

# The Science of Non-native Species in a Dynamic Delta

Delta Independent Science Board

Public Draft Report (July 14, 2020)

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## Introduction and Rationale

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The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009 stipulates that the Delta Independent Science Board “shall provide oversight of the scientific research, monitoring, and assessment programs that support adaptive management of the Delta through periodic reviews.”<sup>1</sup> Management of the Delta to realize the coequal goals stated in the Delta Reform Act is directed by the Delta Plan. The Act also stipulates that the Delta Plan should restore a healthy ecosystem by promoting “self-sustaining, diverse populations of native and valued species by reducing the risk of take and harm from invasive species.”<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this review is to assess the state, quality, and potential usefulness of **scientific information** that helps agencies understand and manage the threats and consequences of non-native species (plants and animals) into Delta lands and waters. The overall goal of this review is to offer recommendations to improve the science needed to manage for non-native and non-native invasive species in the Delta. This review process included an extensive literature review and two panels each comprised of five experts who explored the status of science relative to non-native species in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Additionally, Delta Independent Science Board members participated in several workshops, presentations, and discussions with managers. We chose this topic because the Bay-Delta ecosystem is one of the most invaded ecosystems on the globe and reducing the impact of non-native species and protecting native species is one of the five core strategies discussed in the Delta Plan’s Chapter 4 amendment (“Protect, Restore and Enhance the Delta Ecosystem”).

Overall, there has been a tremendous amount of research done on non-native species in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (hereafter, “Delta”). It is beyond

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<sup>1</sup> California Water Code Section 85280.

<sup>2</sup> California Water Code Section 85302(e)(3).

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the scope of this review to summarize all of that information or to list all of the project- or species- or technology-specific science or monitoring that has or should be done. Rather, we focus our findings and recommendations on a higher-level approach to provide managers with a scientific-based prioritization framework to make decisions. We use examples for the Delta to support our findings. The consequences of biological invasions, however, are a global concern (e.g. Pysek et al. 2020) and the scientific needs to better prevent, control, and ultimately manage invasive species are similar across ecosystems.

We begin the review by providing a broad context for considering non-native species in a dynamic Delta. We then define terms and discuss the invasive process. We provide an overview of the individual species approach to invasive-species management and prevention and discuss how non-natives fit into the broader picture of changes in species composition in a dynamic and rapidly changing ecosystem. We illustrate how science can inform management decisions at different stages in the invasive process. We follow by considering how ecological restoration may affect and be affected by non-native species, and how the continual threats from non-native species affect and are affected by the practice of adaptive management. We highlight areas in which scientific knowledge or its application in the Delta relative to the influx of non-native species could be expanded and better coordinated. Throughout, we offer recommendations to strengthen the management of dealing with non-native species in the Delta.

## **The Context of Non-Native Species in a Dynamic Delta**

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To understand, anticipate, and manage non-native invasive species in the Delta, one must consider them in the context of a dynamic and ever-changing environment. Two realities cannot be ignored.

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**First**, today's Delta is not a pristine ecosystem. Far from it—it is one of the most heavily modified estuaries on Earth. Well before the arrival of European settlers, Native Americans altered the mosaic of species in the Delta by tending local plant species that bore acorns, fruits, and construction materials and by moving them into new locations (Zedler and Stevens 2018). Beginning with European colonization of the Americas, people mixed species between the eastern and western hemispheres (Mann 2011), a practice that has continued through to the economic globalization of today. The massive alterations that began in the mid-nineteenth century and the subsequent engineering of the Delta to support agriculture and manage water have accelerated invasions by non-native species.<sup>3</sup> Many non-native species have become “naturalized” members of Delta ecosystems.

**Second**, the major forces now driving environmental change in the Delta—climate change, sea-level rise, and human uses of land and water resources—are subject to a complex interplay of global, regional, and local influences, many of which are beyond direct management. As these forces mount, environmental changes are becoming more rapid, extreme events such as droughts or deluges are becoming more frequent and more extreme, and tipping points of ecosystem change are more likely to be passed—the pelagic organism decline (POD) that occurred in the Delta in 2002 is an example (MacNally et al. 2010). The environmental turmoil created by these forces of change will provide new opportunities for non-native invaders and challenge the capacity of native species to adapt, of scientists to understand and predict ecosystem dynamics, and of managers to shepherd their land and water resources responsibly.

Everything in this report should be considered in the context of these two overarching realities. Our overall recommendation is to **encourage a broader,**

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<sup>3</sup> Whipple et al. (2012) and SFEI-ASC (2014) review the history and current status of Delta landscapes and ecosystems.

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more forward-looking, integrated approach to non-native species science in the Delta to inform management goals.

## The Invasion Process

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### Findings

- The definition of an **invasive species** is a non-native species that does or is likely to cause environmental or economic harm or harm to human health. It is based on a human value judgement.
- All invasive species are non-native, but not all non-native species are invasive.
- In general, managers have favored native over non-native species to conserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, and historical Native American cultural functions.
- Non-native species are one of the five fundamental drivers of ecosystem change.
- Non-native species can disrupt food-webs, nutrient and contaminant cycling, habitat structure, and ecosystem services.
- Management can help buffer an ecosystem from future invasions by concentrating on the two processes that humans can control: reducing or eliminating invasion pathways and reducing ecosystem vulnerability to new invaders.
- Once a new non-native species has become established in an ecosystem, the structure, composition, and likely the functioning of the ecosystem are changed.
- The species pool in an ecosystem is dynamic, leading to a continual reshuffling of native and non-native species.

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## Background and Definitions

Globally, invasive species are one of the greatest threats to the ecological integrity of ecosystems (IPBES 2019) and may have contributed to 25% of the global plant extinctions and 33% of the animal extinctions (Pysek et al. 2020). The emergence of invasion ecology as an area of broad scientific and public concern dates from the publication of Charles Elton's book, *The Ecology of Invasions by Animals and Plants* (1958). Elton cast the challenge of invasive species using a military metaphor:

*"I have described some of the successful invaders establishing themselves in a new land or sea, as a war correspondent might write a series of dispatches recounting the quiet infiltration of commando forces, the surprise attacks, the successive waves of later reinforcements after the first spearhead fails to get a foothold, attack and counter attack, and the eventual expansion and occupation of territory from which they are unlikely to be ousted again"* (Elton 1958: 109).

Although this militaristic metaphor may no longer be appropriate (Davis et al. 2011, Janovsky and Larson 2019), it does capture many of the features of the battle against invasive species and their characterization as harmful. Invasive species are considered to be one of the five direct drivers of ecosystem change along with climate change, resource use, habitat alteration (land use) and pollution (Millennium Report, 2005). Accordingly, the literature on this topic is extensive.

