Delta Conservation Framework

Section VI

Contents

VI. Delta Conservation Framework Implementation

The Delta Conservation Framework serves as a high-level conservation planning framework through 2050, with a landscape-scale focus across the entire Delta, Suisun Marsh, and Yolo Bypass. It is closely aligned with previous and ongoing efforts to coordinate and plan conservation in the Delta and provides goals and implementation strategies with objectives to guide the development of *Regional Conservation Strategies* by *Regional Conservation Planning Partnerships* (Regional Partnerships). Examples of the Regional Partnerships approach already exist in the Suisun Marsh and are emerging in the Cache Slough Complex, Yolo Bypass, and the Central Delta Corridor. The Delta Conservation Framework also highlights the importance of integrating conservation planning with existing and incipient Delta adaptive

THE DELTA CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK

- Offers a shared vision and overarching goals on how to achieve Delta conservation.
- Initiates an ongoing forum for collaborative engagement.
- Promotes education and outreach about the importance of a healthy Delta at local, state and national levels.
- Serves as a long-term extension of the California EcoRestore initiative.
- Outlines strategies and objectives for potential solutions to known Delta conservation challenges.
- Provides guidance for the coordination of collaborative regional conservation strategies.
- Informs state and other funding priorities.
- Advances goals of the California Water Action Plan and Delta Reform Act.

management programs[1] to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and objectives over the long term. This approach is particularly important in the face of the accelerating effects of climate change.[2]

To implement the suite of overarching goals, the Delta Conservation Framework suggests strategies focused on:

1. Conducting an open, collaborative partnership planning process with representation from all sectors and interests;
2. The integration of conservation planning and socioeconomic factors, particularly recreation and agriculture;
3. A shift from a focus on single species toward improving the underlying processes of functioning ecosystems that in turn provide species habitat and ecosystem services;
4. Improving the implementation and long-term management of conservation projects through permitting processes that increase efficiency and save costs; and

5. Moving beyond short-term financial support to securing funding for the long-term operation and management of conservation lands.

This section summarizes recommended tools to implement the Delta Conservation Framework strategies and highlights summary overviews of specific *Conservation Opportunity Regions* (COR) throughout the Delta. This section also offers an overview of how this document may serve to inform the upcoming amendment of the Delta Plan, Chapter 4, on ecosystem protection, restoration, and enhancement. Finally, it presents an initial direction and a way forward, despite the challenges and mounting urgency to improve Delta ecosystems for the benefit of humans and wildlife.

Implementation of the Delta Conservation Framework

There are two primary approaches recommended for implementing the Delta Conservation Framework's overarching goals and strategies. The first approach is to form independently facilitated Regional Partnerships that propose region-specific suites of projects utilizing a decision process based in best-available interdisciplinary science. The second approach allows for individual project implementation in areas without an established Regional Partnership.

Projects that are part of a Regional Partnership, or individual conservation projects, could submit proposals to available funding sources, including Proposition 1 or Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund solicitations. State funding solicitations run by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the Delta Conservancy will, by virtue of grant solicitation language that aligns with the Delta Conservation Framework goals, integrate into the landscape-scale planning blueprint the Delta Conservation Framework provides.

Regional Conservation Planning Partnerships

Regional Conservation Strategy planning would be conducted by members of a Regional Partnership. Each Regional Partnership should be independently facilitated, ideally by an entity familiar with the conservation planning methods and tools but no vested interest in the region. A variety of tools and processes are available to assure success of Regional Partnership engagement during the development of *Regional Conservation Strategies*. These tools can include scenario planning,[3,4] the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (Open Standards),[5] and Structured Decision Making (SDM),[6] among a variety of others.[7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15] Short overviews, presented below, of these three approaches outline how these are used individually or in combination to achieve an effective planning process and desired outcomes. In addition, the Delta Plan provides guidance for a three-phase and nine-step Adaptive Management Framework (see also Section IV).[16]

For each of the COR, Regional Partnership participants would develop a Regional Conservation Strategy that reflects the guiding principles outlined in Section I, all of the overarching goals, and individual strategies and objectives that are most applicable to that region. A *Regional Conservation Strategy* should be developed through a comprehensive evaluation of available regional datasets on vegetation, habitat quality, presence of species, agricultural and other land use patterns, water management, existing infrastructure (e.g., levees and water diversions), and other relevant socioeconomic information

like land values, projected sea level rise, and flood risk. Incorporating all of these factors helps create a comprehensive picture of where conservation could work, and where it would not, within a region.

