

DELTA CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK

VISION FOR A FUTURE DELTA¹

We envision the future Delta as a mosaic of towns, agricultural landscapes, managed wetlands, and resilient ecosystems where people prosper and healthy fish, wildlife, and plant communities thrive.

We foresee:

- **MULTI-BENEFIT OUTCOMES:** The Delta as a network of multiple-use landscapes where agricultural productivity, economic vitality, and ecosystem conservation are achieved in a manner that mutually supports the needs of people, fish and wildlife.
- **CONSIDERATION OF LANDSCAPE DYNAMICS:** Recognizing the Delta as part of a system that functions within the context of California's largest watershed, considering system-wide dynamics in decision-making.
- **HEALTHY RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS:** Healthy resilient Delta ecosystems with the capacity to adapt through time to impacts from climate change, sea level rise and other disturbances.
- **COLLABORATION:** State, federal, and local government agencies and stakeholders committed to coordination and collaboration across sectors, jurisdictions, and disciplines in order to achieve multi-benefits outcomes while recognizing trade-offs, where possible.
- **LOCAL SUPPORT:** Delta residents' promote the management of healthy ecosystems as the basis of an economically thriving Delta region.
- **LOCAL BENEFIT:** Delta residents and visitors actively engaging in the region's unique cultural and natural resource values through wildlife-friendly agricultural practices, tourism, low-impact outdoor recreation, and environmental education activities for all ages.
- **RELIABLE LOCAL WATER:** A Delta region where effective integrated water management promotes good water quality and a reliable water supply for in-Delta users.
- **MULTI-BENEFIT FLOOD MANAGEMENT:** A flood management system that provides improved flood protection while providing increased habitat value for fish and wildlife, where possible.

¹ "Delta" also includes areas beyond the legal Delta boundary such as the Northern Yolo Bypass and Suisun Marsh.

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PURPOSE

The Delta Conservation Framework outlines a collective vision for the long-term integration of ecosystem conservation actions into the Delta's rich cultural and economic fabric.

The Delta Conservation Framework:

- I. **PROVIDES A SHARED VISION AND OVERARCHING GOALS FOR DELTA CONSERVATION**
 - Serves as collective basis for Delta conservation practice for decision-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders, and as high level guidance document for the collaborative development of more focused *Regional Conservation Strategies* going forward.
- II. **INITIATES A FORUM FOR COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND BROAD BUY IN**
 - Sets a precedent for actively engaging landowners, federal, state, and local government agencies, regional partnerships, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to help develop and advance ecosystem conservation goals and strategies at multiple scales, and ensure alignment with existing conservation initiatives.
- III. **SERVES AS THE LONG-TERM EXTENSION OF CALIFORNIA ECORESTORE**
 - Continue to promote a shared vision among agencies with increased efficiencies through cost sharing, collaborative planning, and streamlined permitting, to improve implementation of conservation programs and projects in the Delta.
- IV. **OUTLINES STRATEGIES FOR POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO RECOGNIZED CHALLENGES**
 - Offers strategies to address challenges, including regulatory conflicts, permitting and other barriers to conservation project implementation, and their long-term maintenance and management.
- V. **PROVIDES GUIDANCE FOR PRIORITIZING REGIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGIES**
 - Provides a framework for coordinated implementation and management to build on early conservation successes and to guide collaborative future planning, implementation, and long-term management activities.
- VI. **INFORMS STATE FUNDING PRIORITIES**
 - Directly informs grant-solicitation language for some State funding programs, helps guide distribution of other available conservation support, and serves as a basis for future funding for long-term Delta conservation.
- VII. **ADVANCE GOALS OF THE CALIFORNIA WATER ACTION PLAN AND DELTA REFORM ACT**
 - Serves as basis for the amendment of the ecosystem elements of the Delta Plan, and outlines goal-based recommended strategies for improvements in ecosystem health , local water supply and water quality to inform Delta Plan policies and recommendations.

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PRINCIPLES

FOR CONSERVATION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Central Premise: The conservation of Delta ecosystems will benefit both its people and the environment .

