Delta Conservation Framework

September 2017 PUBLIC DRAFT – Section Summaries

Section 1: A Common Vision for a Sustainable Delta

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Yolo Bypass, and Suisun Marsh (Delta) comprise the largest inland estuary in the United States supporting a wide variety of native fish and wildlife species. It has also provided a home for communities with deep roots in agriculture and the land for over 200 years, and for Native American communities before that. Statewide, the Delta serves as the hub for California's water distribution system that supplies a large portion of the State's population and agricultural economy. The Delta Conservation Framework offers a vision for conservation (protection, enhancement, restoration, and management of ecosystems) in the Delta through 2050.

> **Vision Statement:** *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.*

The Framework's vision for the future Delta is founded on two themes:

1. **Integrating all stakeholders (including local landowners and communities) into the process of conservation planning.**
2. **Implementing conservation to restore ecological processes and improve or reestablish function of degraded or lost ecosystems.**

Developing a framework for planning and implementing conservation in a dynamic place with close ties to native biodiversity, California history, agriculture, and statewide economies is a daunting task.

CDFW has led the Delta Conservation Framework effort in partnership with Delta stakeholders, including federal, state, and local government representatives, conservation practitioners, non-profit organizations, landowners, residents, business owners. Guidance from three primary sources served as the foundation of the Delta Conservation Framework:

1. Feedback from a series of public workshops held in 2016;
2. Prior plans focused on the people and ecosystems of the Delta;
3. The best available science on ecosystem processes in the Delta.

CDFW pulled together relevant expertise from this strong foundation to develop a series of conservation goals, and look ahead to conservation implementation. Sections 2 - 6 of the Framework discuss the seven goals in more detail, and highlight how each goal was developed based on a foundation of prior planning documents, science, and stakeholder feedback.

Delta Conservation Framework

September 2017 PUBLIC DRAFT – Section Summaries

Section 1 - Discussion Questions:

1. Throughout the 2016 public workshop series, we heard about the importance of considering agriculture and communities in the Delta during conservation planning. Does the vision statement adequately balance agriculture and local communities with conservation over the long-term?

Delta Conservation Framework

Section 2: Integrating the Delta Community with Conservation

Today the Delta is at a crossroads between a long history of change of Delta ecosystems because of reclamation and expansion of agriculture, and an uncertain future with statewide water demands, climate change, and sea level rise over the next 100 years. Looking back over the recent history of conservation planning in the Delta, it is clear that there is a need to better integrate the perspectives of Delta stakeholders, including those of local community members and agriculture, with conservation planning and implementation.

Section 2 of the Delta Conservation Framework proposes three goals to ensure that all stakeholder perspectives are included when planning and implementing conservation in the Delta.

- **Goal A** highlights the need to **improve stakeholder communication and integrate considerations of local economies** by developing regional planning partnerships that guide conservation implementation in specified conservation opportunity regions of the Delta.
- **Goal B** focuses on expanded outreach campaigns to local, statewide, and national audiences. This outreach is intended to **highlight the uniqueness of the Delta** ecosystem, Delta as evolving Place, and the role the Delta plays in supporting the sixth largest economy in the world.
- **Goal C** discusses existing science and planning which shows how conservation goals can be integrated with flood control, agriculture, land subsidence, local water supplies, and local water quality to **achieve multi-benefit outcomes** for Delta ecosystems and local communities.

Together, the three goals in Section 2 of the Framework provide a strong foundation for planning conservation alongside stakeholders, agriculture, and local communities.

Section 2 - Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with the goals? Why or why not? What would you add or change?

2. Who should be involved, and how to ensure that the community is well represented in these planning partnerships?

Section 3: Value and Need for Ecosystem Conservation

Delta ecosystems have degraded substantially over time, and continue to do so, because of a host of factors including changes in land use, poor water quality, reduction in sediment supply, and invasive species. Populations of native fish and wildlife species have seriously declined in the past decade, and the ability of the Delta to provide ecosystem services to support the needs of people both locally and statewide have weakened.