Each Regional Partnership should develop regionally relevant SMART objectives (specific, measurable, attainable, result-oriented, and time-bound) that are aligned at the landscape scale with overarching Delta Conservation Framework objectives. These regional SMART objectives should be developed based on available information and the expertise of local stakeholders, scientists, and agency partners. The partnership should then evaluate objective-based implementation actions based on how they would play out during implementation. After they are evaluated by the Regional Partnership, actions and related objectives should be ranked and prioritized based on considerations of project effectiveness over the long term, integration with neighboring land uses, and influence on landscape-scale ecological function.

Individual Project Implementation

The second approach guides implementation of individual projects being proposed in areas without an established Regional Partnership or *Regional Conservation Strategy*. Individual conservation projects could be implemented in the Delta on publically owned lands or as a result of collaboration between willing landowners and local, state, or federal agencies. Individual projects in areas where no Regional Partnership has been established should adhere to good neighbor practices established by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Agricultural Land Stewardship group to ensure that short- and long-term impacts on neighboring land uses are avoided or minimized.[17]

Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is a strategic way to plan for the future. It helps to achieve desired outcomes over the long term by evaluating the consequences of alternative pathways to achieve a defined goal. Also called scenario thinking, or scenario analysis, it is a structured way for agencies, organizations, or partnerships to think about how a variety of strategies and actions will likely affect the future by developing and evaluating a small number of scenarios—stories about how the future might unfold and how this might affect the issues that confront them in the short and long term.

To develop and evaluate a suite of representative planning scenarios, potential prejudices and biases that could influence the decision making process need to be acknowledged. In the first step of scenario planning, participants are instructed to recognize and let go of prior misconceptions to identify known facts (see Figure 6.1 – Step 1 – Rules of the game). In the second step, recognizing what cannot be controlled will help participants identify factors that can be influenced by the actions proposed to reach desired outcomes. Also, identifying the main drivers and related key uncertainties (Figure 6.1 – Step 2) in the various contexts helps to establish the most likely forces at play and uncovers the potential for affecting them. This will help participants understand potential pitfalls and divergent viewpoints. As misconceptions, prejudices, and key uncertainties are clarified, understanding and trust can be built. Examples of prejudices and key uncertainties affecting successful conservation implementation in the Delta are outlined in Table 6.1.

The three to five scenarios developed in Step 2 are told as sequential stories, describing the assumptions made regarding how the future will unfold in each case and suggesting various factors and outcomes for key uncertainties. Each scenario then serves to "visualize" the possible steps toward achieving a goal and potential pitfalls to reaching them relative to the existing uncertainties. These scenarios can then be individually evaluated and ranked. Evaluation of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats--scenario by scenario--allows identification of the most promising options for moving forward (Figure 6.1– Step 3). When the most promising options rise to the top, they can be used to develop SMART objectives for implementation (Figure 6.1 – Step 4).

Scenario planning in conservation is a vital tool that enables planners to consider landscape-scale and long-term dynamics. For example, it could be used to help anticipate impacts of short- and long-term changes (e.g., land use or climate change, respectively) on ecosystems, species, infrastructure, water management, agricultural practices, and recreation. These changes could then be integrated into the long-term conservation planning picture.[18] A scenario planning approach could be integrated within a SDM process (see Structured Decision Making below) to incorporate a decision model, long-term adaptive management, and funding needs when anticipating how near-term conservation actions may evolve into the future. Scenario planning can also be incorporated into the Open Standards as part of the conceptualize-project step to evaluate several possible options for reaching the desired outcomes at varying time steps.