The concepts of invasive and non-native species and related terms have been controversial since their beginnings; different researchers adopt different definitions for their own reasons, and the controversies will continue as environmental change quickens. The terminology for non-native species is also confusing, confounded and inconsistent (e.g. Shrader-Frechette 2001, Colautti and MacIsaac 2004). A variety of terms has been used to denote a non-native

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species, including alien, nonindigenous, exotic, invader, weed, aquatic nuisance species, introduced species, and foreign species. The definitions are more well defined in legislation and executive orders. A **non-native species** is a species that is not originally from the ecosystem in which it now occurs. Using the National Invasive Species Management Plan (Beck et al. 2006), we use the definition of an **invasive species** as “a species that is non-native to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.” The National Invasive Species Council added that invasive species are those introduced to an area as a result of intentional or unintentional human actions. In general, managers have favored native over non-native species to conserve biodiversity, ecosystem services, and historical Native American cultural functions.

By this definition, all invasive species are non-native, but not all non-native species are invasive. The two essential elements in the definition of an invader are that the species is non-native and that it causes harm. Whether a non-native species entering an ecosystem causes harm is a matter of human values, which can change or differ among groups of people. A non-native species can become invasive as its impact changes or becomes better known and some species can be considered both detrimental and beneficial. For example, sport fishers in the Delta currently value non-native striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*) that were introduced and became established over a century ago, whereas others emphasize the harm the bass now may cause by preying on native fishes (Moyle 2011; 2020). Striped bass are now managed as a recreational resource in the Delta. Therefore, determining whether a species should be labeled “invasive” can depend on how people perceive the economic and environmental benefits and costs of the species and how these are balanced (Beck et al. 2006), and different people do it differently.

For management purposes, native species are generally considered to be those species present in an area when Europeans first arrived and described what they found. Pysek and Richardson (2010) suggest that native species “evolved in a



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given area without human involvement or ... arrived there by natural means ... from an area in which they are native.” Thus, species such as cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), which emigrated from their native Africa on their own and colonized much of the Americas, are not generally considered invasive. By this measure, a human vector must be involved for a species to be called invasive.

As more species expand their ranges from areas in which they are native into new areas in response to climate changes, however, determining whether a species is or is not native may be less important than determining whether it meets the second defining element: causing harm. For example, barred owls (*Strix varia*), native to eastern North America, have expanded into forests of the Pacific Northwest where they were historically not present. They compete with federally threatened northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), displacing them from many areas and hastening their decline (J.D. Wiens et al. 2014). Should barred owls be considered an invasive species?

### **Ingredients for Establishment of a Non-native Species**

There are three essential ingredients for the successful establishment of a non-native species in an ecosystem.

- 1) There must be a **pathway or corridor** that allows the species to traverse the natural barriers that may prevent the species from getting to an ecosystem. These barriers can simply be the distance or the presence of inhospitable habitats. There are natural ways to break through these barriers that vary from continual range expansion to changes in intervening habitat to accidental transport by another organism (e.g., aquatic organisms attaching to water birds). The success of establishment of a non-native species is often dependent on the number of introduction events and the number of individuals introduced (see review by Pysek et al. 2020).

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Human activity has created multiple pathways for invasions through deliberate release with or without intent (stocking, bait release), hitchhikers on commodities (e.g. insects) or on transport vectors (e.g. biofouling, ballast water, boats), escape from captivity (aquaria pets), or creation of anthropogenic pathways (e.g. canals and water diversions).

- 2) The second essential ingredient is **a match of the physical, biological, or chemical habitat requirements of the potential non-native species to those of the receiving ecosystem**. Are habitat conditions suitable for growth, reproduction and persistence of the non-native species in this ecosystem or do predators, competitors, or adverse habitat conditions restrict establishment of the new species? In essence, the basic drivers of ecosystem change driven by climate, habitat alterations, pollution, extreme events, and resource use can and will change the habitat receptivity to different types of non-native species.

Humans have altered the receiving habitats and therefore have altered their susceptibility to invasion by different non-native species. Human alterations can include changes in hydrological flow amounts and patterns, habitat structure, species composition (resource exploitation), nutrient and pollution input, food-web disruption, and even the initial influx of non-natives that can change habitat vulnerability to additional non-native species.

Given the above, then prevention of new invaders should be focused on reducing ecosystem vulnerability and pathway restrictions.

- 3) The third ingredient for the successful establishment of a non-native species is often related to the inherent biological and ecological traits of the individual species—**the habitat and reproductive requirements and abilities of the potential invasive species**. Some species are better adapted to expand into new environments because they are generalist feeders, have rapid reproductive capabilities, have high tolerance for a

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wide range of environmental conditions, or have greater resistance to predators. Ultimately, the success or failure of a species that enters an ecosystem will depend, in part, on these characteristics, although the relationship are challenging to define quantitatively (e.g. Ricciardi and Rasmussen, Kolar and Lodge 2001, Marchetti et al. 2004).

## **Non-native Impacts on Ecosystems**

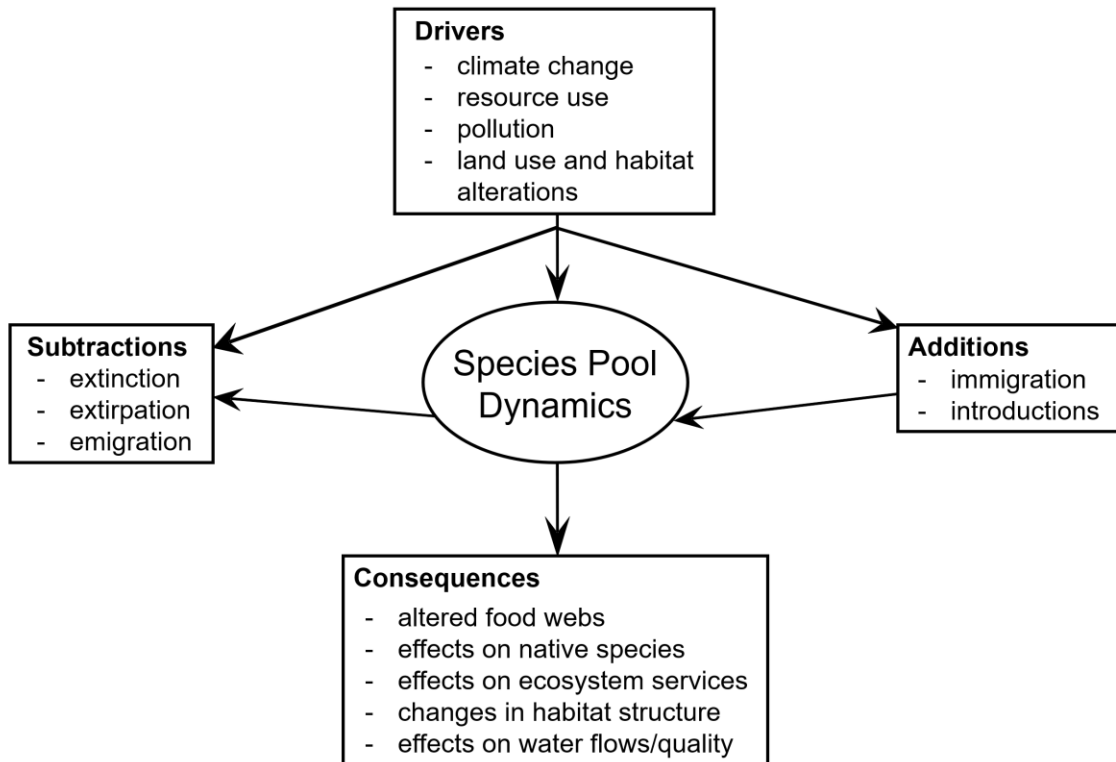
Once a new non-native species has become established in an ecosystem, the structure, composition, and, likely, the functioning of the ecosystem are changed. To evaluate the science underpinning efforts to address non-native species problems in the Delta, invasion can be considered as one aspect of the broader dynamics of the community of species occurring in the Delta (the “species pool”; Figure 1).

