



## INFORMATION ITEM

### Proposed 2021 Delta Stewardship Council Priorities

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**Summary:** Furthering the coequal goals is an ongoing, Council-led endeavor that requires leadership on multiple complex issues. Much of our work in 2021 will be accomplished by continued collaboration with our local, state, and federal agency partners to complete Delta Plan amendments, advance Delta Plan implementation, and ensure that Delta decision-making is based on best available science. Additionally, core Council functions, including support for the Delta Independent Science Board, covered actions, and administrative functions, including information technology support, will continue to be central to the organization's success.

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#### PROPOSED 2021 PRIORITIES

As highlighted during last month's Council meeting, staff made significant progress on all major 2020 Priorities. The proposed 2021 Priorities will continue to focus on two primary objectives:

- 1) Strengthen and implement the Delta Plan; and
- 2) Build capacity for One Delta, One Science.

##### *Objective 1: Strengthen and Implement the Delta Plan*

Council staff will continue focused efforts and work on amending Delta Plan chapters (described below), as well as improving and strengthening the tracking, reporting, and implementation of the Delta Plan, consistent with the Delta Reform Act and state regulatory requirements.

***Delta Levees Investment Strategy.*** Rulemaking for the Delta Levees Investment Strategy (DLIS) was withdrawn in March 2020 to evaluate new levee condition (LiDAR elevation) data. Staff anticipates presenting the results of the evaluation to the Council in Spring 2021. Staff is also considering revisions to the proposed regulatory language and has held informal stakeholder discussions in early 2021.

***Delta Plan Ecosystem Amendment.*** Through a public process that began in October 2017, the Council will continue to work with partner agencies, stakeholders, and the public to amend Chapter 4 of the Delta Plan (Ecosystem Amendment). Staff presented a draft Ecosystem Amendment to the Council in May 2020, which serves as the project description for the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) required by the

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Staff anticipates releasing a Draft PEIR for public review in Summer 2021 and presenting a Final PEIR and Ecosystem Amendment to the Council in Winter 2021.

***Delta Adapts.*** Staff will continue to work with stakeholders, Federal, state, and local government agencies on Delta Adapts to better understand how climate change and sea-level rise will impact the Delta. Following two years of analysis, and supported by extensive stakeholder engagement, the Council released a draft Vulnerability Assessment in January 2021 for public review and comment. Throughout 2021, Council staff will work with stakeholders to initiate an Adaptation Strategy building from the Vulnerability Assessment's key findings. Councilmembers will continue to receive progress updates at meetings throughout the year.

***Implementation of the Delta Plan Five-Year Review Report.*** In 2019 the Council completed the first mandated review of the Delta Plan. Many of the five-year review recommendations will be implemented by staff. However, additional input from the Council may be needed on staff's continued engagement in reduced reliance, updates to the Delta Plan administrative performance measures, and an issue paper related to environmental justice. Staff will continue to provide updates to the Council on overall progress on these items throughout 2021.

***Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee.*** During 2021, the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC) will continue to implement high priority actions from the Delta Science and Funding Initiative; in particular, completion of the Science Needs Assessment, year two of the Delta Crosscut Budget, and development of a scope for a critical review of science funding. DPIIC will also explore what nature-based adaptation to climate change means for the Delta and how DPIIC agencies can work together on adaptation.

*Objective 2: Build Capacity for One Delta, One Science*

Council staff will continue building capacity in the Delta-wide science community by initiating the review and update of the Science Action Agenda, convening workshops and forums to advance understanding of funding and management needs, and furthering scientific understanding of the Delta through funding critical science investigations.

***Delta Science Proposal Solicitation Notice.*** Launched in Fall 2020, this solicitation is in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and will award \$9 Million to high-

quality research proposals responsive to the 2017 – 2021 Science Action Agenda. Full proposals will be submitted in February and reviewed by independent technical experts, with a final review panel coordinated by California Sea Grant. Based on these independent reviews, the Delta Lead Scientist will present funding recommendations to the Council in June 2021.

***State of Bay-Delta Science.*** The State of Bay-Delta Science is a regular publication that communicates and synthesizes the current state of the science for specific topic areas. The Delta Science Program has convened an editorial board to guide the publication of the 2022 edition, which will focus on the “Services and Disservices of Plants and Algae of the Delta.” This topic has seen substantial scientific attention in recent years and is a cross-cutting issue for Delta residents, the protection of endangered species, public health, and the recreational health and economy of the Delta. The edition will include individual chapters on native and invasive plant ecology, control of aquatic weeds, harmful algal blooms, the role of aquatic plants in carbon sequestration, and emerging technologies for monitoring plants and algae. Chapters will be drafted and submitted to the *San Francisco Estuary for Watershed Sciences* for independent peer review in Fall 2021.

***2021-2025 Science Action Agenda.*** Building on progress in 2020 to identify priority management questions of the Delta, the update to the Science Action Agenda will continue with collaborative work to identify management-relevant science actions. This process will include an assessment of progress made since the publication of the *2017 – 2021 Science Action Agenda*, as well as a public workshop to identify needed science actions. The Delta Independent Science Board will conduct a review of the draft document in Fall 2021. The final document will be published in 2022.

***Bay-Delta Science Conference.*** The 2021 Bay-Delta Science Conference will be the 11th biennial forum to exchange the latest scientific findings and recognition of Bay-Delta Art. This conference is the largest public forum in the region for the professional exchange of ideas on science, scientific direction, and applying science to management for the Bay-Delta. The 2021 Conference will be held on an all-virtual platform April 6 – 9, 2021, with a theme of “Building Resilience Through Diversity in Science.” The Conference program includes five concurrent sessions spanning topics from climate change to social sciences, including a dedicated track on long-term monitoring conducted under the Interagency Ecological Program.