Section 3 of the Delta Conservation Framework explains how long-term landscape-scale conservation planning can be used to implement projects that improve ecosystem function and connectivity, how this approach can also benefit listed species, and how it can be integrated into the strong agricultural traditions and local communities of the Delta. Recent investigations into the way Delta ecosystems functioned prior to 1800, how their function changed once land use changes took effect, and what processes will reestablish or improve this function serve as the foundation for Goal D. The aim of Goal D is to conserve Delta ecosystems to improve resiliency to climate change and benefit society and wildlife over the long term.

Goal D includes seven strategies. These strategies point to key factors determining the health of Delta ecosystems, including:

- ecosystem function and life-history support for native and migratory species
- conservation of transition zones
- improved ecosystem and wildlife population connectivity
- conditions conducive to listed species recovery
- support for aquatic food webs
- invasive species detection, management and control
- public access to conservation sites

Section 3 - Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with the goals? Why or why not? What would you add or change?

Section 4: Delta Conservation Based in Science

Effective conservation of Delta ecosystems and support people and wildlife requires best-available science and a commitment to long-term monitoring and evaluation should inform decisions about individual project design and long-term management.

Section 4 outlines the strong existing science capacity to inform decisions, which includes the Delta Science Program, the Delta Independent Science Board, the Collaborative Science and Adaptive Management Program, the State and Federal Water Agency Contractors Coordinated Science Program, the Interagency Ecological Program, the San Francisco Estuary Institute, University of California Davis, and the Public Policy Institute of California.

Goal E suggests three strategies to maintain and enhance existing Delta science capacity, and use long-term adaptive management to evaluate the progress of conservation throughout the Delta over time:

- Strategy E1: Implement the priority research science actions and needs outlined in the Delta Science Strategy, the IEP science agenda, and Delta smelt and salmonid Resiliency Strategies.
- Strategy E2: Utilize adaptive management, including coordinated, area wide monitoring programs, as an integrated part of Delta conservation to assess progress and status and trends of resources of interest.
- Strategy E3: Develop resources and recommended best practices to maintain or increase ecosystem and wildlife resiliency to projected climate change effects.

The wealth of ecological and socioeconomic studies should inform conservation-related decision-making, and new information should be integrated into current updates of the Delta Science Plan and the State of Bay-Delta Science. To evaluate the effectiveness of conservation-related actions over time, long-term monitoring as part of adaptive management is critical. Changing ineffective management actions will help to keep costs down and avoid unnecessary impacts. Adaptive management programs are planned to meet this need over the long term, the adaptive management program for the state and federal water project operations, and the California *EcoRestore* adaptive management program.

Section 4 - Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with the goals? Why or why not? What would you add or change?

Section 5: Facilitating Delta Conservation Practices

Despite the best intentions of ***Regional Conservation Plans*** developed collaboratively by stakeholders, the success of individual conservation projects will continue to be limited without new and creative approaches to permitting and long-term funding for land management and monitoring.

Section 5 includes two goals focused on these common conservation challenges.

- **Goal F** highlights the need to improve permitting processes in the Delta through improved coordination among regulatory agencies and project proponents, alternative permitting tools, and the development of regional or programmatic permits.

- **Goal G** focuses on the need to secure funding to implement conservation and manage lands over the long-term. It suggests strategies for better coordination of existing short-term grant programs, development of new long-term funding sources, and effective advertisement of funding opportunities to potential applicants.

Section 5 highlights the many existing opportunities to use existing permitting tools more effectively, develop new permitting tools, and expand existing funding opportunities. However, it also highlights that dedicating resources to improving communication and coordination among project proponents, regulatory agencies, and decision-makers is required to resolve the long-standing limitations posed by permitting and a lack of funds for long-term land management, and operation of infrastructure.

Section 5 - Discussion Questions:

Permitting

1. Do you agree with the goals? Why or why not? What would you add or change? Are the strategies suggested sufficient to address the goals? *For example, do you think a permitting ombudsman would be helpful? Or a regional permit approach?*

Funding

1. We have heard of the need for better management. Do you feel that is reflected adequately here? What other ideas do you have for how, in your view, long-term funding and staffing could best be used on State-owned conservation lands in your area?

