

# Conservancy Currents

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy's Newsletter

*A partner for balanced ecosystem restoration and economic development in the Delta*

Fall 2015—Winter 2016 Volume 4, Issue 2

## Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program

While fish is a highly nutritious food and an important part of a healthy diet, many types of fish caught in the Delta and other California water bodies contain mercury. Mercury can be found naturally in the environment but is also found in

Delta waterbodies in elevated amounts as a result of California's mining history. The Conservancy has teamed up with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), to implement the Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (Delta MERP). Through Delta MERP, the Conservancy is raising awareness, in a linguistic and

culturally appropriate manner, about the mercury contamination of sport fish in the Delta. The goal of the project is to reduce exposure to mercury from consumption of contaminated Delta fish among impacted populations.



Through a small grants program administered by Delta MERP, three community-based organizations—California Indian Environmental Alliance, Lao Khmu Association, and Asian Pacific Self-Development and Residential Association—have been awarded \$15,000 each to implement projects in their community. The funded projects aim to reduce human exposure to mercury through education and outreach to the community with Woman, Infant and Children Clinics (WIC Clinics); provide educational information at community events, community centers and one-on-one meetings; translate MERP materials into other languages; develop signs for posting at fishing locations; and incorporate MERP education into existing educational programs.

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## Delta Waterway Cleanup

The Conservancy celebrated the California Coastal and International Cleanup Day on September 19th by hosting a Delta Waterway Cleanup on Sherman Island with the Rio Vista Windsurfers Association and Sherman Island Kiteboarding Organization. Volunteers cleaned up over a mile along the waterway and anglers in the area joined in to pick up an estimated two tons of trash (one full dumpster). The Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps participated in the cleanup and hauled away 68 tires that were found near the waterway. California Coastal Cleanup Day takes place annually on the third Saturday of September and is one of the largest volunteer events in California.

The event is also part of the International Coastal Cleanup which is one of the largest volunteer events on the planet. The next Delta Waterway Cleanup is

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***Chair's Corner***

## ***Conservancy Poised to Support Delta as Place and Restoration Work***

The Delta is a great place. Whether it be to recreate, explore, raise a family, or grow food, it's a great place. The Delta is also an evolving place. As the epicenter of California's water issues,

discussions are happening at all levels, inside and outside the Delta regarding the movement of water, fish species, crops grown, and the strength of the levees.

How do we make room for this evolution while not losing sight of the Delta? We do this by honoring all that makes the Delta what it is. We increase awareness of the Delta as a place with deep roots and new opportunities.

We support the Delta's Legacy Communities while promoting them as a tourism destination. We promote the health of the water while encouraging folks to use it for boating, kitesurfing, and fishing. We acknowledge the importance of fish and bird species to the ecosystem while promoting outdoor activities. We look for ways to make the delivery of Delta crops to markets easier while

promoting agri-tourism. And we boost levee strength while encouraging Sunday drives to Delta restaurants and museums.

The Conservancy is committed to honoring the Delta as a place. Our marketing campaign, discussed on page 3, explores how we're trying to raise awareness of the Delta as a place. And the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program supports restoration and enhancement, water quality, and agricultural sustainability. The Conservancy is also supportive of the Delta Protection Commission's Community Action Planning workshops designed to preserve local communities' heritage and values while improving their economic vitality. However the Delta evolves, keeping sight of the Delta as a place will ensure that it continues to be a great place.



*Historic pear label from a Delta farm.*

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## ***Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Board***

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**Erik Vink**  
*Delta Protection Commission*

*The Board meets on the fourth Wednesday of every other month, beginning with January. For Board materials, please see the Conservancy website at: [www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov](http://www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov).*

## *Campbell's Corner* **Flood Preparedness**

While it is always a good idea to be prepared for flood events, this year presents much higher probabilities that significant and possibly record rainfall associated with El Nino could impact the Delta and surrounding low lying areas. Please take some time to prepare. California Storm Ready has a website that provides information on how you can prepare as an individual, how the State is preparing and what to do before, during, and after storms. You can access the site at [storms.ca.gov](http://storms.ca.gov). The Delta Protection Commission has a [Flood Preparedness website](#) that has many excellent resources to help you prepare. The Conservancy produced a video on preventing flood related contamination entitled, Getting Prepared: Preventing Flood Contamination in the Delta. You can access the video on our website ([link](#)). The state and the reclamation districts throughout the Delta are preparing by addressing high risk areas and stockpiling materials for flood fights. Emergency services are always at the ready to help notify and evacuate if necessary, but individual preparation is critical to prevent loss of life and property. Please take some time to review these resources and prepare yourself, your family and home, and your farm or business. Hopefully we get just the right amount of snow and rainfall to ease the drought without any flooding. Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.



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## **Delta Awareness Campaign: Marketing**

Folks that live and work in the Delta know what a great place it is to be. Whether you're interested in boating, birds, wine, or windsurfing (or anything in between), there is a lot to do and see. Even though tourism and recreation is one of the top economic drivers in the Delta—second to agriculture—many people outside of the Delta, however, do not know how many great opportunities exist in the region.

Partnering with the Delta Protection Commission (Commission), the Conservancy has spent the last couple of years raising funds to implement an awareness campaign for the Delta. The first phase of the campaign was completed last year with the creation of a Delta brand. Phase two—the development and initial implementation of the marketing campaign—is now underway.

The Conservancy has contracted with Jungle Communications to develop a five-year marketing plan and undertake the initial implementation. Since beginning the project earlier this year, the consultant has been developing a Delta-wide website that provides information on activities and opportunities in the Delta.

The Conservancy and Commission have also formed the Delta Marketing Task Force to help guide the agencies and the consultant in developing the marketing plan. The task force has met twice to discuss specific promotions and ideas for inclusion in the marketing plan. A central focus of the marketing plan will be promoting existing festivals and potentially developing a new festival.