Several forces drive changes in the species pool. These drivers—climate change, sea-level rise, land-use change, habitat alteration, hydrological changes, resource use, pollution and nutrient loading, droughts, and a host of other human actions—all affect species and their habitats directly and indirectly. As a consequence, the species pool in an area of interest is in a continual state of flux, with changing population levels of species already present, additions of new species from elsewhere, and loss of species previously present in the pool. Additions come from immigration of species moving of their own accord, intentional human introductions of new species, (e.g., assisted migration or stocking), or accidental or careless introduction through human-facilitated pathways (e.g., release of bait fish, clams hitchhiking on recreational boats).

Whether a newly arriving species becomes established depends on abiotic conditions, the characteristics of species that moved into the area earlier, and how they assembled themselves into ecosystems. Once established, a non-native species may affect the persistence or decline of species already present and those that arrive subsequently. Losses of species from the pool occur when a species becomes extinct or is extirpated from the area of interest or when a

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species disappears because individuals and population centers have moved elsewhere (e.g., as a result of climate change). There are also transients in the species pool such as migratory birds and fishes. The species pool of any location therefore contains a mixture of native and non-native species that changes over time, creating an ever-changing mosaic of ecosystems over a broader area as species move among locations.



*Figure 1. A conceptual model of changes in the species composition (the “species pool”) of an ecosystem, leading to multiple consequences.*

Compositional changes in the species pool can have a variety of ecological, economic, or sociological consequences (Figure 1). Ecologically, altered competitive or predator-prey relationships among species may disrupt food webs. The effects on native species that are rare or declining in abundance may be especially great, leading some to be extirpated. If these species are legally recognized as threatened or endangered, there will be political and economic as well as ecological consequences.

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Other consequences of changes in the species pool may affect human interests more directly. Ecosystem services provided by existing species and biological communities may change. For example, new species may alter the biological, hydrological, or physical structure of the ecosystem (e.g., nutria, *Myocastor coypus*, burrow into levees). Changes in the composition of aquatic vegetation, such as the recent dominance of the Delta by dense growths of Brazilian waterweed, can alter water flows, temperature, and chemistry and can affect other elements of aquatic ecosystems as well as the quality and quantity of water available to people.

Changes in the composition of a species pool and their consequences, of course, are just changes. It is *people* who determine whether the individual or collective changes are good, bad, or benign, depending on how they affect something about the system that people value, for whatever reasons. In some instances, the introduction of a new species into an area may have little observed effect on other species, ecosystem processes, or how humans use or manage the system (Matern and Brown, 2005). In other situations, a new species may be valuable to people (e.g., striped bass) or increase or alter the productivity of food webs (e.g., Liao et al. 2018). When new species have harmful consequences, they are labeled invasive species.

## **Non-Natives in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta**

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### **Findings**

- The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is one of the most invaded estuaries in the world.
- Reducing the impact of non-native species and protecting native species is a core strategy of the Delta Plan.
- Several factors have facilitated Delta invasions, including ballast-water pathways through the San Francisco Bay and severe habitat restructuring for land and water use.

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- The vulnerability of disturbed environments to invasion is well documented in other ecosystems and has been substantiated by studies in the Delta.
- Changes in the Delta over the past decades have generally favored non-native species (fish, at least) at the expense of native species.
- Science dealing with non-native species in the Delta has been extensive.
- Impacts of invaders on the Delta Ecosystem have been large but attributing specific impacts to specific species is challenging scientifically because science is reactive (done after an invasion) and data are limited.

## History and Status

The San Francisco Estuary (including the Delta) has been described as one of the most invaded estuaries in the world (Cohen and Carlton 1998). Because the Delta-San Francisco Bay Area is one of 25 global biodiversity hotspots of highest priority for conservation, the threat of invasive species is a major environmental concern. More than 200 non-native species have invaded the Delta's aquatic and terrestrial habitats. The many transport pathways that bring non-native species into San Francisco Bay—international shipping, recreational boating and fishing, horticulture and pet industries, agriculture, and deliberate introduction—have facilitated their movement into the Delta (Luoma et al. 2015). These pathways, combined with the Delta's highly altered landscape, have facilitated the establishment of many non-native species (Ruiz et al. 2011). About one quarter of non-native species introduced to the estuary are arthropods, followed by mollusks, fish, and vascular plants (Cohen and Carlton 1998).

Well before the arrival of non-European settlers in the Delta, Native Americans altered the mosaic of species by tending local plant species that bore acorns, fruits, and construction materials and by moving them into new locations (Zedler and Stevens 2018). Subsequent people introduced domesticated grazers (horses, cattle). Grasses were favored by grazing and by fires set by lightning and by Native Americans. With the settling of European immigrants, California's

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Central Valley was gradually converted from native to the Delta alien grasses, and the Delta was engineered to support agriculture.