Principles:

1. **PROCESS-BASED CONSERVATION:** *Focus conservation practices on reestablishing and promoting ecological function and adaptive capacity of natural systems, not restoring to historic Delta conditions.*
 - a. Protect, enhance or restore critical ecosystem processes with a focus on complexity and diversity to promote resilience and capacity for adaptation to change.
 - b. Create functional redundancy through multiplicity of key landscape and biotic elements.
 - c. Provide connectivity across space (landscape, regional, watershed, and local project levels), and time (near to long-term).
 - d. Design and coordinate conservation at the landscape scale², with direct consideration of landscape position, future trajectories (e.g. sea level rise), and existing and historical biological conditions (e.g. seed banks).
 - e. Where feasible, conserve large areas, with a long time horizon in mind.

2. **PEOPLE AND PLACE:** *Recognize the Delta as a place with unique cultural, recreational, natural resource, and agricultural values.*
 - a. Allow for integrated collaborative conservation and land management solutions while being sensitive to specific local cultural and environmental circumstances.
 - b. Consider geographic setting and context in order to select the appropriate conservation strategies within individual regions and their biological legacies.

² Landscape-scale conservation is a concept that considers a departure from a single focus of site based conservation. It aims to take a holistic approach, looking not just at biodiversity issues and the challenges of climate change, but also at issues such as local economies and agriculture, eco-tourism, geodiversity and the health and social benefits of the environment.

- c. Use appropriate, available public lands with long-term potential for conservation implementation, with additional focus on existing or potential opportunities with willing private landowners.
 - d. Implement good neighbor policies
 - e. Integrate ecological, social, and economic resilience into Delta conservation goals.
 - f. Consider conservation values of agricultural and urban lands, where appropriate.
 - g. Promote agricultural and socio-economic research in the Delta to continue to inform conservation planning and implementation processes.
 - h. Coordinate conservation policy, planning, and implementation among agencies and stakeholders.
3. **MULTIPLE BENEFITS:** *Provide increased environmental benefits and integrate conservation and other land use practices, where possible, to provide simultaneous ecological benefits for wildlife and people.*
- a. Create multiple benefits from fostering dynamic and more natural hydrologic and biophysical physical processes.
 - b. Manage for balanced and interconnected natural and agricultural ecosystem diversity within a landscape context.
 - c. Create a shift towards ecologically healthy natural communities by reducing the abundance and occurrence of noxious³ invasive species, where possible.
4. **BUILDING COMMUNITY:** *Conduct regular public outreach and engagement of Delta stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of Delta conservation efforts.*
- a. Promote early and consistent coordination among resource agencies, practitioners and other stakeholders for the development of regional conservation strategies, related funding support and general regional permitting frameworks.
 - b. Continue coordination and regular engagement opportunities for Delta residents and stakeholders in conservation planning and implementation.
5. **INCREASING EFFICIENCY:** *Utilize processes that minimize project costs, and provide consistent and integrated tools to support decision-making, evaluation of success, environmental compliance and permitting: Build on past planning documents and existing efforts;*

³ An invasive species, that interferes with the ecological function and other management objectives for a given ecosystem area at a given time.

- a. Use standard approaches for achieving goals and multi-benefit objectives, aimed at maintaining, enhancing or restoring system-wide aquatic, fluvial, transitional and terrestrial ecosystem functions.
 - b. Utilize opportunities for infrastructure upgrades, such as setback levees or fish screens, to achieve ecological benefits, where possible.
 - c. Conduct research and adaptive management, including ecological monitoring and evaluation, at project-specific and regional scales to continually improve the scientific basis of planning and management decisions and measure the achievement of goals over time.
6. **ACKNOWLEDGING LONG-TERM FUNDING NEED:** *Recognize that guaranteed sources of funding are necessary for successful long-term Delta conservation and management.*
- a. Develop a consolidated list of funding opportunities maintained by one entity available online to all Delta stakeholders.
 - b. Explore the establishment of a stable funding source for the long-term support of natural resource conservation and management in the Delta.
 - c. Consider endowments for long-term operations and management of conservation lands.