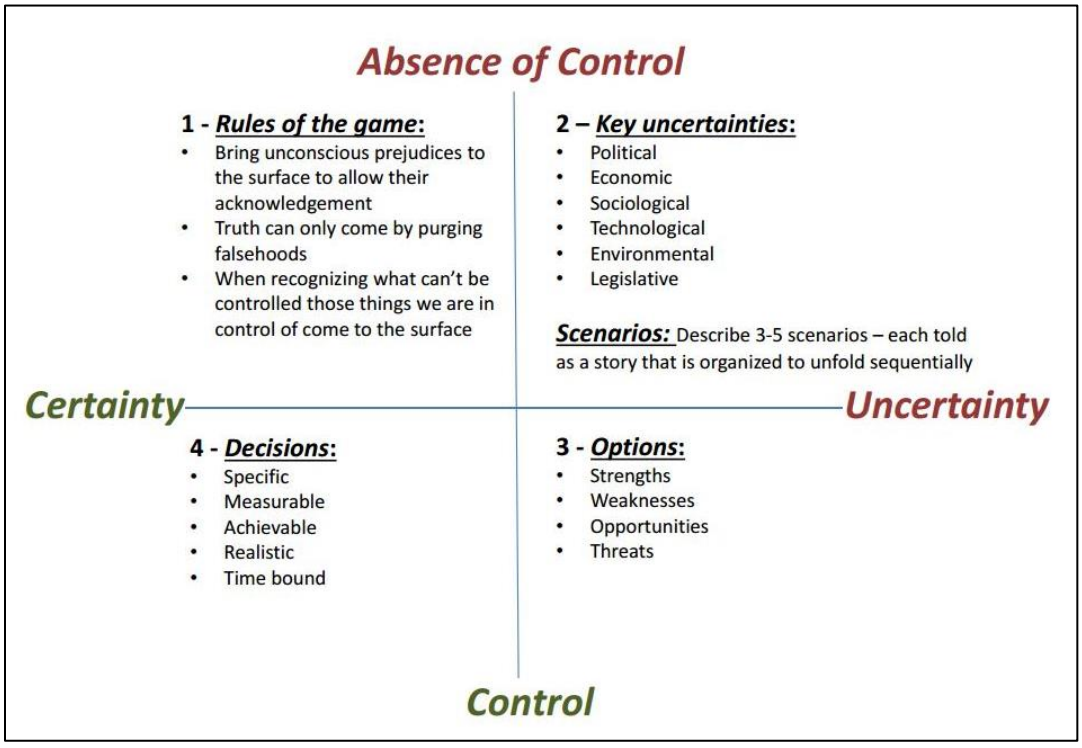

Figure 6.1: Key considerations in the scenario planning process with levels of certainty and control (Source: Brefi Group Limited, www.brefigroup.co.uk).

Table 6.1: Examples of prejudices and key uncertainties affecting successful conservation implementation in the Delta.

Prejudices – Limitations – Key Uncertainties	Controllable?	Potential Approach/Solution
Delta conservation is independent from other land uses	yes	Good neighbor practices
People do not benefit from Delta conservation	yes	Multi-benefit conservation
Conservation area managers are bad neighbors	yes	Good neighbor practices
Delta conservation is incompatible with agriculture	yes	Wildlife-friendly agriculture
People's needs don't matter to conservation decision makers	yes	Multi-benefit conservation
Conservation areas do not offer opportunities for recreation	yes	Multi-benefit conservation
Impacts of conservation (e.g., tidal wetland flooding) will negatively affect other land uses, especially agriculture (e.g., levee seepage affecting prime agricultural soils)	yes	Multi-benefit conservation
Status quo of subsidence is not a problem and does not have to be addressed through change in agricultural practices	yes	Education and outreach on carbon farming to reverse subsidence
Climate change effects will change the Delta ecosystems	somewhat	Maintaining or increasing ecosystem and infrastructure resilience through restoring ecosystem function and establishing transition zones
Will Delta stakeholders be able to move Delta conservation forward in collaboration?	yes	Outreach and inclusive planning partnerships

Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

The Open Standards provide a well-established conceptual framework and tool set for conservation planning, implementation, and monitoring. They represent the state-of-the-art in the conservation community's knowledge of the process for designing, managing, and monitoring conservation activities. [5,19,20,21] The Open Standards help conservation partnerships use a coordinated and systematic approach to their conservation initiatives so they can learn what works, what does not work, and why. Ultimately, this process allows conservation partnerships to adapt, improve their future efforts, and link in with other efforts which use the same approach to planning.