Introductions began to accelerate as ships started entering San Francisco Bay in 1775. As global shipping into the Bay increased around 1850, introduction pressure intensified (Cohen and Carlton 1995, Ruiz et al. 2000). Introduction rates have increased since the mid-1900s; about half of non-native species recorded in 1995 were introduced after 1960 (Cohen and Carlton 1998). This increase coincides with a time of growing international commerce from East Asia, the opening of new ports in the 1970s, faster ships, and increasing anthropogenic disturbance (Carlton et al. 1990, Carlton 1996). In particular, habitats were altered by increasing hydrological management through freshwater diversions beginning in the 1920s and major dam construction on the Sacramento River and its tributaries between 1945 and 1968 (Arthur et al. 1996, Winder and Jassby 2011). Conditions will continue to change into the future (Lund et al. 2010). Salinity will change in different parts of the Delta with changes in hydrological regimes (Fleenor et al. 2008), with cascading effects on Delta ecosystems and fish (Moyle and Bennett 2008). These transformations of the Delta facilitate the establishment and persistence of new species.

The vulnerability of disturbed environments to invasion is well documented in other ecosystems and has been substantiated by studies in the Delta (Leidy and Fiedler 1985, Feyrer and Healey 2003, Conrad et al. 2016). Hydrologic alterations—especially water diversions, altered flows, and increased water temperatures—have exacerbated drought-like conditions, which are linked to increasing invasions by non-native zooplankton that have in turn created conditions more favorable to non-native fish (Feyrer and Healey 2003, Winder et al. 2011).

Appendix A summarizes some specific examples of the impacts of non-natives in the Delta. Non-native species can often outcompete, prey upon, and exclude native species. The continuous arrival and spread of non-natives have displaced

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native aquatic vegetation, decimated native fish populations, contributed to the decline of native biodiversity, altered food webs and ecosystems, structurally damaged both natural and constructed habitats, and affected ecosystem services such as the provision of clean water (Simberloff and Rejmanek 2011). As in other estuaries, the Delta ecosystem also is vulnerable to invasion because brackish waters generally have fewer indigenous animal species than other habitats, facilitating the establishment of non-native species (Cohen and Carlton 1998, Wolff 1998, Cloern and Jassby 2012). The range of salinity conditions exposes the Delta to potential invasion by non-native species through a multitude of vectors and creates conditions favoring establishment once they arrive.

Some introduced species have had more substantial environmental and economic impacts than others due to their capacity to reshape their environment, with cascading effects on habitat, nutrient and contaminant cycling, and trophic structure (Kimmerer et al. 1994, Crooks 2002, Sousa et al. 2009). Significant habitat-altering invasive species include several species of aquatic plants that alter flows and create novel habitat for non-native fish (Brown and Michniuk 2007, Loomis 2019). Filter-feeding bivalves have altered benthic and pelagic food-web structure and nutrient cycling. Sometimes species exhibit a boom and bust invasion in which abundances and impacts can change significantly, as with the Chinese mitten crab (Box 1).



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### ***Box 1. The Chinese Mitten Crab: A Boom and Bust Invasive in the Bay and Delta***

Chinese mitten crabs are medium-sized crabs named for their hairy, mitten-like claws (Rudnick et al. 2005). They are native to coastal rivers and estuaries of central Asia and have invaded several European countries over the past century. Discovered in South San Francisco Bay in 1992, the mitten crab spread rapidly to cover several thousand squared kilometers surrounding the Bay and Delta (Rudnick et al. 2000). Introductions may have occurred through ballast-water discharges, although there was initial speculation that it was purposeful because of the value of their roe.

Chinese mitten crabs are catadromous, which are species that live in freshwater but migrate to more saline habitats to breed, and are associated with tidally influenced portions of Bay tributaries as young juveniles; with freshwater streams  $\leq 250$  km from their confluence with the Bay) as older, migrating juveniles; and with the open waters of the Bay as reproductive adults after migrating from fresh water to reproduce between late fall and early spring (Rudnick et al. 2000, 2003). Chinese mitten crabs have been of widespread environmental concern because of their extreme abundance and burrowing behavior, which causes bank erosion. Between 1995 and 2001, burrow densities increased five-fold in tidal portions of the banks in South Bay tributaries (from a mean of 6 burrows per meters squared in 1995 to  $>30$  burrows per meter squared in 1999). Population size peaked in 1998, with 750,000 crabs counted in fall migration in a North Bay tributary. Abundance subsequently declined greatly; 2,500 crabs were counted in the same river system in 2001 (Rudnick et al. 2003). They are rarely encountered in the Bay and Delta today.

Chinese mitten crabs are also of concern because they accumulate higher concentrations of mercury than crustaceans living in the water column (Hui et al. 2005). Because their predators include fish, birds, mammals, and humans, their mercury burdens have an exceptional potential to impact the ecosystem and public health. Chinese mitten crabs also damage nets used in commercial fisheries (Rudnick and Resh 2002).

## **Management and Coordination**

Given the prevalence of non-native species in the Delta, the Delta Plan identifies reducing the impact of non-native species and protecting native species as a core strategy in the Ecosystem Goal (Box 2). Several interagency programs have also been formed to prevent, detect, and manage invasive species, including the

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Delta Interagency Invasive Species Coordination Team, which is organized by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy and aims to strengthen coordination among agencies to detect, prevent, and manage invasive species.

***Box 2. Reducing Impact of Non-native Species is a core strategy in the Delta Plan.***

Reducing the impact of non-native species and protecting native species is one of the five core strategies discussed in the Delta Plan's Chapter 4 amendment ("Protect, Restore and Enhance the Delta Ecosystem"). Within this strategy, the Plan recommends that state and federal agencies should prioritize and implement actions to control non-native species (ER R7), including communication and funding for a rapid response to invasive species (Delta Stewardship Council 2020). The Plan classifies non-native species into four categories: naturalized species, widespread and unmanaged species, widespread and managed species, and emerging species of concern. Invasive species are described as non-natives whose introduction may cause harm to the economy, environment, or human health.

The Plan addresses the specific threats posed by several invasive species, including aquatic weeds (water hyacinth, Brazilian waterweed, water pennywort, Eurasian water milfoil, and parrot feather), overbite clams, and zooplankton. In addition, it explains the potential threat of invasions by zebra mussels, quagga mussels, and nutria. The Plan also discusses measures and entities that have been established to prevent introduction of non-native species. California law requires that ships entering from outside the United States Exclusive Economic Zone either retain, properly exchange, or discharge ballast water to a treatment facility to reduce the chances of introduction. In addition, the California State Lands Commission limits the allowable concentration of living organisms in discharged ballast water.

The Delta Plan recommends increasing funding and communication among agencies for invasive species management.

