DELTA CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK

VISION FOR A FUTURE DELTA

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.

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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
   o 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
   o 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
   o 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
   o 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
   o 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
   o 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
   o 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 scale\(^2\), 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 noxious 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;

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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.