

**Panel Scientific and Technical Review Form**  
(Note: Review comments will be anonymous, but public)

**Proposal number: 2001-E209**

**Proposal title: Suisun Marsh Land Acquisition and  
Tidal Marsh Restoration**

**1a) Are the objectives and hypothesis clearly stated?**

*Summary of Reviewer's comments:*

Both reviewers concluded that the objectives are clearly stated. The exact hypotheses cannot be determined until the specific sites are identified.

*Panel Summary:*

Overall hypothesis is that adverse impacts associated with hydrology changes, non-native species, and contaminant stressors will be reduced through tidal marsh restoration. Proposal itself represents initial acquisition step and is not specifically designed to test this hypothesis. Nevertheless, the proposal outlines subsequent steps that will satisfy this evaluation criteria. The objectives are not clearly stated and it appears to be buried in the proposal text.

**1b1) Does the conceptual model clearly explain the underlying basis for the proposed work?**

*Summary of Reviewer's comments:*

Basis for the conceptual model is well presented and the proposers are familiar with the benefits of tidal marsh restoration for this region.

*Panel Summary:*

Proposal provides general discussion of possible stressors and how tidal restoration would reduce these stressors. Some examples are given, but no specific studies or analyses are provided. The model does not relate to any specific actions to be taken as a result of this particular funding.

**1b2) Is the approach well designed and appropriate for meeting the objectives of the project?**

*Summary of Reviewer's comments:*

The general region of Suisun Bay selected for acquisition is suitable and provides ecological benefits. One reviewer stated that the proposers have a complete design for the project and understood all the steps towards meeting the ultimate conclusion. Another reviewer stated that the lack of specificity was

disturbing and that it is difficult to know what will actually occur with these lands until the determination of which lands are available and the type of restoration that may occur.

***Panel Summary:***

Project represents first phase (acquisition) of lands in order to conduct analyses for latter tidal marsh restoration. There are no criteria provided for the selection of these lands that would meet the objectives of the project. No specific land acquisition sites are proposed as sales will be based on future willing sellers; however, some lands are identified as possible acquisition. The greatest uncertainty is what type of restoration is being proposed. Only one paragraph is provided as to the type of restoration—presumably levee removal. However, the constraints and issues involved in the restoration of these lands is only cursorily reviewed. This could present a major problem and the costs for future analysis, restoration planning, and implementation cannot be determined from this approach. The panel believes that this project does not provide a well designed approach to meeting the objectives of the project.

**1c1) Has the applicant justified the selection of research, pilot, or demonstration project, or a full-scale implementation project?**

***Summary of Reviewers' comments***

Reviewers believe that the project is justified whereas one reviewer questioned specifically why the focus of the acquisition is northeast Suisun Bay.

***Panel summary:***

No research or pilot demonstration is proposed. The applicant has not provided any “model” approach to restoration that has been demonstrated elsewhere. Much of the lands may be held “as-is” until a restoration plan has been formulated. No background information is provided on these habitats and therefore it is difficult to understand what benefits may come from the restoration.

**1c2) Is the project likely to generate information that can be used to inform future decision making?**

***Summary of Reviewers' comments:***

One reviewer felt that this project provided targeted research to determine the effects of levee breaching and that the approach was very comprehensive. The second reviewer stated that since this proposal is only land acquisition, the proposal lacked any process to inform decision making in the future. No precise parcels have been identified.

***Panel summary:***

Information will be generated on land prices for the region. The panel did not find any evidence in the proposal of a comprehensive restoration plan for these properties and could not find any description of targeted research as mentioned by one reviewer. There is no program described in the proposal that would provide useful information for other projects.

**2a) Are the monitoring and information assessment plans adequate to assess the outcome of the project?**

***Summary of Reviewers' comments:***

Both reviewers indicated that no monitoring was provided in the proposed activity and that it was deferred to later phases. One reviewer suggested that it would have been useful to have seen some basic structure or outline of the monitoring plans so that it could influence land acquisition priorities.

***Panel summary:***

No monitoring is proposed nor any reporting on how the acquisition process is proceeding over time. There is no time frame proposed for the acquisition to be accomplished or methodology to assess whether acquisition of individual parcels will eventually lead to a suitable restoration area. The budget for later phases provides some components for future monitoring, but the type of monitoring is not described in the proposal.