The California Invasive Plant Council is a non-profit organization that catalogs invasive plants present in California, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture has lead authority to control of noxious weeds in California. In addition, the Delta Region Areawide Aquatic Weed Project is a collaboration among academic and governmental agencies tasked with sustainably managing

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aquatic weeds in the Delta. More broadly, the Invasive Species Council of California ([ISCC website](http://www.iscc.ca.gov/), <http://www.iscc.ca.gov/>) aims to coordinate and strengthen the various organizations that address invasive species in the state of California.

## Recommendations

The science dealing with non-native species in the Delta is extensive and has largely emphasized: 1) prevention, early detection and rapid response, eradication, assessment and monitoring, and control of individual species (e.g., nutria) or groups of similar invaders (e.g., emergent aquatic vegetation); 2) retrospective impact assessment (e.g., the effects of invasive clams); and 3) development of new technologies for monitoring (e.g., remote sensing and eDNA) (e.g. Jerde et al. 2011, Baerwald et al. 2012, Stoeckle 2016, Hosler 2017, Khanna et al. 2018b). See Appendix A.

We recognize that there are many scientific needs at the project level, species level, monitoring level, or technology level. These span topics such as the development of safe control measures (e.g. herbicides), development of new monitoring tools (eDNA, remote sensing), and evaluation of pairwise species relationships (e.g. striped bass and delta smelt) to more challenging questions like better defining the role of an individual invader (e.g. *Corbicula*) in nutrient cycling. Clearly, all of these types of projects are important but need better prioritization. **We recommend that a series of workshops or syntheses be conducted to develop a detailed set of Science Priorities for dealing with invasive species that defines short-term and long-term science needs.** Recent workshops like the 2019 assessment of remote sensing technology and status for invasive aquatic vegetation (references) are good examples of the type of approach that is needed.

One of the primary impacts of non-native species is to disrupt or change the food web and nutrient cycling. Understanding the role of non-native species (potential, existing, or outgoing) in the food web is fundamental for predicting and evaluating

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impacts (David et al. 2017). **We recommend the development and testing of a comprehensive food-web model for the Delta.** This type of model is most effective for policy if it is spatially-explicit, can be driven by changing environmental conditions, and is open source (e.g. DeMutsert et al. 2018, Schuckel et al. 2018). Several shelf-ready models already exist (e.g. ECOSIM/ECOPATH/ECOSPACE, e.g. Vassslide et al. 2016) but we believe a coordinated effort to evaluate the most appropriate approach for the Delta is needed (e.g. Schuckel et al. 2018).

## **Individual Invasive Species: Prevention and Management**

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### **Findings**

- The primary goal of management in the Delta is to prevent the introduction of potential invaders to the ecosystem. Decisions are thus mostly focused on the different phases of individual invaders: threat assessment, early detection and rapid response to eradicate, control, and (if all else fails) adaptation.
- A prioritized list of potential invaders can be built for the Delta through a robust threat assessment.
- It is up to management to decide action levels. At what level of risk does one decide whether to take action take no action.
- Science and management are clearly linked and must be integrated. Each management goal/action requires science.
- Identification of shared invasion pathways for multiple species can enhance prevention efforts.

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- Monitoring is essential to assess the effectiveness of prevention, to detect new non-natives, and to map the spread and abundance of established non-natives.
- Rapid response for eradication or control requires resources and agency commitment and coordination.

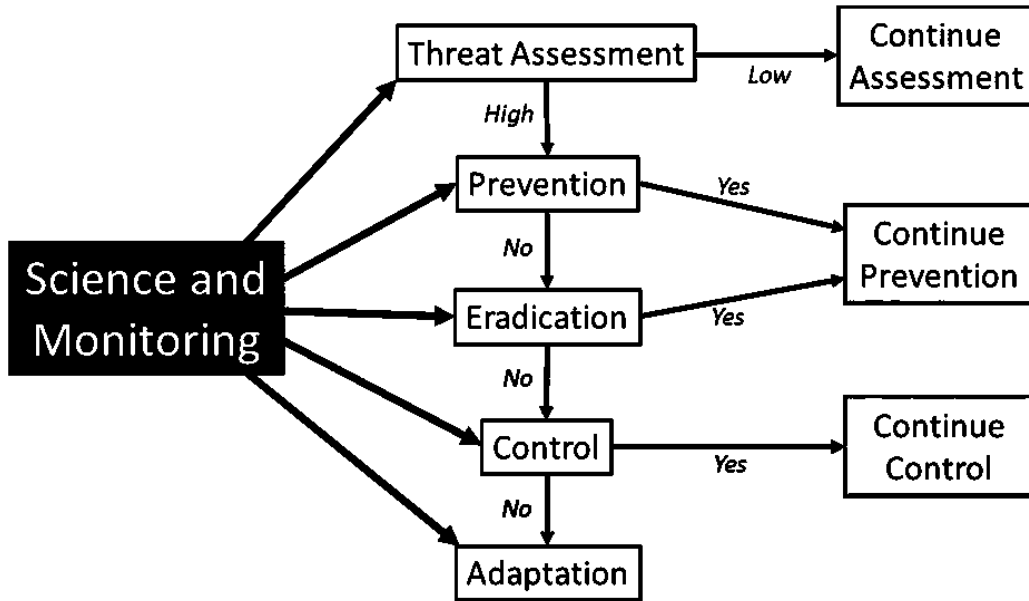


Figure 2. Stages of management and responses in dealing with a potential invasive species. Ideally, all of the stages and responses are informed by science and monitoring informs action.

## The Overall Process and Scientific Needs

The science of non-native species includes both the science associated with individual species and the ecosystem-level science that addresses ecosystem services and function.

The general management protocol for dealing with individual invasive species is well established at local, state, national, and local levels. The responses range from prevention, early detection, and rapid response to eradicate individual





















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Invasive species become established in an ecosystem because conditions there fulfill their ecological niche requirements, either because the invader excludes some native species that previously occupied that niche or because there was no species present that had the same ecological niche requirements. Absence of controlling predators can also be important. Perhaps the non-native species replaces a species that became extinct centuries or millennia ago (Perino et al. 2019) or environmental changes have created new habitats (like rivers turning into calm ponds or lakes). Whether the species are functional equivalents can only be hypothesized based on structure.

Ecosystem “sustainability” or protection does not mean unchanging stasis. As the species pool changes, managers need to assess species’ functions and determine the benefits and costs of changes in dynamic ecosystems. New tools are becoming available for predicting, tracking, and controlling invaders. Dick et al. (2017) created a Relative Impact Potential metric to predict the likelihood and magnitude of ecological impacts of invasive species, using data on the numerical responses and functions derived from other populations elsewhere. Foxcraft (2009) established “thresholds of potential concern” as triggers to begin controlling non-native species in the adaptive management of South Africa’s Kruger National Park. Such approaches may help to shift the management of invasive species from response to prevention.