The five main Open Standards process steps are: 1) conceptualize the project; 2) develop a formal action plan; 3) implement actions; 4) analyze, use, and adapt; and 5) capture and share learning. These steps are described further in Appendix XV. The Open Standards also offer a software tool called Miradi for use throughout the planning process. It allows users to create conceptual models; analyze factors in

light of their impact on the conservation targets (e.g., specific ecosystem types, species, human-oriented benefits) and desired outcomes; and create implementation, management, and monitoring plans and project budgets.

The Open Standards' concepts can be applied at any stage in the conservation process, and they will allow planning teams to consider the benefits of conservation to human communities and integrate socioeconomic aspects.[22] They include an in-depth, rational analysis of individual strategies called "results chains" that allows planners to evaluate whether actions are linked, focused, feasible, and appropriate for reaching the targeted goal. By following if-then logic steps along a results chain, this evaluation ultimately prioritizes strategies to achieve conservation goals through related actions (Figure 6.2). The Open Standards also facilitate long-term planning in the context of climate change by encouraging planners to 1) understand and respond to existing and future impacts of climate change, alongside other conventional threats or pressures; and 2) develop and implement actions that do not erode options for responding to future climate change impacts.

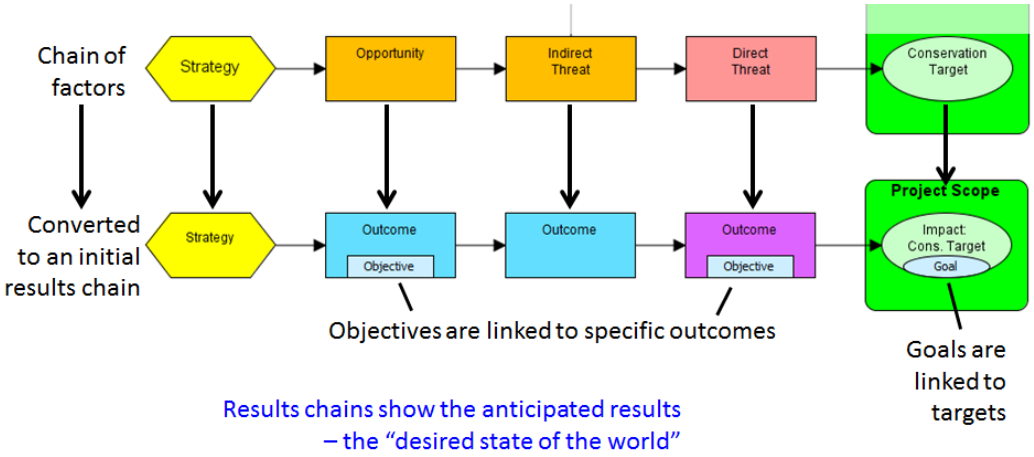

Figure 6.2: Example Open Standards results chain showing how the logic behind a strategy (yellow hexagon) can be tested in a step-by-step approach. Strategy is linked with intermediate action outcomes (blue) that are connected by "if then" statements and lead to the ultimate outcome (purple). These interconnected intermediate outcomes will then affect the desired outcome specific to a conservation target (e.g. ecosystem, species) and related goal (green). [Source: Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation]

The Open Standards approach and associated tools can support the development of Delta *Regional Conservation Strategies* by providing a structure to approach conservation planning consistently. Open Standards can be used in concert with scenario planning (described above), decision approaches such as SDM[23,24] (described below), and decision support models such as Marxan.[25] Marxan was used successfully by the Bay Area Conservation Lands Network for prioritization of Bay Area conservation lands.[26]