Section 6: Delta Conservation Framework Implementation

The Delta Conservation Framework presents seven overarching goals to implement solutions to the primary challenges for conservation in the Delta. Recognized in prior planning efforts, Delta stakeholders also acknowledged these solutions in the 2016 Delta Conservation Framework workshop series. They span a wide range of topics, including the importance of:

1. Better integration of stakeholder and local community perspectives into conservation planning,
2. Basing conservation planning and evaluation on the best available science,
3. Addressing ongoing institutional challenges to implementing conservation projects, and
4. Making available long-term funding to support land management and monitoring.

Section 6 describes a path forward for implementing the goals of the Delta Conservation Framework through individual project implementation or through the development of ***Regional Conservation Strategies*** based on comprehensive analyses of available science and current land uses. It also describes planning frameworks and tools to support ***Regional Conservation Partnerships*** including *Structured Decision-Making* (SDM), scenario planning, and the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation*.

Conservation Opportunity Region appendices focused on Suisun Marsh, Yolo Bypass, Cache Slough, North Delta, South Delta, West Delta, and the Central Delta Corridor, describe in more detail potential conservation opportunities in regions of the Delta, Yolo Bypass, and Suisun Marsh. Regional planning partnerships exist to date in Suisun Marsh and the Yolo Bypass, and others are emerging in the Cache Slough Complex and the Central Delta Corridor, with the potential for more to develop in the North, South, and West Delta regions.

By implementing the Delta Conservation Framework with engagement from all stakeholders, it is possible to achieve our vision for the Delta in 2050, in which resilient natural and managed ecosystems are located within a mosaic of towns and agricultural lands that are connected across the landscape.

Section 6 - Discussion Questions:

1. Do you agree with the goal of using planning partnerships as a path forward? Why or why not?

2. How well do the proposed Planning Partnerships and associated ***Regions*** capture distinct portions of the Delta with unique land uses and communities?

Guiding Questions for Review of the Delta Conservation Framework Document

The idea of using a landscape-scale approach to conservation, as outlined in the Delta Conservation Framework, is to implement projects at the regional level, integrating management practices and desired outcomes with the perspectives of the local communities, yet tie their functional connectivity together across the entire Delta.

As you are reading this document, please think about the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the goals, strategies and objectives throughout Sections II-V? Why or why not? What would you add or change?

2. Does the vision statement and guiding principles in Section I adequately balance agriculture and local communities with conservation over the long-term?

3. Does Section II adequately cover who should be involved, and how to ensure that the community is well represented in these planning partnerships?

4. Our assumption is that multi-benefit projects are the best way to proceed in the Delta. Would you add anything to the list of benefits that we are trying to achieve in the Delta with our projects? Not all projects have to achieve all goals. Multi-benefit projects benefit ecosystems and people by integrating conservation with:
    - levee maintenance and flood management
    - recreation
    - wildlife-friendly agriculture
    - reversing subsidence through carbon farming
    - invasive aquatic weed control

5. Do the ideas based on historical ecology and ecosystem function presented in section III adequately reflect your understanding of/viewpoints about:
    a. How Delta conservation projects can best be implemented across the landscape to reestablish ecological processes at small and large scales?
    b. How Delta conservation practices can best tie in with local community priorities, coexist with, and support private landowner and Delta community needs relative to agriculture, recreation and tourism?

6. Does Section IV effectively demonstrate the current capacity of Delta Science and the continued need for science coordination in the context of conservation related decision-making? What is missing?
7. Does Section IV adequately reflect the idea that long-term adaptive management informs conservation projects, and allows adjustments into the future? How could the presentation of this be improved?

8. Do you think Section V adequately reflects how increasing support for conservation project managers to plan and obtain necessary permits could move conservation along faster in the Delta?

9. Examples of ideas to support conservation project permitting include dedicated staff resources at regulatory agencies, establishing a permitting ombudsman position, or developing regional permits. Does section V provide suitable examples of the permits that are the primary limiting factor in launching conservation projects in your area?

10. Do you think section V adequately reflects the voice of the community regarding the need for long-term funding to manage State-owned conservation lands, and improve neighbor-to-neighbor relationships between agencies and private landowners? What could be improved, or added?

11. In section VI and the document, do you agree with the goal of using planning partnerships as a path forward? Why or why not?

12. How well do the proposed Planning Partnerships and associated ***Regions*** capture distinct portions of the Delta with unique land uses and communities?