# 2025 Delta Restoration Forum: Showcased Projects & Programs

Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee
DELTA STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN DELTA CONSERVANCY
A California State Agency

Delta Stewardship Council
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The following are the projects and programs represented at the third Delta Restoration Forum, held on May 1, 2025, and hosted by the Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee's Restoration Subcommittee. Additional materials from the Forum are available to be shared upon request by emailing dpiicrestorationsubcommittee@deltacouncil.ca.gov. Please contact the project/program proponents for additional project-specific information.

## BirdReturns: A Habitat Incentive Program

Jodi Pinder (jodi.pinder@audubon.org), California Audubon

Bekka Rosenkrantz (bekka.rosenkrantz@tnc.org), The Nature Conservancy

Millions of birds depend on California's Central Valley as a critical stopover site during long migrations. But shorebirds and other migrating waterbirds are faced with a significant habitat deficit due to the loss of nearly 95% of historic wetlands, and shorebirds are declining precipitously as a result. BirdReturns is a flexible, cost-effective wildlife habitat marketplace designed to increase shallow flooding on the landscape for migratory birds where and when they need it most. This innovative incentive program ensures migratory birds have places to stop in California's Central Valley where they can rest and refuel on their long journeys. Simultaneously, BirdReturns delivers multiple benefits for farmers, wetland managers, and communities across the Valley. The goal of BirdReturns is to help restore the migratory bird populations of the Pacific Flyway, which stretches from the Arctic to the southern tip of South America. For more program details, please visit birdreturns.org.

## Carbon Sequestration in DWR's Multibenefit Restoration Projects

Tyler Anthony (tyler.anthony@water.ca.gov) and Michelle Jesperson (michelle.jesperson@water.ca.gov), California Department of Water Resources, Division of Multibenefit Initiatives

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) is a leading partner in many wetland restoration projects across the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. To date, DWR has completed or has projects underway to restore 24,000+ acres of tidal and freshwater wetlands. Currently, DWR is generating carbon credits for the voluntary carbon market from three individual projects (over 1,700 acres) on Sherman and Twitchell Islands, with ongoing verification of an additional 1,000+ acres to its American Carbon Registry program of activities. We will provide an overview of the completed, current, and future efforts to develop a protocol and generate carbon credits for wetland restoration projects.

## Delta Stewardship Council Initiatives

dpiicrestorationsubcommittee@deltacouncil.ca.gov

The Delta Stewardship Council is an independent California State agency created to advance the State's coequal goals for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta: a more reliable statewide water supply and a healthy and protected ecosystem, both achieved in a manner that protects and enhances the unique characteristics of the Delta as an evolving place. The Council carries out its mission by implementing the Delta Plan, an enforceable long-term sustainable management plan to ensure coordinated action in the Delta at the federal, State, and local levels. Our agency has two main divisions: the Planning & Performance Division, which leads Delta Plan implementation, updates, and regulatory review of projects for consistency with the Delta Plan, as well as other planning efforts; and the Delta Science Program, which funds, synthesizes, and communicates scientific research relevant to the Delta. Council staff provided handouts on relevant Council initiatives.

## Design Update for the Webb Tract Wetland Restoration Project

Malinda Stalvey (mstalvey@mwdh2o.com), Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

Vance Howard (vhoward@geiconsultants.com), GEI Consultants, Inc.

Steven Deverel (sdeverel@hydrofocus.com), HydroFocus

Funded by a grant from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California plans to implement a wetland restoration project on Webb Tract, in Contra Costa County. The project will restore approximately 2,500 acres of wetland and associated habitat on the deeply subsided island, with design, permitting, and construction occurring over the next three years. Key goals of this multi-benefit project include halting peat oxidation and reversing subsidence, promoting carbon sequestration, generating sustainable revenue to support land management, and restoring high-quality habitat for wildlife.

## Healthy Rivers and Landscapes and Lookout Slough Tidal Habitat Restoration and Flood Control Project

Charlotte Biggs (charlotte.biggs@water.ca.gov), California Department of Water Resources

More information about the Healthy Rivers & Landscapes program can be found at the following links:

- resources.ca.gov/Initiatives/Voluntary-Agreements-Page
- https://resources.ca.gov/Initiatives/Voluntary-Agreements-Page

More information about the Lookout Slough project can be found at the following links.