Structured Decision-Making

Resource management and conservation investment decisions are characterized by complexity and uncertainty. As a result of the complex links between ecosystem function, existing land uses, and local communities, Regional Partnerships will have to deliberate on a wide range of factors including 1)

multiple objectives and stakeholder perspectives; 2) overlapping jurisdictions of local, state, and federal agencies; 3) short- and long-term effects of land use and climate change on regional sustainability and ecosystem function; 4) cumulative effects of all factors combined over time and space; and 5) high levels of uncertainty. All these necessary considerations create an intricate web of potentially competing or confounding factors when planning conservation. As a result, the decisions made by a Regional Partnership must consider a combination of subjective judgments made by experts about the potential consequences of proposed alternatives, as well as difficult, value-based judgments about priorities, preferences, and risk tolerance. In some cases, these decisions are associated with high-stake economic, environmental, social, and political implications; and they will be closely scrutinized by technical, public, and political interests. Arriving at the best decision is even more difficult because stakeholders participating in a Regional Partnership are almost always working with limited resources. For example, government agencies are increasingly required to do more with less, on short timelines, and with rising expectations for quality, consistency, and transparent decision-making.

SDM is based in decision theory and risk analysis. It offers an organized and transparent approach to identifying and evaluating alternatives that integrates science and policy explicitly; and it focuses on engaging stakeholders, experts, and decision-makers in productive decision-oriented analysis and dialogue. The dialogue established by the SDM approach allows participants to deal proactively with complex problems and judgments by following a decision-focused roadmap for integrating activities related to planning, analysis, and consultation (Figure 6.3). SDM incorporates a simple set of concepts and helpful steps for problem-solving that are focused on achieving fundamental objectives. In SDM, every decision consists of several primary elements: management objectives, decision options (Alternatives), and predictions of decision outcomes (Consequences) (Figure 6.3). As a result, making decisions based on clearly articulated fundamental objectives includes crucial SDM concepts such as dealing explicitly with uncertainty and responding transparently to legal mandates and public preferences or values in decision-making[6] (Figure 6.3). SDM has been incorporated into the Adaptive Management Program

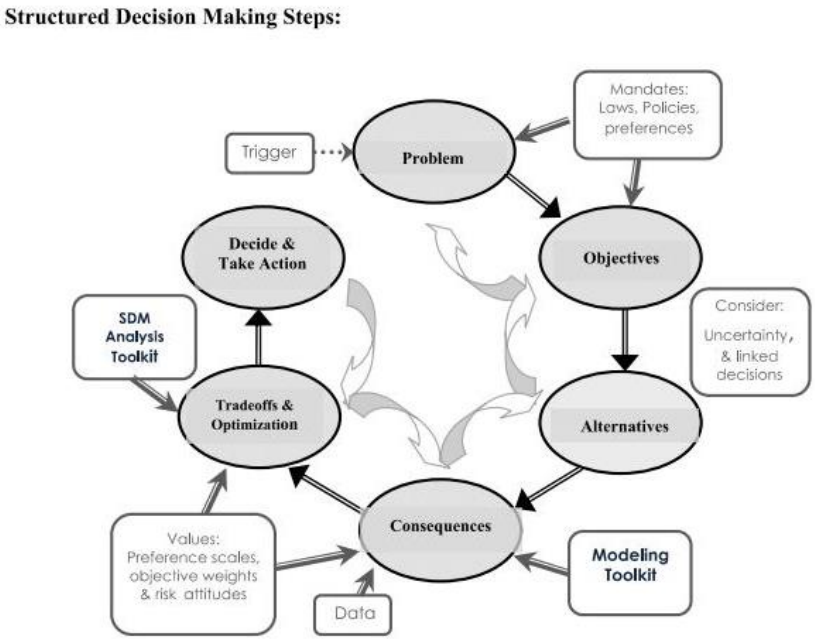

Figure 6.3: Structured Decision Making roadmap. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

process,[27] and it can be used to inform all phases of adaptive management (see more information in section IV).

The Open Standards or scenario planning results will directly contribute to the "Alternatives" and "Consequences" steps of the SDM cycle. Individual planners and land managers, or Regional Partnerships, can use these and other tools to plan conservation using a strategic, coordinated approach. By prioritizing conservation actions based on the likelihood of long-term effectiveness in achieving conservation objectives, the potential for outcomes to evolve over time, and short- and long-term cost effectiveness of projects, is clarified. By regularly re-evaluating factors, scenarios, strategies, and decisions over time, conservation planners will better understand how early projections played out and how management of conservation lands needs to be adjusted over time.

