# INFORMATION ITEM

Tribal and Environmental Justice Annual Update

## Summary

The Council will receive a presentation from staff on ongoing progress on recommendations outlined in the Council's 2025 Tribal and Environmental Justice Issue Paper. This presentation responds to a recommendation in that paper for staff to report to the Council annually on progress. Today, staff will identify actions where significant progress has been made corresponding to each of the paper's four goals.

## Background

The 2019 Five-Year Review of the Delta Plan identified environmental justice as a key issue for Council focus. The review recommended Council staff prepare an issue paper to inform potential future policy actions to address EJ and better serve disadvantaged communities. The main objectives described in the Tribal and Environmental Justice (TEJ) Issue Paper (issue paper) are to:

- Build a network of community leaders and organizations to inform and support the Council's TEJ work
- Identify TEJ issues within and around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta
- Identify policy options to address those issues

The issue paper presents Council staff's understanding of past and current TEJ issues in the Delta and recommends actions to better address those issues within the scope of the Council's mission, authority, and influence. The issue paper focuses on TEJ within and around the present-day legal boundaries of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun Marsh (Wat. Code, § 85058; Delta) and the mission, duties, and responsibilities set forth in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009. (Wat. Code, § 85000 et seq.) The issue paper expresses Council staff's evolving understanding of TEJ issues and provides foundational context from which the Council can build and grow its TEJ work into the future. The

paper includes both general recommendations, relevant to all who work in the Delta, as well as ones specific to the Council. The latter, which is the focus of this progress report, are organized according to four main goals, each with supporting strategies and actions to achieve those strategies.

## Progress Summary

Staff have made notable progress on actions that were already underway when the Council adopted the issue paper in April 2025. Examples shared below are organized according to the issue paper's goals and strategies.

### Goal 1: Integrate environmental justice into the Delta Stewardship Council, consistent with the Delta Reform Act

Substantial progress has been made on actions that address integrating environmental justice into Council activities.

#### *Strategy 1a: Commit to advancing environmental justice over the short and long term.*

##### *Council Engagement and Outreach Specialist*

This new position will serve as the Council's tribal liaison, lead the agency's external community engagement, and build on the staff's existing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) initiatives. As the tribal liaison, they will continue to build on existing relationships and lead the tribal affairs team, which include members of each of the Council's programmatic divisions. The specialist will ensure that the Councils' equity and accessibility goals are embedded in all operations.

##### *Environmental Justice Issues in Areas that Receive Delta Water*

The Council's California Sea Grant Social Science Extension Specialist Dr. Tara Pozzi has begun exploring water justice issues in areas that receive Delta water. This work will use water allocation network data gathered by Dr. Kristin Dobbin, Assistant Professor of Cooperative Extension at University of California, Berkeley, to identify vulnerable communities south of the Delta that depend on State Water Project and Central Valley Project water exports.

*Social Vulnerability Index 2.0*

In the 2021 Delta Adapts Vulnerability Assessment, staff developed a Social Vulnerability Index (SoVI) combining socioeconomic indicators (e.g., disability status, health conditions, food access) that may impact a community's ability to adapt to climate change. This tool identifies Delta communities that are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change. In 2026, Council staff worked with a UC Davis graduate student to update the SoVI data sources and update vulnerability scores for each census block group in the Delta (see Attachment 1).

## *Strategy 1b: Create a more inclusive workplace through creative and equitable recruitment and retention, building staff capacity and literacy on equity and tribal and environmental justice, and using inclusive language.*

*Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan and TEJ Training*

In 2025, the Council formally established its Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee, a group that meets twice monthly to review recruitment and hiring practices, training, and agency policies and to recommend equitable best practices. The Committee is working on a JEDI Action Plan organized around workforce practices, organizational culture, and public engagement. Staff conducted two TEJ training sessions in 2025, focusing on TEJ history in the Delta and the structure and priorities of issue paper goals and strategies.

*Shoreline Leadership Academy*

Staff partnered with the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), Contra Costa County (CCC), CCC Resource Conservation District, the Watershed Alliance, and the Exploratorium for the inaugural CCC Shoreline Leadership Academy in 2025. The academy trains community members on topics related to the shoreline over a six-month period, offering a curriculum organized around the eight priorities of BCDC's regional shoreline adaptation plan[1]. Council staff supported curriculum development, providing subject matter

[1] Community health and well-being; ecosystem health and resilience; development, housing and land use; critical infrastructure and services; public access and recreation; transportation and transit; shoreline contamination; collaborative governance, flood management, and funding

expertise and facilitating meetings. This cohort is now advising CCC on the development of its Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan for BCDC.