- gov.ca.gov/2024/09/18/deltas-largest-ever-tidal-wetland-restoration-project-completed-reducing-flood-risk-and-supporting-wildlife/
- gov.ca.gov/2024/09/18/deltas-largest-ever-tidal-wetland-restoration-project-completed-reducing-flood-risk-and-supporting-wildlife/
- resources.ca.gov/CNRALegacyFiles/docs/ecorestore/projects/Lookout-Slough-Tidal-Habitat-Restoration-Flood-Improvement.pdf

## Montezuma Wetlands: Beneficial Reuse for Tidal Marsh Restoration

Cassie Pinnell (cpinnell@vollmarconsulting.com) and Anton Bokisch (abokisch@vollmarconsulting.com), Vollmar Natural Lands Consulting

The Montezuma Wetlands project has successfully begun to address two important societal challenges – historic loss of wetlands and finding a responsible and beneficial use for millions of cubic yards of sediments dredged annually from San Francisco Bay Area ports, harbors, and channels.

## Mormon Slough Restoration Project

Artie Valencia (artie@restorethedelta.org), Restore the Delta

The Mormon Slough Restoration project is led by Restore the Delta with a coalition of tribal governments, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, local government, and community to shape the project in the lens of environmental justice and tribal communities. The project will identify two sites for restoration and will produce designs for these sites and a general design for the entire slough that is informed by a visioning session with community and stakeholders.

## Multibenefit Components of Elk Slough Project including, Flood Protection, Habitat Restoration, and Enhanced Fish Passage, while recognizing the rich agricultural heritage that contributes to "Delta as a Place"

Tom Slater (tslaterdee@yahoo.com), Reclamation District 999

Elk Slough has an enormous amount of natural habitat that needs a substantial amount of repair for flood control. We have plans to enhance the habitat with modern ways that will provide adequate flood protection. We also will open the waterway to the Sacramento River allowing fish passage to occur in the same manner it did years ago. We will also build gates to allow closure during high water levels that will help address necessary flood protection with projected climate change issues.

## Multi-Benefit Ecosystem Restoration Projects in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta: Paradise Cut, Van Buskirk, Peters Pocket, and Riparian Corridor

Sarah Puckett (spuckett@americanrivers.org), American Rivers

American Rivers is working with partners to plan and implement four multi-benefit, nature-based ecosystem restoration projects in and around the Delta. We are working to reduce the risk of flooding, reconnect rivers with their floodplains, and restore critical habitat for fish and wildlife species along the San Joaquin River at the former Van Buskirk golf course in Stockton, and by expanding the Paradise Cut flood bypass in Lathrop; we are planning a wetland restoration project on over 800 acres at Peters Pocket along Cache Slough in Solano County; and we are working with a local landowner to plant riparian vegetation along San Joaquin River levees in Lathrop.

## Projecting the Benefits of Tidal Wetland Restoration in the Delta and Suisun

Kristen Dybala (kdybala@pointblue.org), Point Blue Conservation Science

We need your input on tidal wetland restoration scenarios in the Delta and Suisun Marsh, especially: (1) knowledge of any proposed or planned projects not yet available in EcoAtlas, (2) perspectives on what makes an area more or less likely to be restored (e.g., constraints or priorities in terms of region, landowner, current land use/land cover, or other factors), and (3) alternate strategies under consideration for meeting the Delta Plan restoration target. We seek to represent the extent and possible spatial distribution of tidal wetlands once the restoration target is reached, to evaluate the potential benefits and trade-offs of meeting the target. This project builds on our open source “Delta Multiple Benefits” framework, which is designed to estimate the net impacts of alternative landscape changes on multiple metrics, including agricultural livelihoods, water quality, climate change resilience, and suitable habitat for multiple species. It is also designed to readily incorporate new species, models, data, metrics, and scenarios. For more information, please see our website (pointblue.github.io/DeltaMultipleBenefits) and contact us to offer your input on tidal wetland restoration scenarios or to collaborate on future development and applications of this framework.

## RCDs Partnering with DWR to Steward State-Owned Lands in the Delta

Amy Williams (williams@yolorcd.org), Yolo County Resource Conservation District

Elizabeth Davis (elizabeth.davis@solanorcd.org), Solano County Resource Conservation District

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) has partnered with local Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) to steward their state-owned lands throughout the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. This partnership has allowed DWR to lean on the relationships and specialized restoration skills of RCDs to maintain and enhance thousands of acres of habitat restoration sites while supporting capacity building of all agencies. With more state-owned lands in need of stewardship now and in the not distant future, fostering relationships with local agencies is one way to achieve healthier ecosystems within the Delta.

## Restoring Tidal Marsh and Intact Upland Transition: Goat Island

Stuart Siegel (siegel@sfsu.edu), San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Goat Island Tidal Marsh Restoration and Public Access Improvement Project will 1) restore 75 acres of brackish tidal marsh, 2) reconnect more than a half mile of a broad, intact upland transition zone that can accommodate very long-term sea level rise, 3) reconnect a seasonal watershed to the restored tidal marsh, and 4) improve the public access experience through new trails and boardwalks. Situated at the Solano Land Trust's Rush Ranch Open Space Preserve two miles south of Highway 12, this National Estuarine Research Reserve site hosts one of the estuary's few remaining intact tidal marsh-uplands natural systems. Rush Ranch is a centerpiece of public access, environmental education, and research in the 100,000-acre Suisun Marsh, utilized by school groups throughout Solano County, visited by birders, photographers, view seekers, nature enthusiasts, equestrians, and the mobility impaired, and studied across many topics by researchers across universities, agencies, and NGOs.