**2b) Are the data collection, data management, data analysis, and reporting plans well described, scientifically sound and adequate to meet the proposed objectives?**

***Summary of Reviewers' comments:***

Reviewers agreed that acquisition and appraisal information will be collected. One reviewer suggested that information on the properties be placed in a GIS-based system. This would assist with later phases of the project.

***Panel summary:***

No data collection is proposed other than parcel and land appraisals. This information is sufficient for this phase of the project.

**3) Is the proposed work likely to be technically feasible?**

***Summary of Reviewers' comments:***

One reviewer stated that the project's success will be dependent upon willing sellers. The other reviewer indicated that the applicants have provided an experimental approach to restoration and have

divided the project into various phases.

***Panel summary:***

Land acquisition is only feasible if willing sellers are identified. The panel disagrees with one reviewer that restoration will be successful. The restoration phase of the project has not been adequately described in this proposal. No specific restoration plans have been put forth and it is difficult to determine how restoration will be done if there land parcels are not contiguous. The specific constraints associated with restoration in this portion of the Bay have not been described in the proposal and therefore, it is not apparent that the applicant has considered the technical feasibility of the restoration. In addition, the funding requested for stewardship is very limited and may require substantially more funding if restoration is delayed.

**4) Is the proposed project team qualified to efficiently and effectively implement the proposed project?**

***Summary of Reviewers' comments:***

Both reviewers felt that the co-applicants were qualified from a land acquisition and management prospective. One reviewer suggested that additional consultants specializing in wetland restoration be included in future phases. The other reviewer felt that other agencies and groups proposing restoration in Suisun Marsh are more directed towards mitigation requirements and not to the best interests of the habitat. Higher restoration success would be accomplished by the co-applicants.

***Panel summary:***

Yes, the two co-applicants are experienced in this type of work involving acquisition and land management. It is not clear what the role will be played by all the staff listed for USFWS and no qualifications are given for staff that may be involved in assessing habitat values and restoration potential of the various lands. Additional staff from USFWS should have been identified.

**5)Other comments** None

**INDIVIDUAL REVIEWER OVERALL EVALUATION SUMMARY RATING AND COMMENTS:**

**VERY GOOD.** Although this is the very initial phase of a multi-phase project that only involves land

acquisition, it promises future restoration of some significant parcels of former wetlands in northeastern Suisun Bay. The proposal would have been enhanced significantly (and the project, if funded, should incorporate) by the inclusion of a systematic process for ranking land parcels being considered for acquisition based on ecological, technical and socioeconomic criteria that are designed to “build” a broad, interconnected restoration base in that region of the Bay.

**EXCELLENT.** The proposal demonstrates an outstanding grasp of the physical processes, biological values, and ecological stressors within Suisun Marsh. The area identified for restoration will complement the CALFED ERP, and other wetland restoration activities in Suisun funded by the existing Suisun Marsh Mitigation Agreement between DWR, CDFG, SRCD, and USBR. The experimental approach outlined in this proposal to test alternate restoration strategies will yield critical information for future regional restoration efforts. The project proponents have carefully considered the critical importance of linking shallow water marsh with upland transition zones. The applicants have demonstrated through past performance on their lands managed in the San Francisco Estuary that they have the institutional will and expertise to do this right.

**Overall Evaluation  
PANEL SUMMARY COMMENTS**

The proposal only accomplishes the first phase of restoration: land acquisition. Unfortunately, there are no criteria established for the acquisition of these lands. In addition, willing sellers have not been identified. There is no proposal or guarantee of restoration of these lands. It may take a considerable period of time to acquire and study these lands before restoration can begin. Land holding costs and maintenance costs may be much greater than anticipated given the need to maintain levees and water control structures. The primary difficulty with this proposal is the lack of specificity as to which lands will be acquired, how restoration will be implemented, and what the overall habitat goals are for the project. The project does not even reference the San Francisco Bay Habitat Goals objectives for this region as a basis for the future restoration. The panel does not agree with the reviewers ranking—in particular one reviewer appeared to read more into the proposal than the proposers presented.

**OVERALL PANEL EVALUATION SUMMARY RATING: FAIR**