

75

YEARS of PROGRESS

Rising to the Challenge of the Delta Reform Act



From Reform to Results

In 2009, California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta faced serious challenges, including declining water quality, a stressed ecosystem, fragile levees, and inadequate governance.

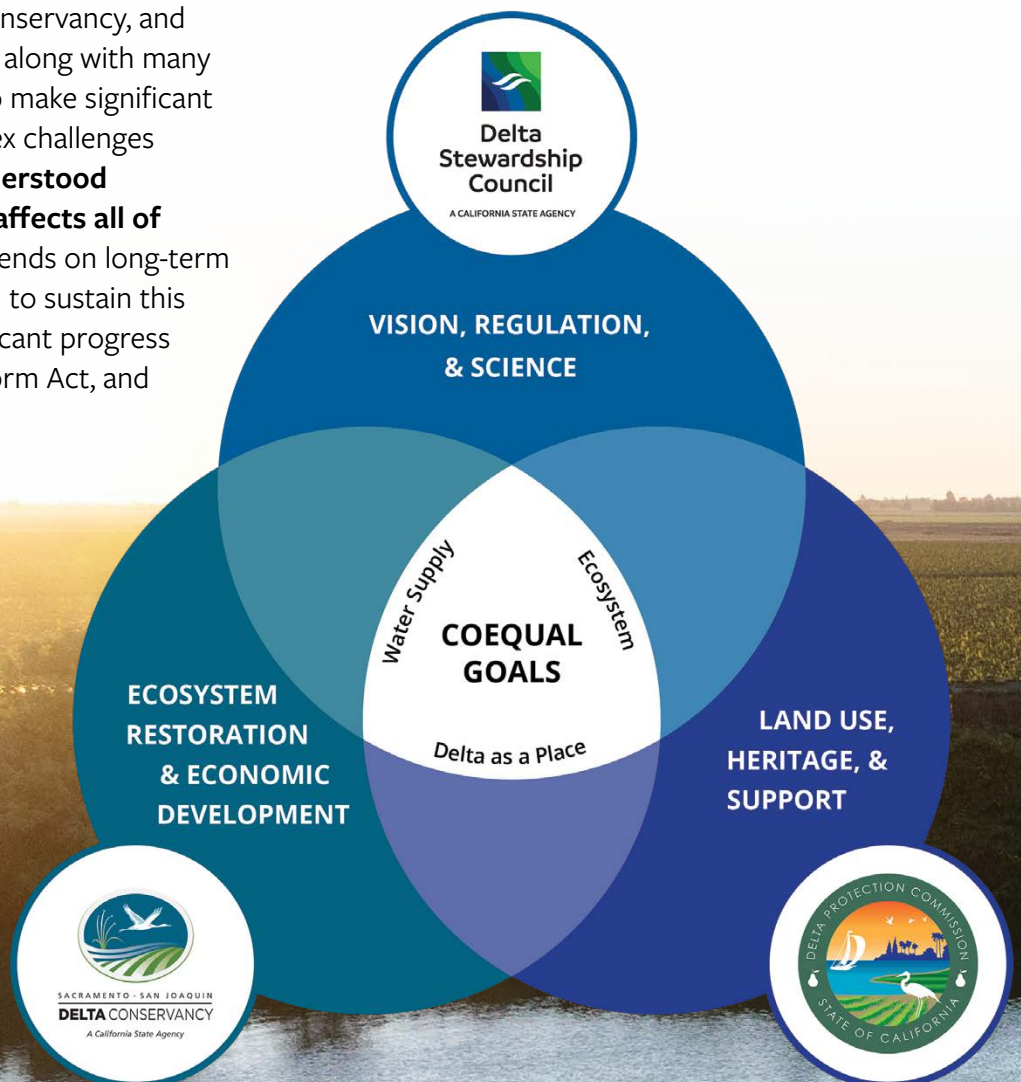
There were over 200 federal, state, and local agencies with some jurisdiction in the Delta, but no one was in charge, and there was no common vision to align the many efforts underway. In response, the California Legislature passed the landmark Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act, creating a coordinated approach to managing a region that serves as the heart of the state's water system.