Godoy (2019) challenged researchers to uncover “emergent properties” of ecosystems being invaded by considering multispecies assemblages and learning how communities change once invaded. Efforts focused on just two competing species at a time (e.g., a native and non-native) miss the emergent properties of ecological communities. Researchers and modelers need to understand the risks of invasion impacts at species, multispecies, and ecosystem levels (Vila et al. 2011). That is the context in which invasions occur.

The challenge to develop scientific methods to monitor the spread, control, and assess the impacts of individual invaders or invasive types (e.g., emergent







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They advised Delta managers to strategize how to adapt to warmer temperatures, higher sea levels, and salinity intrusion and to plan for more runoff in winter and less in spring-summer. They viewed their projections as a starting point, warning “Today's extremes could become tomorrow's norms.”

Changes in temperature and precipitation are expected to affect all aspects of invasion: dispersal pathways (as trade and transport change), establishment (as species ranges shift), impacts (more insect pests, greater food requirements as animals experience stressful conditions, lower stream flows as trees increase evapotranspiration rates), and efforts to manage and control (e.g., shifts in biocontrol-prey interactions, shifts in herbicide tolerance, and more fire-tolerant weeds as drought and fire increase) (Dukes 2011). Along the coast of southern California, invasive non-native plants expand their distributions in years with greater rainfall and lowered soil salinity, which trigger seed germination of upland weedy species as well as native plants (Noe and Zedler 2001a, 2001b; Noe 2002).

Sea levels and climate are expected to change faster than native plants and associated animals can migrate to escape changing conditions. Even a single storm can bring saltwater well inland of normal high tides, killing salt-intolerant species and opening space for invasions. As Callaway and Parker (2012) noted, management of invasive species is already extremely difficult, but “shifting climates will create additional challenges to consider, as changing conditions could create opportunities for a different group of nonnative species, and the future spread of existing invasives will be even more difficult to predict.”

Some invasive species seem pre-adapted to thrive with changing climate. For example, common reed (Box 3, Appendix A) is well adapted to varied climatic conditions where it is native: each lineage has multiple genotypes and grows in diverse habitats and its plastic traits respond to changes related to global warming (temperature, CO<sub>2</sub>). Responses to co-occurring environmental changes (drought, salinity, flooding) vary by genotypes within lineages (Skálová et al.

















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How should we deal with such a prospect? We should have monitoring systems and food-web studies and spatially explicit habitat models in place to be able to forecast the species' impact and its rate of spread and a central 'go to' base of scientific expertise. We should be able to predict changes in the food web and assess the changes once "Newtrina" has become permanently established. We should be able to tease out the impacts of "Newtrina" relative to ongoing and simultaneous changes in the ecosystem due to climate change, weather extremes, and other driving forces. We should develop protocols for dealing with unanticipated invaders like "Newtrina" that arrive unannounced.

At the present time, the management protocols for preventing, detecting, minimizing the impacts, and adapting to individual invaders are well established and largely adopted at the state and national levels. The science supporting these efforts needs to improve and be applied to the Delta. The approach of focusing on individual invader species has been valuable, although not always effective. However, the rate of invasions and the impact of invaders on ecosystem structure and function are closely linked to other fundamental drivers of ecosystem change, including climate change, resource use, pollution, habitat alteration, and extreme events. Given that the Delta ecosystem has been largely modified, is already highly invaded, and like many other ecosystems is undergoing continual and increasingly rapid change, one might ask: What is the appropriate goal for non-native species management? We can expect that the species pool will continually change and management will need to adapt to the changes. Some of these changes may be predictable and others not. Ultimately management needs to move beyond individual species management to address how to set ecosystem goals in recognition of an ever-changing species pool and uncertainty. The fundamental role of science is to provide management with enough information to set priorities and manage expectations. Developing more forward-looking scientific and predictive science will improve our ability to understand and adapt to those changing conditions.

## APPENDIX A: Examples of Significant Non-native Species in the Delta

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The following examples highlight several important non-native species and their impacts on the Delta ecosystem. Although non-native species occur throughout the Delta, they have received by far the greatest attention in aquatic environments. The ecological boundaries of upland ecosystems are less well defined relative to the Delta. In agricultural systems, various “pests” and “weeds” (which are also invasive species) have been the focus of intensive prevention and control efforts. While many of our comments apply to non-native and invasive species in any ecosystem, our focus in this report is primarily on aquatic ecosystems.

### **Bivalves and their effects on the pelagic food web**

**The Delta has been invaded by several bivalve species that have significantly altered food webs through competition with native filter- and deposit-feeding invertebrates and through altering phytoplankton concentrations.** The most notable and well documented of these invaders is *Corbula amurensis*, which was first sighted in the San Francisco Estuary in Grizzly Bay in 1986 (Carlton et al. 1990). The species was likely brought to California as larvae in the ballast of cargo ships. Benthic communities in invaded areas were significantly disrupted and species richness in these habitats gradually decreased during the late 1980s as *C. amurensis* came to dominate the community (Nichols et al. 1990). The combination of the high population growth rate of *C. amurensis* with its filter-feeding efficiency led to a nearly five-fold decrease in average phytoplankton biomass within 2 years of invasion, limiting food availability to zooplankton (Jassby et al. 2002, Thompson 2005). This reduction in phytoplankton biomass shifted food-web dynamics by directing primary production toward benthic consumers (clams) instead of zooplankton (Kimmerer et al. 1994). By depleting native zooplankton, *C. amurensis* facilitated



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*Eichornia crassipes* is an example of a Floating Aquatic Vegetation (FAV) species. It was introduced to California in 1907. It has invaded slow-moving waterways, where its growth changes water quality, displaces native vegetation, clogs channels and marinas, and increases water loss due to its high transpiration rate (Underwood et al. 2006). *Eichornia crassipes* cover increased four-fold between 2004 and 2014 to about 800 ha (Santos et al. 2011a, Dahm et al. 2016). However, 2014 had delayed use of herbicides and it was a peak drought year. Since 2014, water hyacinth cover has been less than it was in 2004-2008 (Ustin et al. 2018).