Conservation Opportunity Regions

The Delta Conservation Framework encourages implementing conservation projects on available publically owned lands, or on lands with existing conservation easements that usually have restricted land uses. If willing landowners are interested in participating in conservation activities, conservation projects could be implemented on privately-owned lands as well. Private landowners that already voluntarily participate in conservation activities include nongovernmental organizations like The Nature Conservancy or California Waterfowl Association and agricultural practitioners working with these and other entities.[28] During the 2016 Delta Conservation Framework public workshops, stakeholders identified COR to divide the Delta into smaller subregions that better reflect local land use, communities, ecosystem types, and the location of existing publically owned lands. These COR sit within roughly defined geographic regions in the Delta, Yolo Bypass, and Suisun Marsh where public lands and existing conservation lands offer opportunities for conservation. The COR identified here were developed to balance feedback from workshop participants, new and ongoing planning efforts, and conservation opportunity areas identified in the Delta Plan[29] and Draft Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP).[30] They include Suisun Marsh, Yolo Bypass, Cache Slough Complex, Central Delta Corridor Partnership, South Delta, North Delta, and Contra Costa.

Appendix II contains short summary overviews of individual COR that describe regional setting, management or planning history, opportunities for conservation, climate change and adaptation opportunities for long-term sustainability, potential solutions to recognized challenges, links to the Delta Conservation Framework, and entities/partnerships important for implementation. These COR summaries are intended as standalone segments of the Delta Conservation Framework to be used by existing and prospective Regional Partnerships to establish regional conservation planning efforts. The structure of COR overviews are similar; and in some cases, content may overlap for consistency. These COR overviews highlight the progress thus far in each COR with an existing or emerging Regional Partnership, or they provide ideas on how new Regional Partnerships and *Regional Conservation Strategies* could be developed in regions where these are not already under way.

Informing the Delta Plan Amendment

In 2015, the Delta Stewardship Council (Council) made a commitment to evaluate the need for an ecosystem restoration amendment to the Delta Plan. Separately, the Council also considered a Delta Plan amendment to address conveyance, storage, and operations of the water supply systems, also an original component of the 2013 BDCP Public Draft.[30] In an effort to inform an amendment of Chapter 4 of the Delta Plan on ecosystem protection, enhancement, and restoration, the Delta Conservation Framework provides overarching goals, and associated strategies and implementation objectives, with a combined emphasis on improving ecosystem function and better integrating the socioeconomic realities and needs of Delta residents, agricultural operators, and society (e.g., tourists; separately addressed by the Delta Plan, Chapter 5) into planning conservation. It also offers suggestions for how conservation project permitting could be made more efficient and for obtaining lasting funding support. This suite of goals also addresses the aims of most of the Draft BDCP conservation measures (CM; specifically: CM2-CM13, and CM21).[30] As a result, the Delta Conservation Framework goals could expand the current focus of the Delta Plan, Chapter 4, with a vision for conservation of a connected mosaic of habitats throughout the Delta, as well as additional recommendations for enhanced Delta channels and rivers, sustained and improved migratory bird habitats, minimized impacts to water quality, and detection and control of nonnative (invasive) species.

The Delta Conservation Framework does not address Delta-wide functional flows, nor does it speak to all aspects of improving water quality or improvement of hatcheries and fish harvest management that would result from conservation project implementation. It does include a strategy for maintaining or improving localized ecosystem water availability. The Delta Conservation Framework also does not include early Delta Stewardship Council's consideration of an amendment to the conveyance, storage, and operations of the water supply systems component of the Delta Plan. However, it does include goals and strategies addressing habitat and invasive species impacts; and it provides more insights for how to improve Delta ecosystem resiliency to climate change and other major drivers of change, as well as how to inform and promote mechanisms critical for successful implementation of conservation projects in the Delta going forward. Appendix VIII shows how the Delta Conservation Framework goals and strategies align with 2013 Delta Plan recommendations. Appendix V provides a crosswalk of preliminary goals for the amendment of Chapter 4 of the Delta Plan with the Delta Conservation Framework goals, strategies, and objectives.