## River Partners Tribal Engagement

Austin Stevenot (astevenot@riverpartners.org) and Julie Rentner (jrentner@riverpartners.org), River Partners

As the First Director of Engagement for River Partners, Austin works to bring tribal voices to the table with their planning and implementation of their projects with the long-term goal of land back.

## Statewide Restoration General Order (SRGO)/401 Water Quality Certifications

Nicholas Savino (nicholas.savino@waterboards.ca.gov), Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

The Statewide Restoration General Order (SRGO) is a streamlined permitting pathway for restoration projects that need a 401 Water Quality Certification or Waste Discharge Requirement. Applicants can apply for coverage under the SRGO if the project meets the eligibility requirements outlined in the General Order. Additionally, a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) was adopted with the SRGO, which applicants may choose to use for CEQA compliance for their projects.

## Stream Flow Enhancement Program

Aaron Haiman (aaron.haiman@wildlife.ca.gov), Wildlife Conservation Board

The Stream Flow Enhancement Program (SFEP) funds projects that enhance streams and rivers across the state of California. The SFEP defines enhanced stream flow to mean: a change in the amount, timing, and/or quality of water flowing down a stream, or a portion of a stream, to benefit fish and wildlife. Funded projects have a primary focus of enhancing flow in streams or rivers that support anadromous fish; support special status, threatened, endangered, or at-risk species; or provide resilience to climate change.

## The Grizzly Slough Floodplain Restoration Project

Dave Lounsbury (dlounsbury@wbecorp.com), Reclamation District 348 New Hope Tract

Angela Calderaro (angela.calderaro@water.ca.gov), California Department of Water Resources, Division of Multi Benefits, Delta Ecosystem Enhancement

The Grizzly Slough Floodplain Project is a habitat restoration project that will create instream, fishery supportive habitat through channel morphology and native riparian plant cover. Upon completion, the Project will restore tidal and river flows to the site at frequency and durations suitable to support seasonal floodplain habitat for native fish rearing and ensure wildlife friendly agriculture.

## Toward a Resilient Delta: Rice and Wetlands on Staten Island

Sydney Chamberlin (s.j.chamberlin@tnc.org), The Nature Conservancy

Land subsidence and stressors from climate change pose significant threats to the Delta. However, it is possible to stop and/or reverse land subsidence and reduce carbon pollution from the Delta -- while also enhancing habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds -- by strategically re-wetting Delta peat soils. Cultivating rice and wetlands are two complementary practices that rewet peat soils and provide subsidence, climate, and habitat benefits. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is implementing these practices on Staten Island while exploring potential incentives for other landowners who are interested in pursuing these activities.

## Upcoming Funding Opportunity for Subsidence, Ecosystem, and Community Access Projects in the Delta and Suisun Marsh

Lauren Damon (lauren.damon@deltaconservancy.ca.gov), Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy


The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy is committed to working in partnership with local communities to protect, enhance, and restore the Delta's environment, economy, agriculture, and working landscapes. In support of this mission, the Delta Conservancy will soon be accepting proposals for multi-benefit projects in the Delta and Suisun Marsh, supported by $29 million in funding from Proposition 4. Application periods will occur for three project types: 1) Nature-Based Solutions for subsidence reductions, 2) Ecosystem Restoration and Climate Adaptation, and 3) Community Enhancement and Public Access. We encourage collaboration through public and private partnerships and offer technical assistance to applicants. To learn more about previously funded projects and receive updates on the upcoming solicitation, please visit the Delta Conservancy's Grant Program web page: deltaconservancy.ca.gov/grant-program.

## Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program

Chris Janousek (christopher.janousek@oregonstate.edu), Oregon State University

Aviva Rossi (avivar@sfei.org) and Lisa Beers (lisab@sfei.org), San Francisco Estuary Institute

The Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program (WRMP) is investigating long-term change in tidal wetlands in San Francisco Bay and Suisun Bay to inform estuarine climate change adaptation, restoration, and conservation. By coordinating with a diverse group of regional partners, the WRMP is establishing a detailed science framework, developing a monitoring site network, and eventually providing a data sharing platform for public access to program data. Monitoring parameters include fish communities, tidal wetland habitat extent, wetland elevation and elevation change, marsh vegetation, groundwater, and sediment accretion. More information about the WRMP can be found at: wrmp.org.