

RLO036 SRCD



January 9th, 2013

Mr. Phil Isenberg
Chair, Delta Stewardship Council
Recirculated Draft PEIR Comments
980 Ninth Street, Suite 1500
Sacramento, California 95814

Subject: Suisun Resource Conservation District Comments on the Recirculated Delta Plan Draft PEIR

Dear Mr. Isenberg,

The Suisun Resource Conservation District (SRCD) is a legislatively created special district with the primary local responsibility for promoting wetland conservation of the Suisun Marsh through improvements in water management practices on private lands within the primary management area of the Suisun Marsh (Public Resources Code 9962). The SRCD has taken the leadership role for over 40 years to ensure adequate water quality in the Suisun Marsh – a condition necessary to promote a diversity of productive waterfowl habitat, enhance the wetland resource values through appropriate management practices, and make sure the wetland and wildlife values of the Suisun Marsh are sustained and protected.

For the past decade, SRCD has worked cooperatively with California Department of Water Resources, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Services, the United States Bureau of Reclamation, and the CALFED Program (the predecessor to the Delta Stewardship Council) as a Principal Agency in the development of the Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation and Restoration Plan (SMP) and associated environmental impact report/statement (SMP EIR/EIS). The SMP is a comprehensive 30 year management plan for the Suisun Marsh region. The SMP's development process was based upon Agency collaboration with stakeholder participation to develop a plan to address conflicts regarding ongoing management of existing Marsh resources, the enhancement and long term management of managed wetlands, and the restoration of 5,000 to 7,000 acres of tidal wetlands to contribute to the recovery of listed terrestrial and aquatic species. The SMP significantly supports the coequal goals of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009. It is consistent with the Delta Plan, it implements many of the near term and intermediate term ecosystem

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Response to comment RLO036-1

Comment noted.

Response to comment RLO036-2

Comment noted.

restoration objectives called out in the Delta Plan Policies and Recommendations, and implements a viable strategy for restoring a healthy Delta ecosystem, while protecting and enhancing existing ecosystem resources of the Delta and Suisun Marsh in partnership with the stakeholders of the Marsh.

RLO036-2

Recently, the Delta Stewardship Council staff and science program began to actively participate as a SMP Principal Agency and is becoming engaged in future adaptive management, science, and implementation elements of SMP. SRCD is pleased with these recent developments and is hopeful that the DSC will embrace the SMP as complementary to the Delta Plan and will work collaboratively with land managers and Agencies in protecting and restoring the wetland and wildlife resources of the Suisun Marsh.

On February 2, 2012 SRCD submitted comments on the 5th draft of the Delta Plan and Draft EIR. The following comments will be limited to the 7th draft of the Delta Plan and the Recirculated Draft Delta Plan PEIR. SRCD continues to be concerned that the Recirculated PEIR fails to adequately analyze the environmental impacts that may be associated with the implementation of the Delta Plan's current draft Policies on the Suisun Marsh. The implementation of some of these policies will cause significant direct and indirect physical changes in the environment and significant adverse and unavoidable environmental effects and consequences to the wetland and wildlife resources of the Suisun Marsh. The Recirculated PEIR has not adequately considered, disclosed, analyzed, nor proposed adequate mitigation for significant potential future negative impacts to the wetland and wildlife resources of the Suisun Marsh.

RLO036-3

- ER P1 & P2 – Any increases in local and regional salinities in the Suisun Marsh due to changes in Delta outflow, increased upstream diversions, changes to timing and duration of Delta outflow, and/or the ecosystem restoration activities in Suisun Marsh and other priority habitat restoration areas in the Delta, will negatively impact the Suisun Marsh. Increases in salinities in the Suisun Marsh will decrease existing wetland diversity, decrease wintering waterfowl carrying capacity, decrease habitat quality for resident and migratory wildlife, decrease the operational life of managed wetland water management infrastructure and increase the costs of seasonal wetland habitat management activities. These significant adverse and unavoidable environmental effects must be analyzed, disclosed and adequately mitigated.
- ER P2 & R1- “Restore significant portions of the Suisun Marsh to brackish marsh with land-water interface”. The Recirculated PEIR has not defined what “significant portions of the Suisun Marsh” means nor has it identified potential impacts to the existing environment from the proposal. Any tidal restoration actions that exceed the SMP EIR/EIS tidal restoration targets will result in degradation, conversion, or direct loss of existing managed wetland habitats; it will decrease existing wildlife species

RLO036-4

RLO036-5

Response to comment RLO036-3

Please see the responses to the commenter's prior letter, LO196.

