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Proposed Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan for the Suisun Marsh: Scoping Process Fact Sheet

Volume 1

Suisun Marsh Charter Group Members



Description of Program Location

The Suisun Marsh is located downstream from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and upstream from the Central San Francisco Bay and is entirely in southern Solano County. For the purpose of this program, the southern boundary of the Suisun Marsh



extends from the Town of Collinsville, west along the Contra Costa County and Solano County boundary. On the north, the program boundary extends from the Town of Cordelia east along Highway 12. Highway 680 creates the western boundary, and Shiloh Road from Highway 12 to Collinsville delineates the eastern boundary.

The Marsh falls into the Suisun Marshlands and Bay Ecological Management Unit of the California Bay Delta Authority's (CBDA) Suisun Marsh and North San Francisco Bay Ecological Management Zone. With about 30,000 acres of sloughs and small bays; about 50,000 acres managed wetlands; and about 5,500 acres tidal marsh, the Suisun Marsh is the largest contiguous brackish water wetland in California. It is an important wetland on the Pacific Flyway, providing food and habitat for migratory birds. This intricate mosaic comprises over 10 percent of the remaining wetlands and associated companion habitats in California.

The Suisun Marsh provides habitats for many species of plants, fish, and wildlife, in addition to wintering and nesting habitat for waterfowl on the Pacific Flyway. The salt marsh harvest mouse, California black rail, California clapper rail, the Peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and Aleutian Canada goose inhabit the Marsh. Suisun Marsh supports about 45 fish species, 230 bird species, 45 mammal species, 10 reptile species, and 5 amphibian species. The Marsh also harbors sensitive plant species and communities including several rare species. The Suisun thistle is a Marsh endemic and is found nowhere else in the world. The predominant habitat types in the Marsh are tidal sloughs, brackish tidal marshes, seasonal brackish managed marshes, and grasslands.

The non-tidal wetlands are primarily managed for waterfowl. An extensive levee network, including 229 miles of exterior levees and many miles of interior levees, allow the landowners, both private and the public, to control water levels on these lands. An extensive network of sloughs conveys tidal flows and some freshwater flow into the Marsh. Montezuma Slough, the largest of these, is connected to Suisun Bay at its eastern and western ends. The slough is an important nursery area for many fish, including Chinook salmon, striped bass, splittail, and delta smelt. The Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates were constructed near the eastern slough entrance and began operation in the fall of 1988 to limit the tidal influx of saltwater from the Bay into Suisun Marsh. These salinity control structures can operate from September through May to meet water quality standards.

The Suisun Marsh Plan will provide for protection and enhancement of the Pacific Flyway, existing wildlife in managed wetlands, endangered species, restoration of tidal marsh and other ecosystems, water quality, and the maintenance and improvement of levees. It will also include specific actions relative to an amendment to the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement and strategies to resolve permitting issues related to past and ongoing maintenance and management activities.

Please provide comments by Feb. 9, 2004 to:

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Preliminary Program Goals

The overarching goal of the proposed program is to develop alternatives leading to a programmatic regional plan that will outline the actions necessary in Suisun Marsh to:

- preserve and enhance managed seasonal wetlands;
- implement a comprehensive levee protection/improvement program; and
- protect ecosystem and drinking water quality, while restoring habitat for tidal marsh-dependent sensitive species.

The proposed Suisun Marsh Plan will address strategies to resolve permitting issues related to past, ongoing, and future maintenance and management activities, and identifies strategies to resolve other interagency conflicts related to the management of the Suisun Marsh. The Suisun Marsh Plan also provides for approval of an amendment to the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement, and for implementation of the CBDA's Levee Program in the Suisun Marsh.

Preliminary Goal 1: Ecological Processes – Rehabilitate natural processes where feasible in the Suisun Marsh to more fully support, with minimal human intervention, natural aquatic and associated terrestrial biotic communities and habitats, in ways that favor native species of those communities, with a particular interest in waterfowl and sensitive species.

Preliminary Goal 2: Habitats – Protect, restore, and enhance habitat types where feasible in the Suisun Marsh for ecological and public values such as supporting species and biotic communities, ecological processes, recreation, scientific research, and aesthetics.

Preliminary Goal 3: Levee System Integrity – Provide long-term protection for multiple Suisun Marsh resources by maintaining and improving the integrity of the Suisun Marsh levee system.

Preliminary Goal 4: Non-Native Invasive Species – Prevent the establishment of additional non-native species and reduce the negative ecological and economic impact of established non-native species in the Suisun Marsh.

Preliminary Goal 5: Water and Sediment Quality – Improve and/or maintain water and sediment quality conditions to provide good quality water for all beneficial uses and fully support healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystems in the Suisun Marsh; and to eliminate, to the extent possible, toxic impacts to aquatic organisms, wildlife, and people.

Preliminary Goal 6: Public Use and Waterfowl Hunting – Maintain the heritage of waterfowl hunting and increase the surrounding communities' awareness of the ecological values of the Suisun Marsh.

Overview of Environmental Review

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) are serving as the co-lead Federal agencies while the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is the lead State agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

In compliance with both NEPA and CEQA, a joint Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Report will analyze, through the development of a range of alternatives, the beneficial and adverse effects of implementing a Suisun Marsh Plan on environmental resources including: water quality, fisheries, wildlife, vegetation, special-status species, land use, land use development patterns, population, housing, economics, and public services (fire protection, vector control), cultural resources, air quality, noise, recreation, energy, visual impacts, and socioeconomic condition. Specific alternatives to the proposed Suisun Marsh Plan have not been identified at this time and will be developed following public scoping.