## Goal 2: Expand opportunities for tribes to practice their subsistence and cultures, and recognize tribal rights in the Council's work

This goal focuses on activities the Council undertakes to working with or consulting with Tribes.

### *Strategy 2a: Build and strengthen respectful relationships between tribes and the Council that practice reciprocity and recognize, honor, and promote tribal interests in the Delta.*

*Interweaving Knowledge Systems Roundtable*

In summer 2026, Delta Science Program staff led the Council's first Interweaving Knowledge Systems Roundtable Series, co-created with the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians and the California Indian Environmental Alliance. This series brought together Tribal representatives, Traditional Knowledge Holders, Tribal-serving non-profits, and state agencies to build capacity and educate state employees about how to respectfully interweave traditional knowledge into their work. Over 340 unique attendees participated over 3 days.

*2026 Delta Restoration Forum*

In June 2026, the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee Restoration Subcommittee meeting hosted a presentation from Austin Stevenot, Director of Tribal Engagement at River partners to discuss working with Tribes and interweaving traditional knowledge in ecosystem restoration projects

*2026 Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee*

In September 2026, the DPIIC hosted an agenda item on interweaving traditional knowledge that featured a presentation from Dr. Don Hankins of CSU Chico and DWR on a pilot culturally informed burn of wetlands on Twitchell Island in the Delta.

*2026 Delta Science Plan*

The Council also adopted the 2026 Delta Science Plan, shaped through tribal consultation, which identified excluding traditional knowledge from decision-making as a grand challenge for Delta science.

### *Strategy 2b: Conduct proactive and early tribal consultations on Council initiatives and activities and facilitate and support meaningful tribal consultation.*

*Tribal Consultation Policy Update*

The Council first developed a Tribal Consultation Policy in 2015. In 2025, the issue paper called for a Tribal Consultation Policy update, and the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) released an updated statewide consultation policy. Staff are currently updating the Council's consultation policy in alignment with CNRA's policy. Following tribal consultation, staff will present the updated policy to the Council for consideration and adoption.

## Goal 3: Promote visibility and understanding of tribal and environmental justice in the Delta through research, policy development, and communications.

This goal addresses community partnerships and community-engaged research.

### *Strategy 3a: Establish partnerships that provide ongoing and stable support for tribal- and community-engaged research that centers tribal and community identities, capacities, needs, and issues.*

*Science for Communities*

The Science for Communities initiative is concluding a third round of science-community partnerships since 2022. This initiative pairs Delta communities and local public agencies with academic and agency subject matter experts to address a community research question and co-produce a product. This year, three new partnerships researched community water quality concerns throughout the Delta watershed. Participants hosted a well-attended panel at the 2026 Bay-Delta Science Conference, and will be joining a Council meeting in early 2027 to share progress and next steps.

### Goal 4: Explore ways to address funding inequity in communities that historically have seen the least investment

This goal addresses funding inequities in the Delta.

#### *Strategy 4a: Review, adapt, and enhance the Council's funding to advance equity.*

*Traditional Knowledge Practitioners*

The Delta Science Program has built out a database of subject matter experts that now includes 58 environmental justice experts. Traditional knowledge holders are invited as subject matter experts to review proposals and materials involving traditional knowledge.

*Delta Research Awards*

The 2025 Delta Research Awards integrated tribal and community perspectives by cultivating new relationships between communities, traditional knowledge holders, and researchers. In addition, the solicitation incentivized co-production with higher scores, extended timelines to allow more tribal and public engagement, and added new protections for tribal data confidentiality. Several of the research awards prioritize and compensate partnerships that interweave traditional and local knowledge with science.

## 2027 Priorities

- Goal 1:
    - Continue to explore Delta Plan amendment process, to include TEJ-related updates.
    - Complete water justice research and consider how to incorporate findings into Delta Plan update exploration.
    - Apply SoVI 2.0 to Council programmatic work including but not limited to: informing community outreach, encouraging use for Delta research proposals, and eventually incorporating into the Delta Levees Investment Strategy calculations. Staff will also share with partners and encourage use of the SoVI to direct resources where they are most needed to build adaptive capacity in vulnerable communities.

    - Implement Year 1 of the JEDI Action Plan and continue staff trainings and inclusive hiring practices.
- Goal 2:
    - Complete the Tribal Consultation Policy update with tribal engagement and consultation.
- Goal 3:
    - Initiate Science for Communities 4.0.
- Goal 4:
    - Continue to improve the Delta Research Awards process to incorporate community input and community-engaged research projects.