Response to comment RLO036-4

As described in Section 2B of the Draft Program EIR, the Delta Stewardship Council does not propose or contemplate directly authorizing any physical activities. Rather, through the Delta Plan, the Delta Stewardship Council seeks to influence the actions, activities, and/or projects of other agencies, the details of which would be under the jurisdiction and authority of the agencies that will propose them in the future and conduct future environmental review. Without specific details of future projects, it is not possible or appropriate for the EIR to attempt to speculate regarding possible incremental effects that the Delta Plan might have on management of a specific location and resource such as Suisun Marsh. See Master Response 2. The potential water quality impacts of Delta and Suisun Marsh ecosystem restoration on water quality and on adjacent land uses are described in Sections 3, 6, and 7 of the Draft Program EIR. In particular, the analysis of Impact 3-1b notes that changes in future flows through the Delta could affect salinity and could cause increased salinity in the western Delta in summer months, possibly resulting in significant impacts.

Response to comment RLO036-5

As described in the RDEIR, ER R1 also encourages the use of “information from adaptive management processes during the Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan’s implementation to guide future habitat restoration projects and to inform future tidal marsh management.” In addition, and as described in Section 2B of the Draft Program EIR and Master Response 2, the Delta Stewardship Council does not propose or contemplate directly authorizing any physical activities. Rather, through the Delta Plan, the Delta Stewardship Council seeks to influence the actions, activities, and/or projects of other agencies, the details of which would be under the jurisdiction and authority of the agencies that will propose them in the future and conduct future environmental review. Accordingly, in the absence of specific proposed physical projects, this EIR makes a good faith effort to disclose the potentially significant environmental effects of the types of projects that may be encouraged by the Delta Plan and to identify program-level mitigation measures. Impacts on each of the potentially affected resources areas are analyzed at a program level in Sections 3 through 21 of this EIR.

populations and diversity; it will reduce existing waterfowl species composition, abundance, and distribution; it will limit wintering waterfowl food resources; and it will negatively impact resident breeding and migratory waterfowl, raptors, water birds, and terrestrial wildlife species, including the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. These significant adverse and environmental effects must be analyzed, disclosed and adequately mitigated.

RLO036-5

- DP P2 - The economic and social impact of significant land use changes due to implementing the Policies of the Delta Plan, increased salinity from changes in Delta outflow, and tidal restoration conversion of existing managed wetland habitats in the Suisun Marsh will have significant detrimental impacts to the existing waterfowl hunting clubs, will reduce their financial viability, and destroy the legacy of wetland conservation activities in the Marsh. These significant adverse and unavoidable social economic effects must be analyzed, disclosed, and adequately mitigated.

RLO036-6

SRCD supports the Delta Plan process and the coequal goals of protecting, restoring and enhancing the Delta ecosystem, but this will only be successfully achieved through partnerships and respect for existing landownership and continued protection and stewardship of the existing wetland resources in the Suisun Marsh.

RLO036-7

If you have any questions regarding the content of this letter, please contact me at (707) 425-9302 or schappell@suisunrcd.org.

Sincerely,



Steven Chappell,
Executive Director, SRCD

Cc. Ms. Cindy Messer, Delta Plan Program Manager
SRCD Board of Directors
SMP Principal Agencies
Solano County

Response to comment R LO036-6

Social and economic impacts are not effects on the environment under CEQA, and are not analyzed in the EIR (CEQA Guidelines §§ 15064(e) and 15131; see also Master Response 2).

Response to comment RLO036-7

Comment noted.