The following efforts and resources will inform a Delta Plan, Chapter 4, amendment:

- Delta Conservation Framework, integrating recommendations from *A Delta Renewed*;[31]
- Issue Paper: *Restoring Habitat with Science and Society in Mind*;[32]
- Lessons learned from three years of consultation with project proponents, including promoting the use of best available science and adaptive management and reducing conflicts with existing land uses;
- The California *EcoRestore* experience with project permitting;
- The Yolo Bypass and Cache Slough Partnership experience with interagency collaboration on integrated flood management, habitat restoration, and agricultural sustainability;

- The tool box of strategies developed by the Agricultural and Lands Stewardship Working Group;[33]
- The draft Central Valley Flood Protection Plan Conservation Strategy, developed to support the 2017 update of the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan;[34,35]
- The ongoing development of an adaptive management program for *EcoRestore*, led by the California Natural Resources Agency, with technical leadership by the Council's Delta Science Program;[36]
- The conclusions of the Council's report, *Improving Habitats Along Delta Levees*[37]; and
- Lessons learned from the refinement of the Delta Plan performance measures and the development of project tracking tools.

Lasting Sustainability through Delta Conservation

In the context of ecology, the term sustainability describes the ability of ecological systems (ecosystems) to persist indefinitely by remaining diverse and productive. As described throughout this document, conservation is needed to reestablish degraded ecological functions of many Delta ecosystems. Making the connection between the people of the Delta and those entities committed to implementing conservation is vital. Effective education and outreach regarding the benefits of lasting and sustainable Delta ecosystems–their ecosystem services for all Californians–is a key goal with important political, economic, social, and environmental ramifications. Heightening public awareness of the direct connection between a sustainable and healthy environment and Californian's socioeconomic well-being is critical to sustaining the motivation to support and implement ecosystem conservation over the long term.[38]

Conservation

here means achieving system-wide multi-benefits by integrating protection, enhancement, reestablishment and reconciliation of ecological function of Delta ecosystems with watershed and agricultural sustainability, flood protection, recreation, and other drivers.

Ecological systems function on many interrelated scales. Untangling this functional complexity to identify key actions that will improve ecosystem function is a daunting task, especially when the drivers of ecosystem function are intermingled with human land uses in the Delta. There are numerous uncertainties surrounding our current understanding of each driver of Delta ecosystem function that must be recognized to effectively plan conservation for long-term outcomes. As described above, there are effective tools to help planners untangle this complexity despite key uncertainties, including the Open Standards, scenario planning, and SDM. These are vital tools to evaluate the best paths toward desired conservation outcomes in light of existing uncertainties. Regional Partnerships should consider using these tools as part of *Regional Conservation Strategy* development. Using these types of processes and tools alongside available Delta science will ensure that decisions will be backed

by the best available assumptions and data regarding the influence of conservation actions on ecosystem function. Instead of basing decisions on short-term thinking, conservation planners and stakeholders should be able to rely upon an evolving knowledge base to make and reevaluate decisions. This approach is especially critical when evaluating uncertainties around the effects of climate change on Delta ecosystems.

The Way Forward

Following the initiation of California *WaterFix*[39] and *EcoRestore*[40], CDFW committed to leading a high-level planning effort to advance the conservation of the Delta, Yolo Bypass, and Suisun Marsh. As a result, the Delta Conservation Framework offers approaches for stakeholder integration, conservation, and adaptive management of Delta ecosystems to benefit both human and natural communities. Building on prior Delta planning efforts, the Delta Conservation Framework provides a shared vision and long-term, landscape-scale goals in the context of climate change (see Sections I-IV; Appendix I).

VISION

In 2050, the Delta is composed of resilient natural and managed ecosystems situated within a mosaic of towns and agricultural landscapes, where people prosper and healthy wildlife communities thrive.