Since then, the Delta Stewardship Council, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy, and the Delta Protection Commission, along with many partners, have worked together to make significant progress in addressing the complex challenges facing the region. **It is clearly understood that what happens in the Delta affects all of California.** The Delta's future depends on long-term collaboration and collective action to sustain this momentum. We have made significant progress toward the goals of the Delta Reform Act, and much work remains.

The Delta Reform Act in Action

Three Delta state agencies work in close coordination toward shared priorities while fulfilling their unique missions.

The Delta Stewardship Council advances the Act's coequal goals—water supply reliability and ecosystem resilience—in a manner that protects and enhances the Delta as a unique and evolving place where people live, work, and recreate.



The Council does this by overseeing the collective implementation of the Delta Plan at the local, state, and federal levels, focusing on a shared vision and unifying blueprint for tackling current and expected challenges using the best available science and a protective regulatory framework.

The Delta Conservancy serves as a trusted funding partner for the Delta community, identifying and funding locally supported projects that align with state priorities and needs.

The Delta Protection Commission amplifies the Delta's voice, promoting the region's historical, cultural, and natural resources and protecting its legacy communities, agricultural economy, and heritage.

Confronting the Challenges

California relies on the Delta. The Delta supplies a portion of the water used by more than 27 million people, supports nearly four million acres of some of the best farmland in the world, provides habitat to more than 750 plant and animal species, some of which are unique to the Delta, and much more.

However, the region faces serious risks, including flooding. **Without significant improvements, people, water supply, and \$22 billion in assets** could be exposed to flooding by 2085.

Amid these challenges, state agencies and regional partners look to the coequal goals to guide their actions. In doing so, California has made meaningful progress by applying structured, science-based approaches to address environmental and water management challenges.

Much has happened since the Delta Reform Act was passed in November 2009.

Did you know?

The Delta Reform Act:

- Created the Delta Stewardship Council, Delta Conservancy, Delta Independent Science Board, and the Office of the Delta Watermaster (an independent state officer who provides reports to both the State Water Resources Control Board and the Council).
- Amended the 1992 Delta Protection Act, which previously established the Delta Protection Commission.

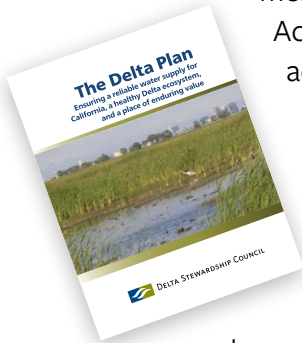
“The Delta supplies a portion of the water used by more than

27

million people.”

Embracing a Shared Vision

- As directed by the Delta Reform Act, the **Delta Stewardship Council developed and adopted the Delta Plan as a legally-enforceable management plan to achieve California's coequal goals** for the Delta, supported by 158 performance



measures to track progress. The Act requires that state and local activities identified as “covered actions” be consistent with the Delta Plan. Public agencies must submit a certification of consistency for their covered action, with detailed findings explaining

how the covered action is consistent with the Delta Plan’s regulatory policies. Any person may appeal a certification of consistency, and the Council hears all appeals. This certification process ensures that all covered actions are consistent with the Delta Plan.

- In amending the 1992 Delta Protection Act, the **Delta Reform Act required the Delta Protection Commission to prepare an Economic Sustainability Plan highlighting public safety needs, recreational goals, and strategies for economic resilience of Delta communities.** This plan informed the Delta Stewardship Council’s Delta Plan policies regarding the Delta as a place.
- In 2025, the **Delta Stewardship Council adopted a Tribal and Environmental Justice issue paper that provides recommendations to advance tribal and environmental justice** in the Delta. This work highlights opportunities for considering tribal communities and historically marginalized groups in Delta decision-making and aligns with statewide initiatives to promote tribal sovereignty and environmental justice. The Council is building on these efforts to continue strengthening inclusive governance.



