water project operations decisions by improving data collection and analysis capabilities.
3. Protect the Delta as a Place
 - a. Encourage habitat enhancement and wildlife-friendly farming practices that can co-exist with agricultural operations in the Delta. Existing programs and new efforts need additional funding for outreach to Delta growers and expanded implementation.

- b. Accelerate progress on the Lower San Joaquin River bypass by undertaking studies to evaluate alternatives and finalize design. This will improve flood protection for the cities of Stockton and Lathrop.
- c. Improve Delta cultural and historical interpretation facilities and programs, especially at Delta gateways, with signage, museums improvements, recreation facilities (Yolo Bypass), and education and interpretive programs (e.g. Big Break Delta Visitor Center, Delta Discovery Center, Locke Board House Museum).

The strategies above are proposed as those which best meet the screening criteria. Attachment 1 provides the results of applying the screening criteria described above to the near-term strategies.

In addition to the capital improvement and facility management actions listed above, other important near-term strategies discussed at the October meeting should be pursued through ongoing agency efforts using existing staff and programs. . These include designation of the Delta as a National Heritage Area, continuing to improve emergency preparedness in the Delta, describing priorities for state investments in Delta levees, including recommended allocations of levee costs to beneficiaries, convening the Delta Plan Implementation Committee, completing the Delta Science Plan and completing a Finance Plan. Progress on these and other strategies is essential, and the staff will continue to work with agencies and stakeholders to promote them.

If the Council concurs with the staff's recommendation, the staff will continue to consult with Delta agencies and stakeholders to continue evaluating these and other potential near-term strategies to begin implementing the Delta Plan. 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. Council directs DSC staff to continue Delta coordination activities consistent with its budget and staff capacity (November – December);
2. 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: "Short List" Near-Term Strategies

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