Based on the central premise that the long-term conservation of Delta ecosystems will benefit people and the environment, the guiding principles that underlie the Delta Conservation Framework focus on (See also Section I):

- PEOPLE AND PLACE: Recognize the *Delta as an evolving place* with unique agricultural, cultural, recreational, and natural resource values.
- BUILD COMMUNITY AND FOSTER PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH: Support outreach, education, and communication across interests, where participants are encouraged to hear all perspectives, interact with respect and humility, and shift the focus away from strict traditional roles toward a better understanding of the big picture to promote multi-benefit solutions.
- MULTIPLE BENEFITS: Integrate conservation with other land use practices, where possible, to provide simultaneous benefits for wildlife and people at a landscape scale over the long term.
- PROCESS-BASED ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION: Focus conservation practices on reestablishing natural ecological processes and promoting the functions and adaptive capacity of Delta ecosystems, rather than restoring the Delta to pre-Gold Rush Era conditions.
- PROMOTE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES: Highlight the societal values of the many services healthy ecosystems provide to humans by emphasizing these services as benefits to society. Delta

ecosystem services include open space, opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism, pollination services, flood protection, clean water, clean air, biodiversity, carbon sequestration and others.

- DECISIONS GROUNDED IN SCIENCE: In light of continuing ecosystem stressors and accelerating changes from climate shifts and other drivers, as well as changeable socioeconomic conditions, utilize scientific approaches to inform and evaluate conservation practices and projects and conservation-related human needs.
- INCREASED 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.
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LONG-TERM FUNDING NEEDS: Recognize that long-term funding is necessary for successful Delta conservation and management through 2050.

The Delta Conservation Framework strives to increase public awareness of Delta conservation and advance science-based conservation practices through a series of goals, strategies, and objectives. Its goals address solutions to conservation challenges, potential regulatory conflicts, and other impediments to conservation project implementation. The Delta Conservation Framework encourages using Regional Partnerships to integrate stakeholder perspectives into regional-scale conservation goals and serves as the long-term continuation of existing restoration initiatives, including California *EcoRestore*. Going forward, the Delta Conservation Framework will inform the amendment of the ecosystem elements of the Delta Plan and state funding priorities.

The path toward more ecologically functional Delta ecosystems within a thriving Delta community remains controversial. Despite mitigation requirements for infrastructure projects and the state and federal water projects, and a long history of public investment in Delta ecosystems through bond funds, few projects have been initiated and managed over the long term. Implementation of conservation in the Delta will continue to stall unless Delta stakeholders are willing to work collaboratively, knowing they may have to be open to considering and accepting tradeoffs. If no solutions can be found, Delta ecosystem conservation will remain on hold, or occur in a piecemeal fashion. In the meantime, Delta ecosystems and their important services to humans and wildlife will continue on their way toward decline.

There is a need to conduct outreach to Delta communities and landowners and bring their perspectives into regional scale conservation planning to inform where projects are sited in the context of local land uses. Collaborative implementation of the Delta Conservation Framework may be a way to make progress towards bridging the many human interests and wildlife needs in the Delta and to achieve lasting conservation success. Conducting conservation planning through Regional Partnerships with local landowners and stakeholders should inform siting of conservation projects, including projects required as mitigation and bond-funded projects. The Delta Conservation Framework prioritizes implementing conservation on publically owned lands, in areas with minimal impacts on local land uses, and in collaboration with willing private landowners. This collaborative approach could also result in increased willingness to consider multi-benefit solutions, or solutions with the least adverse effects on local

landowners. Throughout this process it is essential to recognize that Delta ecosystems can provide services to people while also supporting healthy wildlife habitats.

The Delta Conservation Framework is an invitation for all interested stakeholders to consider coming to the table to work together with the goal of finding acceptable solutions within the entire Delta landscape. It is a call to continue to contribute to improving ecosystem health, supporting and recovering Delta wildlife, and to keep growing the science capacity to allow continual learning from conservation actions in the context of the Delta as Place. This framework highlights the urgency of considering and facing the challenges of climate change and other factors. It is an appeal to utilize creative approaches to permitting processes and to obtain the necessary short- and long-term funding for Delta conservation and management. To achieve the overarching goals of the Delta Conservation Framework, stakeholders need to be willing to work collaboratively towards solutions to conservation challenges in the Delta. What will this look like?

376 # Endnotes

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