Doing More with Less Water

- Since the passage of the Delta Reform Act, **urban water users have reduced consumption by 20% from 2010 to 2020, saving about 50 gallons per person per day.**
- Run by the Delta Conservancy with the California Department of Water Resources, the Delta Watermaster, The Nature Conservancy, and local water users, the **Delta Drought Response Pilot Program gave farmers financial incentives in 2022 and 2023 to try water-saving practices on their fields.** The program improved understanding of how water is used in agriculture, how it can be conserved, and how to plan for future droughts.
- Water rights in the Delta, including riparian rights and pre- and post-1914 appropriative rights, are complex. **Satellite evapotranspiration data has helped the Delta Watermaster track water use more efficiently and transparently.**

storing carbon in plants and soil. This work advances us toward the Delta Plan target of 60,000-80,000 acres of restored habitat by 2050.

- **Restoration investments in the region since 2014 have exceeded \$419 million** for projects considered covered actions under the Delta Plan. The Delta Stewardship Council tracks funding for restoring ecosystem function under a Delta Plan Performance Measure.
- **The Delta Conservancy received a \$29 million allocation from the \$10 billion Proposition 4 climate bond passed by voters in 2024.** This funding is poised to contribute to ongoing restoration, climate adaptation, and community enhancement programs. Each program is planned to receive nearly \$9 million, respectively, distributed across multiple rounds of funding.

Restoring Habitat, Supporting People

- **State, federal, and local agencies have collectively restored over 12,000 acres of habitat, with more than 15,000 additional acres in progress or currently being planned.** Restoration directly benefits local communities by improving water quality, supporting fisheries, and enhancing recreational opportunities. Projects can also help manage climate risks by providing natural buffers that reduce flooding, increasing shade to moderate water temperatures, and

“Urban water users have reduced consumption by 20% from 2010 to 2020.”

20%





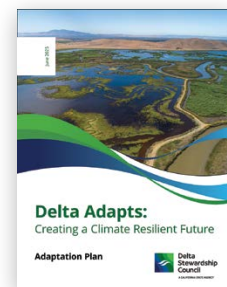
Honoring the Delta as a Special Place

- In 2019, the **United States Congress designated the Delta as California's first National Heritage Area** for its cultural, historical, recreational, agricultural, and ecological significance. As the local coordinating entity, the Delta Protection Commission leads efforts to preserve the region's resources, support the local economy, and promote sustainable tourism. The Commission does so through marketing, partnerships, a Passport Program, and initiatives such as VisitCAdelta.com.
- **State protections under the Delta Protection Act and the Delta Reform Act acknowledge the importance of Delta agriculture and promote public access** for hiking, fishing, and nature observation. This ensures that current and future generations can enjoy and benefit from the Delta.

Building Resilience

- It can't be stated enough: flood risk remains a major challenge that is expected to worsen with rising sea levels and changing climate patterns. Incorporated into state law through the Delta Plan in 2024, the **Delta Levees Investment Strategy prioritizes levee investments to protect people, property, water supply, infrastructure, and the Delta ecosystem.** It also improves transparency in how levee funding decisions are made.

- The Delta is changing quickly due to climate change, which affects every agency and organization working in the Delta, as well as all Californians. The Delta Stewardship Council's climate initiative, ***Delta Adapts: Creating a Climate Resilient Future***, is the Delta's first and only comprehensive climate adaptation plan. It includes strategies and supporting actions to address risks to the state's water supply as well as the Delta's ecosystem, communities, and agriculture.