In addition to *E. densa* and *E. crassipes*, several other non-native plant species pose a threat to Delta waterways. The aquatic alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) is new to the Delta (in 2017, DBW 2017) and is becoming established. It is well known as an aggressive invader in Australia. There, records are available soon after invading for 5 years. During that time, it expanded 4.3 meters per year and produced an average biomass of 4.9 kg dry weight per squared meters per year (Clement et al. 2011). This plant both roots (in shallow water) and produces mats of interwoven of stems that cover waterbodies, restrict human use, exclude native plants, and alter ecosystem functions. *Ludwigia* spp. (water primrose) is a FAV species that increased 4-fold in cover between 2004 and 2016 and encroached into both open water and emergent marsh habitat (Khanna et al. 2018a). *Ludwigia* has been recognized as an emerging problem only in the past decade and now consistently covers more of the waterways than water hyacinth. Coverage in 2014 was similar to that of *E. crassipes* (800 ha) (Boyer and Sutula 2015, Dahm et al. 2016). In 2018 (not considering the south Delta), water primrose occupied about 1200 acres (3.8% of waterways) while water hyacinth was 400 acres (1.3% of waterways) (Ustin et al. 2018). An additional common non-native FAV species of emerging concern, *Limnobium laevigatum* (South American sponge plant), somewhat resembles water hyacinth and is often found alongside it. Common non-native SAV species include *Myriophyllum aquaticum* (parrot feather), *Myriophyllum spicatum* (Eurasian watermilfoil), *Potamogeton crispus* (curlyleaf pondweed), and



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Alternative uses for the shredded plant material (e.g., feed for livestock) may not be cost effective.

Non-native SAV species also differ functionally from native species. Their greater leaf area, denser canopies, and greater light-use efficiency give them a competitive advantage over native species (Santos et al. 2011b). Thus, the removal of one non-native species may result in colonization by another non-native species instead of the intended native vegetation. Inadvertent effects of control methods must be considered in management of invasive species in the Delta.

Non-native aquatic plants have substantial economic impacts in the Delta, affecting water quality, turbidity (and thus habitat suitability for species such as delta smelt), recreational and commercial boating and fishing, water exports, and virtually all human uses of water. Consequently, there are major ongoing efforts to control invasive plant species in the Delta, spearheaded by a variety of agencies and programs (Box 2). From 2013 to 2017, combined state and federal efforts in chemical control of invasive SAV and FAV averaged approximately \$12.5 million per year (Conrad et al. 2020). Because of regulatory restrictions, control could not be applied everywhere it was needed, and even this level of expenditure was insufficient to achieve effective control of invasive aquatic plants (Conrad et al. 2020).

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## **Box 3. Controlling Aquatic Plants**

Management of invasive aquatic vegetation in the Delta includes several agencies, including the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW). DBW has the responsibility to control aquatic 'weeds' in the Delta. Because these are independent agencies, coordinating management strategies is often difficult. Several aquatic invasive species, including *E. crassipes* and *E. densa*, are frequently targeted by the DBW Aquatic Invasive Species Program, which is the principal state agency with the authority to treat invasive aquatic species in the Delta (Ta et al. 2017). Treatment typically consists of herbicide application between March and November. Mechanical and biological control measures are also taken to reduce coverage. Biological controls involve alien insects or mites that are introduced to lower the density of non-native vegetation (Ta et al. 2017). Three insect species have been introduced to target *E. crassipes* and two to target *Arundo donax* (giant reed), although only one of these, *Neochetina bruchi* (water hyacinth weevil), has become established in the Delta (Akers et al. 2017, Hopper et al. 2017). There are plans to release other species of weevils and planthoppers in the Delta to selectively feed on invasive vegetation (Ta et al. 2017).

Because managing invasive vegetation is an interagency effort, there are also several collaborative organizations in the Delta that aim to coordinate and manage invasive aquatic species. The Delta Interagency Invasive Species Coordination Team (DIISC) is an interagency group of individuals from agencies focused on preventing, detecting, controlling, and managing invasive species in the Delta (Ta et al. 2017). They aim to increase collaboration among agencies through meeting and facilitating symposia focused on invasive species. USDA sponsors the Delta Region Areawide Aquatic Weed Project (DRAAWP), which focuses on management strategies, control agents, mapping of weeds, and documenting their effects on ecosystem services. DRAAWP centers its efforts on *E. densa*, *E. crassipes*, and *A. donax* and how to best prioritize management practices and provide agencies with essential information.

## **Wetland vegetation**

**Wetlands such as tidal or freshwater marshes are a major component of ecological restoration programs in the Delta (e.g. California EcoRestore). Once disturbed, wetlands are vulnerable to invasion by non-native plant species; once established, the invaders are often difficult to control or**



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**eradicate.** For example, a tall grass called common reed (*Phragmites australis*) is highly invasive in global wetlands and in the Delta, where it crowds out competitors and forms monotypes. Mapping and tracking distributions are difficult in the Delta because native genotypes (not usually invasive) and European strains (highly invasive) both occur and look alike from the air and on the ground (Hickson and Keeler-Wolf 2007). As it does elsewhere, *P. australis* inhabits multiple habitats: palustrine emergent wetlands, freshwater drainage ditches, intertidal bay islands, muted tidal marshes, and wetlands with saline soils (Galatowitsch et al. 1999).

Because wetlands have been a major focus of restoration for a long time, there is considerable knowledge available about several widespread, aggressive invasive plants such as cattails, reed canary grass, and common reed (Zedler and Kercher 2005). Such species reproduce vegetatively from rapidly spreading rhizomes (belowground stems). Their starchy rhizomes serve as reserves that help them resist control using herbicides and cutting and even superficial soil removal. Their tall leaves and stems enable them to outcompete native species. Wetland restoration provides opportunities for field experiments that can enhance our understanding of invader biocontrol methods, herbicide resistance, or the use of heterogeneous topography to facilitate diverse plantings that resist invasions.

### **Fish**

**Several studies have substantiated that more non-native than native fish species are present in the Delta and these non-natives have been introduced in a variety of ways.**

Many non-native species of fish have been introduced to the Delta through stocking to improve local food and sportfishing opportunities and diversify fish communities. One of the first species introduced was *Alosa sapidissima* (American shad), which was brought to the Sacramento River in 1871 and supported a commercial fishery until the 1950s (Dill and Cordone 1997). *Ameiurus nebulosus* (brown bullhead catfish) were introduced to the San Joaquin

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River in 1874, followed by several other species of catfish. Striped bass were then introduced to the Carquinez Strait in 1879, leading to a successful commercial fishery that recorded over one million pounds of catch within 20 years. Although large-scale stocking of hatchery-raised striped bass ended in 1992 due to threats to native fish, stocking continued at lower levels in later years.<sup>10</sup>

Several other bass species were introduced to California prior to 1900, with records indicating that smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) were first stocked in 1874 and largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) as early as 1891. Stocking continued for many years. Other bass, including the spotted and redeye bass (*Micropterus punctulatus* and *Micropterus coosae*), were introduced on a lesser scale during the 1930s to 1960s. The establishment of several species of bass in the Delta has resulted in a world-class bass fishery, leading to conflicting goals among individuals managing non-native fish in the Delta: many people wish to recover populations of native species, while others aim to maintain healthy populations of harvestable non-native species. Many of these species, like largemouth and striped bass, prey on or compete with native species like Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) (Brown and Michniuk 2007). Consequently, management of fish in the Delta involves balancing conflicting interests and ecological goals.

