



INFORMATION ITEM

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California Webb Tract Wetland Restoration Project Presentation

Summary

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (Metropolitan) has initiated the Webb Tract Wetland Restoration Project (Webb Tract Project), designed to restore wetland and open water habitats on Webb Tract in the central Delta. The Webb Tract Project qualified for a California Environmental Quality Act (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.; CEQA) statutory exemption from the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and aligned with the state's "Cutting the Green Tape" program. Metropolitan has also determined that the Webb Tract Project is not a covered action under the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act. (Wat. Code, § 85000 et seq.; Delta Reform Act).

At today's meeting, Metropolitan staff will describe the Webb Tract Project, CDFW staff will review the streamlined CEQA environmental review process, and Delta Stewardship Council (Council) staff will summarize steps Metropolitan has taken related to aligning the Webb Tract Project with Delta Plan objectives.

What is the Webb Tract Project?

The Webb Tract Project is located on the 5,498-acre island of Webb Tract, which is owned by Metropolitan. The Webb Tract Project consists of 3,532 acres, with an initial creation of approximately 1,900 acres of perennial flooded wetlands and approximately 110 acres of open water habitat in pockets of deeper water areas, within the emergent wetland. These open water areas would be used for floating peat wetlands to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions by acting as carbon sinks. The floating wetlands would also provide bird habitat. The remaining approximately 1,522 acres would consist of berms, staging areas, sensitive habitat areas to be avoided, and uplands. Webb Tract currently contains a duck hunting

lodge and private boat launch. There are no public roads, and the island is only accessible by the Bradford Island Ferry.

The Webb Tract Project is funded in part by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy through its Nature Based Solutions: Wetland Restoration grant program. The Webb Tract grant was executed in March 2024 with a funding end date of March 2029.

What does the Webb Tract Project Seek to Accomplish, and how?

The restored wetlands would benefit threatened or endangered Delta wildlife, such as migratory waterfowl, giant garter snake, western pond turtle, tricolored blackbird, and sandhill crane, through the expansion of foraging, shelter, and nesting habitat for these and other species. In addition, the Webb Tract Project seeks to stop and reverse subsidence through rice farming and wetland restoration. By stopping the oxidation of peat soil through rice farming and wetland restoration, greenhouse gas emissions will also be reduced. Carbon flux data is currently being collected, and once the analysis is complete, the carbon credits will be independently verified and registered with the voluntary carbon crediting program ACR, formerly known as the American Carbon Registry. The lessons learned from Webb Tract can then inform other restoration projects and ongoing agricultural uses on subsided islands in the Delta.

The Webb Tract Project had a collaborative planning process that engaged community members, which has resulted in wide-ranging support, as evidenced by letters of support submitted with the exemption application. In addition, Metropolitan engaged in tribal ecocultural outreach with a working group during the design process, preserving particular areas and providing tribal access once the Webb Tract Project is complete.

What is the CEQA Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects?

The Webb Tract Project qualifies for CEQA's Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects, (Pub. Resources Code, § 21080.56; SERP) which was enacted in 2021 and is administered by CDFW. SERP applies to projects that conserve, restore, protect, or enhance and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife and habitat

upon which they depend, or that restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife. If determined to be statutorily exempt from CEQA, a project does not require the preparation of a Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration, or Environmental Impact Report.

The SERP process begins with consultation between an applicant and CDFW regarding the suitability of the proposed project for the exemption. For a project to qualify, the lead agency must first make an independent determination that SERP applies. It must then seek concurrence from the Director of Fish and Wildlife that the project meets the specific qualifying criteria set forth in Public Resources Code section 21080.56. The Director's concurrence must be based on substantial evidence and best available science.

The Council has received similar presentations from lead agencies and CDFW for the following SERP projects:

- Knightsen Wetland Restoration and Flood Protection Project, August 2023
- Staten Island Wetland Restoration and Carbon Farming for Habitat, Climate and Communities Project, February 2024

How did the SERP Process Work for the Webb Tract Project?

After completing several technical studies, Metropolitan contacted CDFW for a SERP consultation and submitted a SERP concurrence request for the Webb Tract Project on May 12, 2025. Following review by CDFW staff and consultation with the Council, Delta Protection Commission, and Delta Counties Coalition, Metropolitan received a letter of concurrence from Director of Fish and Wildlife Charlton H. Bonham on July 22, 2025. (A copy of the letter of concurrence is available at <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Cutting-Green-Tape/SERP/Concurrences/webb-tract-wetland-restoration-project1>).

How does the Webb Tract Project Align with the Delta Plan?

As it relates to the Delta Plan and in support of its SERP concurrence request to CDFW, Metropolitan:

- completed the “Good Neighbor Checklist” for restoration projects identified in Delta Plan Recommendation **ER RB**,
- prepared a brief analysis of the Webb Tract Project’s consistency with all Delta Plan regulatory policies and made a finding that the Webb Tract Project is not a covered action,
- voluntarily completed Delta Plan Appendix 3A and associated findings, Disclosing Contributions to Restoring Ecosystem Function and Providing Social Benefits (**ER PA**), and Delta Plan Appendix 4A and associated findings, Protecting, Restoring, and Enhancing Habitats at Appropriate Elevations (**ER P2**),
- prepared a Long-Term Monitoring and Management Plan that aligns with Delta Plan Adaptive Management Plan requirements (**G P1(b)(4)**); and
- obtained letters from the Delta Counties Coalition and 16 other organizations supporting the Webb Tract Project and Metropolitan’s use of the SERP.

Is the Webb Tract Project a Covered Action?

Pursuant to the Delta Reform Act, a covered action is: 1) a plan, program, or project as defined pursuant to CEQA in Public Resources Code section 21065; 2) that will occur in whole, or in part, in the boundaries of the Delta or Suisun Marsh; 3) will be carried out, approved, or funded by a state or local public agency; 4) will have a significant impact on the achievement of one or both of the coequal goals or the implementation of a flood control program; and 5) is covered by a Delta Plan regulatory policy. (Wat. Code, § 85057.5.)

Typically, a habitat restoration project like the Webb Tract Project would meet the definition of a covered action, requiring Metropolitan to submit a certification of consistency to the Council. (Wat. Code, § 85225.) However, a project that is exempt from CEQA is not a covered action unless there are “unusual circumstances indicating a reasonable possibility that the project will have a significant impact” on the achievement of one or both of the coequal goals for the Delta or the implementation of a government-sponsored flood control program. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 23, § 5001, subd. (ss)(4).) As discussed above, Metropolitan, in concurrence with CDFW and the Director of Fish and Wildlife, has determined that the project qualifies for SERP.

Council staff have reviewed the project documentation and consulted with Metropolitan and CDFW, including steps taken by Metropolitan to demonstrate how the Webb Tract Project aligns with the Delta Plan. Pursuant to the Council's regulations, Metropolitan has determined that the Webb Tract Project is not a covered action and does not intend to submit a certification to the Council. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 23, § 5001, subd. (o)(3).) No Council action is contemplated at this time.

What's Next?

Next steps for the Webb Tract Project include completing final design and obtaining regulatory permits this fall, utilizing other streamlined permitting processes. Construction is anticipated to start in late spring 2026.

For the Council's awareness, additional habitat restoration projects in the Delta intend to use SERP in a similar manner. Council staff will carefully consider the circumstances of each project and continue to actively participate in CDFW's early consultation process for SERP projects in the Delta and Suisun Marsh.

Fiscal Information

Not applicable.

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