## Next Steps

Staff will continue to progress on issue paper recommendations and will return to the Council at least annually to provide updates, solicit input, and answer questions.

## Fiscal Information

Not applicable.

## List of Attachments

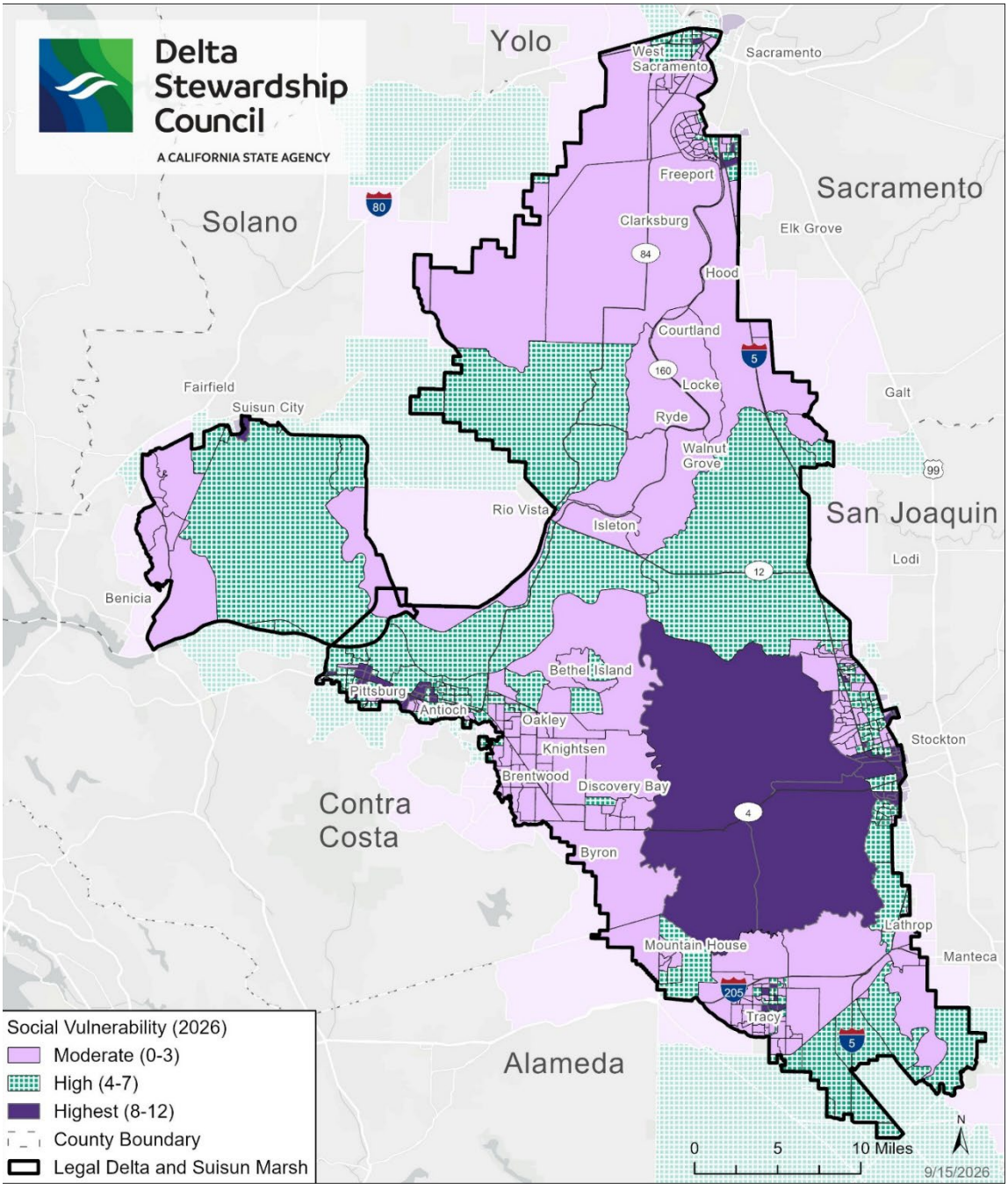



*Figure 1: Social Vulnerability Index 2026 Update Results. The most vulnerable communities are in Stockton, Antioch, Pittsburg, West Sacramento, Sacramento, and Tracy.*

## Contact

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*A recording of the presentation will be available on the Delta Council's YouTube page at [https://www.youtube.com/@DeltaCouncil](https://www.youtube.com/@DeltaCouncil).*