Some other fish species have been introduced as biocontrol agents. *Gambusia affinis* (western mosquitofish) were widely introduced for biological control of mosquitoes in the 1920s. *Menidia audens* (Mississippi silverside) were introduced in the 1960s as a biological control agent; they became widely established by 1975 and are now one of the most widespread and abundant fish species in the Delta (Mahardja et al. 2016).

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<sup>10</sup> In February 2020, the California Fish and Game Commission adopted a policy of striving “to maintain a healthy, self-sustaining striped bass population in support of a robust recreational fishery” while eliminating the policy of supporting artificial propagation.

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Other fish species have been introduced as byproducts of human activity (e.g. see Moyle and Marchetti 2006). One of the most abundant demersal fish in the Delta, *Acanthogobius flavimanus* (yellowfin goby), was first observed in 1963 and was likely introduced through ballast-water transport (Dill and Cordone 1997; Workman and Merz 2007). Their abundance is likely due to their generalist diet, but their inability to reproduce in freshwater has likely limited their expansion. More recent introductions through ballast water include *Tridentiger bifasciatus* (shimofuri goby) and *Tridentiger barbatus* (shokihaze goby), which were first recorded in 1985 and 1997, respectively.

Collectively, non-native species introduced since the 1800s have established populations exceeding the abundance of most native species, resulting in reductions in native fish biodiversity (Moyle 2002; Moyle et al. 2012). In one study that analyzed fish-catch data throughout the Delta between 1994 and 2002, 62% of the species caught and 59% of the overall catch were non-native (Brown and May 2006). Feyrer and Healey (2003) reported that only eight of the 33 species sampled in the southern Delta between 1992 and 1999 were native; no native species accounted for more than 0.5% of the total catch. Higher abundance of native species was correlated with high river flow and turbidity, whereas more non-native fish were associated with warmer water temperatures and low river flow—characteristics of the highly modified south Delta. Similarly, a majority of the overall catch of fish larvae collected between 1990 and 1995 was non-native species associated with low flow and high temperature conditions during the late season; native species were more abundant during early-season conditions (Feyrer 2004). Marchetti et al. (2004) suggested that restoring natural hydrologic processes could mitigate the invasion of non-native fish species while favoring native fish populations.

Historically, the Delta was managed primarily for non-native game fishes, especially striped bass, American shad, and various catishes (Ictaluridae), with some attention also paid to Chinook salmon and steelhead (mainly through hatcheries) and to white sturgeon (Skinner 1962; Kelley 1966; Moyle 2002).

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Today, formal management of non-native fishes is minimal, even though they contribute substantially to fisheries (e.g. largemouth bass fishery in south and central Delta). Management instead focuses largely on species that are listed under state and federal Endangered Species Acts. However, non-native fishes dominate the fish fauna of the Delta and Suisun Marsh and they form surprisingly integrated fish assemblages with the remaining native species, with a few exceptions (Aguilar-Madrono et al. 2019). This has led Dahm et al. (2019) to suggest that fishes in the Delta should be managed as assemblages with common environmental requirements. For example, striped bass, American shad, delta smelt, and longfin smelt all require a fully functioning estuarine salinity gradient, including substantial outflows to maintain large populations. Historically, all found Suisun Marsh to be an important rearing area.

### **Non-native fish and submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV)**

**Both non-native fish and plants have significantly increased in recent decades. Several studies have linked the proliferation of invasive vegetation to the growth of non-native fish populations, but the causal relationship is unclear.** One study found that *Egeria densa* is important habitat for juvenile largemouth bass, and the proliferation of this plant likely supported the growth of the largemouth bass fishery in the Delta (Conrad et al. 2016). *Egeria densa* habitat is very productive and several studies have correlated its presence with fish assemblages dominated by non-native species, some of which are predators of native fish such as juvenile salmonids (Brown 2003, Grimaldo et al. 2003, Nobriga et al. 2005, Brown and May 2006, Brown and Michniuk 2007, Loomis 2019). Nobriga et al. (2005) found that native special-status fish species were less abundant in SAV (primarily *E. densa*) habitat than in turbid open water. In contrast, Young et al. (2018) reported that *E. densa* was not correlated with increased macroinvertebrate food for non-native largemouth bass when compared with other SAV species. Although it has been proposed that restoring tidal-wetland habitat would provide important habitat for native fish

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species, this may only be true where invasive SAV (*E. densa*) is not well established and therefore would not invade the restored habitat (Brown and Michniuk 2007). While restoration for native fish communities looked promising for the northern Delta in 2008, invasive SAV have since increased. For example, Liberty Island was mostly free of SAV in 2008 but now has more than 50% cover of SAV, and the change appears to be persistent (Ustin et al. 2017). Non-native fish might have been facilitated by a concurrent increase in non-native SAV (*Egeria densa*, *Myriophyllum spicatum* and *Potamogeton crispus*). The status and trends of invasive species should be considered when planning future management of both SAV and non-native fish.

### **Mammals**

Nutria are non-native semi-aquatic rodents that are a major threat in the Delta. Although nutria were first introduced to California from South America in 1899 for fur farming, this attempt was commercially unsuccessful (Evans 1970, Carter and Leonard 2002). Subsequent introductions led to a small feral population by the 1940s (Schitoskey 1972), but nutria numbers remained low and the species was eradicated from the state by 1978 (Deems and Pursley 1978). However, a reproducing population was found in the San Joaquin Valley in 2017, and nutria are currently found in the Delta in San Joaquin and neighboring counties (CDFW 2019).

Nutria burrowing and herbivory damage habitats and infrastructure. Nutria burrowing is of great concern in the Delta because levee systems are subject to erosion. Breached levees could allow large agricultural fields to flood, potentially permanently in subsided areas. Nutria feeding is also a threat in the Delta because each animal consumes up to a quarter of its body weight in plants per day. Damage to non-native cattails might not alarm farmers, but they are threatened by losses of rice, corn, and other grains, as well as vegetable crops. Nutria are also vectors for parasites and pathogens. The California multi-agency Response Team is collaborating to eradicate the Delta population. It began as an emergency Incident Command System in 2018 and a formal Nutria Eradication

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Program in 2019. The Nutria Eradication Program had caught over 1,000 nutria by May 2020 (see Footnote 8).

## APPENDIX B: Panelists

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To be completed

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