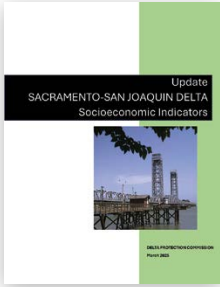
- The Delta Conservancy invests in **nature-based solutions, turning over 10,000 acres of subsided land into wildlife-friendly rice fields and managed wetlands.** These projects use natural processes to reduce flood risk, store carbon, support wildlife, and make the land more economically viable, while also slowing land sinking and cutting carbon dioxide emissions.

Investing in Science

- By 2025, the Delta Stewardship Council's Delta Science Program had **funded over \$54 million worth of research, fellowships, and long-term studies** to benefit decision-making. The return on this investment has been impressive, with findings directly informing agricultural practices, hatchery operations, harmful algal bloom mitigation, invasive species management, and more.



- Issued approximately every five years, The Delta Protection Commission's **Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Socioeconomic Indicators Report** monitors key indicators, providing data that can be used to guide policy decisions related to agriculture, broadband access, education, employment, housing, and infrastructure.



- The Delta Stewardship Council's Delta Science Program has **facilitated dozens of independent scientific peer review services for state and federal agencies**, ensuring that major plans, models, and studies affecting the Delta meet high scientific standards. For example, in 2025, the California Department of Water Resources requested this service to help inform and improve the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes Science Plan.
- Conducted by California Sea Grant and California State University, Sacramento, with support from the Delta Stewardship Council, results from the 2023 **Delta Residents Survey** show that **over three-quarters of residents are concerned about climate change impacts, and only one-third of rural residents and one-fifth of urban**



residents confirmed having access to flood insurance. These findings continue to inform reports, issue papers, scientific studies, and public engagement efforts carried out across agencies, partners, and educational institutions.

- The **Delta Independent Science Board** has **provided independent oversight of programs addressing issues from restoration to water quality, and has reviewed the scientific basis of key planning documents**, including the Delta Plan, the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan updates, and the Environmental Impact Report for the Delta Conveyance Project.



Collaborating is Key

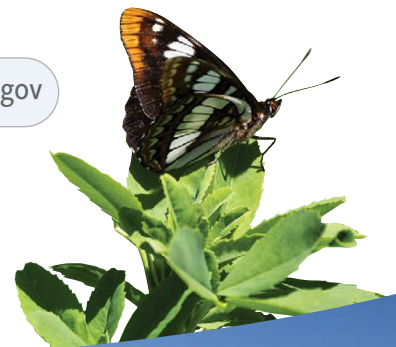
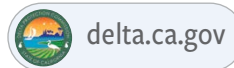
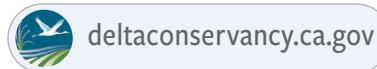
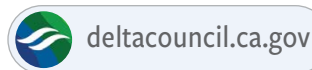
- Much of the Delta's **progress depends on working together and incorporating diverse perspectives**. Consistent with direction from the Legislature, the Delta Stewardship Council established and oversees the **Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC)**, which **convenes leaders from 18 federal and state agencies**. These meetings provide a forum to coordinate actions, increase collaboration, and align efforts around critical issues such as levee investment, science funding, and invasive species management.
- These efforts also led to the formation of the **DPIIC's Restoration Subcommittee** that works to reduce obstacles to restoration implementation, accelerate progress, and foster community engagement and learning.



Looking Ahead

Significant progress has been made since the Delta Reform Act took effect 15 years ago, but major challenges remain. **The Delta needs stable funding and strategic support** to continue addressing California's coequal goals for the region. The gains so far show that **obstacles can be overcome when agencies, communities, and partners work together**. Delta state agencies are well positioned to continue addressing the region's complex challenges and to amplify its statewide importance.

To stay informed and involved in the activities of the Delta's state agencies, visit the following websites.



Acknowledgments: Visuals throughout this report were provided by the Delta's state agencies—The Delta Stewardship Council, Delta Conservancy, and Delta Protection Commission—and the California Department of Water Resources.