***Adaptive Management Forum.*** The Delta Science Plan and the Delta Independent Science Board both call for regular Adaptive Management Forums to promote

coordination and learning and foster discussions about implementing adaptive management in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The second biennial Adaptive Management Forum was held on February 3 – 5, 2021. Hosted by the Delta Science Program, the Forum seeks to improve environmental decision-making under the constantly changing (and uncertain) conditions in the Delta.

***Delta Science Tracker.*** In the last decade, nearly \$1 billion has been spent on science.<sup>1</sup> However, there is currently no central repository that identifies all funded science projects occurring in the Delta. The Delta Science Program seeks to remedy this issue by deploying a web-based platform known as the “Delta Science Tracker.” Identified in the DPIIC-led *Science Funding and Governance Initiative* and the *2019 Delta Science Plan*, the Delta Science Tracker will increase the overall awareness of the projects being funded and improve collaboration across the scientific community. A prototype of the tool is expected in Summer 2021.

***Science Funding and Governance Initiative.*** Over the past three years, Council staff has been working closely with DPIIC members, stakeholders, and the Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB) to develop a set of recommendations and actions for increasing science funding. In 2019, these recommendations and actions were presented and endorsed by DPIIC. Those recommendations and related activities include: implementing common accounting and reporting protocols for science funding, the development and completion of a critical review of science funding, updating the Science Action Agenda, identifying Delta-wide and issue-specific management questions, and facilitating a science needs assessment workshop. These recommendations will continue to be carried out during 2021 with a specific focus on completing the science needs assessment, the second Delta Crosscut Budget, and the development of a scope for the critical review of science funding.

***Monitoring Enterprise Review.*** The Delta ISB will complete a draft of one of its most significant review efforts, evaluating the monitoring enterprise for the Delta and Suisun Marsh. The review's goal, initiated in April 2017, is to evaluate how current monitoring programs meet management needs and how they might be coordinated or modified to improve their responsiveness to management. The monitoring inventory was completed in March 2020. It included 157 unique monitoring activities, larger than any review ever conducted on long-term monitoring for the region. As part of the development of the inventory, three major reports have been produced to date: (1) a methodology report, (2) a summary of monitoring that occurs in the Delta and Suisun

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<sup>1</sup> Delta Science Funding and Governance Initiative Implementation Report, March 2020.

Marsh, and (3) a synthesis report that presents preliminary insights on opportunities for enhanced efficiencies and potential gaps in monitoring. Based on additional analysis, the Delta ISB will present a final report of its findings and recommendations in late 2021.

#### *Core Functions*

In addition to the priorities, Council staff will continue to perform the core functions that support Delta Plan and Delta Science Plan implementation. Going forward, staff will continue to ensure that the Council is kept apprised of other activities that could impact the Council's work, such as major covered actions and significant legislative and policy initiatives at state and federal levels.

**Delta Plan Performance Measure Tracking and Reporting.** Staff tracks and reports on administrative performance measures, funding, programs, and related activities in the Delta to inform the success of Delta Plan policies and recommendations. The Council provides several public-facing database systems to track Delta Plan implementation and will further incorporate best practices for environmental data management in 2021. In addition, the Delta Plan identifies output and outcome performance measures to track the impacts and effects of the Delta Plan. These indicators rely heavily on quantifiable targets and data analysis from partner agencies.

**Regulatory Role and Covered Actions.** Staff supports Delta Plan consistency certification of covered actions through early consultation, science support, comments on CEQA documents, training for agencies and stakeholders, and maintenance of the online certification system. Depending on project proponent timeframes, additional covered actions or appeals may appear before the Council in 2021.

**Adaptive Management.** Staff provides adaptive management services to support covered actions in the certification process and provides resources, advice, and technical support through the Interagency Adaptive Management Team. In addition, Council staff supports the Delta ISB in their efforts to review adaptive management programs in the Delta and provides advice to the Council on a wide range of issues.

**Independent Scientific Peer Review, Advice, and Synthesis.** The Delta Science Plan emphasizes the importance of independent scientific peer review for increasing the credibility of scientific information for decision-making and determining best available science, as required by statute. Independent scientific advice uses outside experts to provide expert guidance at key points in project planning, implementation, or evaluation. The Delta Science Program will continue to provide peer review, advice,

and synthesis services to support state and federal agencies' Delta decision-making.

**Ongoing Agency and Science Communications.** Staff will provide meeting support, the development of an annual report, publications, video blogs, factsheets, website updates, and presentations. This also includes science communications support for seminars, brown bags, symposia, and workshops that serve the entire Delta science community. Staff will also continue to support meetings of the Council, the Delta ISB, and DPIIC, including logistics, preparing reports and briefing panels, and post-meeting follow-up. Communications staff will also continue to support program staff in utilizing the agency's communications strategy and Public Participation Plan to develop and implement project-specific communication plans.

**Fiscal, Acquisitions, Information Technology, Business Operations, and Human Resources.** Staff will continue to provide the day-to-day administrative functions to support the priorities and core activities of the Council.

**Other Activities.** Staff will also engage in other activities that advance the Delta Plan, as time and resources allow. Emerging opportunities or circumstances may necessitate responses by the Council that could shift emphases. As Council staff track other activities that affect the Delta, we will alert the Council to actions that may significantly affect Delta Plan implementation so that priorities can be adjusted as necessary and desired by the Council.

#### **FISCAL INFORMATION**

Not applicable.

#### **LIST OF ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: 2021 Priorities Matrix

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