If you're interested in joining the task force or want to ensure that

your tourism or recreation business or activity are included in the web site, please contact Amanda Bohl at (916) 376-4022 or [Amanda.bohl@deltaconservancy.ca.gov](mailto:Amanda.bohl@deltaconservancy.ca.gov).

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### **Delta Waterway Cleanup**

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scheduled for spring as a part of Sacramento's Creek Week. If interested in more information, please contact Kathryn Kynett at (916) 376-4024 or [kathryn.kynett@deltaconservancy.ca.gov](mailto:kathryn.kynett@deltaconservancy.ca.gov).

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## *Delta Watershed Initiative: DEDUCE*

The Delta Science Plan identifies a need to improve the organization of and tools for communicating Delta science to guide policy for management of the Delta ecosystem. In response to this need, the Conservancy is implementing the Delta Environmental Data for an Understanding of a California Estuary (DEDUCE), a project of the Conservancy's Delta Watershed Initiative (Delta WIN), in partnership with the San Francisco Estuary Institute-Aquatic Science Center, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Delta Stewardship Council, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the State and Federal Contractors Water Agency. DEDUCE is improving the accessibility and exchange of priority water quality data from the Delta by including data in an estuary-wide data center. California's data centers are the hub of information and allow data to be accessed through a variety of tools, such as the My Water Quality portals, the California Environmental Data Exchange Network (CEDEN) and the Contaminant Data Download and Display (CD3). The Conservancy has worked with federal and state agencies and other entities in the Delta to identify priority datasets which are not currently stored in a centralized location. The Conservancy is now in the process of transferring priority data to the estuary-wide data center. The result will be increased access to water quality data for the public as well as scientists and decision-makers who use Delta science as a foundation for policy and management decisions.

In addition to advancing data sharing, Delta WIN includes environmental education as a critical component of a comprehensive watershed based approach to environmental stewardship. The Conservancy is currently partnering with the Sacramento Area Creeks Council to develop curriculum for using Litterati in the classroom. Litterati allows citizens to upload images of trash in the environment and geotags the images to create a worldwide display of trash. The use of hashtags to describe pollution allows for reporting on the amount and type of trash found. The goal is to engage students through an art and technology approach to citizen science. This project is set to be complete by 2015 after which, the curriculum will be available through the Conservancy's website. If interested in more information, please contact Kathryn Kynett at (916) 376-4024 or [Kathryn.kynett@deltacconservancy.ca.gov](mailto:Kathryn.kynett@deltacconservancy.ca.gov).

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### *Mercury Exposure*

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The signs with advisory information about safely consuming fish caught from the Delta are expected to be ready for posting at fishing access locations in 2016. The translation of Delta MERP advisories to Chinese, Khmer, Lao, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Hmong are nearing completion. Community involvement is key to the success of Delta MERP. If you are interested in more information or participating in community stakeholder group meetings, please contact Kathryn Kynett at [Kathryn.Kynett@deltacconservancy.ca.gov](mailto:Kathryn.Kynett@deltacconservancy.ca.gov) or (916) 376-4034 or visit <http://deltacconservancy.ca.gov/>.

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### *EcoAtlas: Delta Projects Added*

In 2012, the Conservancy reached out to project proponents to discuss wetland project tracking needs. EcoAtlas was identified as the best tool for tracking this type of information. The Conservancy secured federal funding to move forward in utilizing EcoAtlas as a tracking tool.

Completed in October, this project significantly expanded EcoAtlas ([www.ecoatlas.org](http://www.ecoatlas.org)), the state's repository for wetland project data, to include hundreds of habitat protection, enhancement, and restoration projects throughout the Central Valley and San Francisco Bay-Delta regions, including 172 projects in the Delta and Suisun Marsh. Detailed project data, critical for natural resource managers, such as acres of distinct habitat types, species benefitted by project, project progress and status, and funding information, were added to the project tracking database.

Additional functionality was added to EcoAtlas to allow for the visual display, querying and extraction of this tabular and spatial project data.

As new projects are developed and existing projects enter new phases, information can be expanded and updated through the new data portal that allows project proponents to enter and update information displayed in EcoAtlas. Additional data layers such as modern Delta habitats were added to EcoAtlas to allow users to evaluate projects within the context of existing ecological resources and other landscape characteristics and uses. Going forward, the Conservancy will continue to reach out to project managers and assist in keeping information updated to ensure that this stellar tracking system will continue to inform wetland management.

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[This article is generously provided by Carol A. Jensen.](#)

## Delta Agriculture has a long and varied history

Our California Delta agricultural history is long and varied. It is primarily the history of growing single crops for export. Agricultural and cattle production begins with farming the Spanish (1784-1810) and Mexican (1819-1846) land grants adjacent to the Sacramento and San Joaquin Delta. Crucial to any farm is a river, creek, or slough for irrigation. Hand-drawn maps or diseños of these ranchos/farms describe properties along the California Delta containing anywhere from 3,000 to 20,500 acres. Key to agricultural success in the 19th and early 20th centuries is a river landing for shipping produce and direct market access to San Francisco.

Commodity, not subsistence, farming has been a hallmark Delta occupation. Cattle ranching and the sale of cattle hides to eastern United States leather manufacturers was one of the first cash crop businesses in California.

Introduction of domestic wheat and oat seed is often attributed to Dr. John Marsh, who owned Rancho los Meganos located in the San Joaquin Delta. Wheat cultivation is a dry farming crop that does not require irrigation, making the hills and dry plains of the upper San Joaquin Delta an ideal growing area. More grain products were shipped from this agricultural region between 1870 and 1900 than from all other areas in the United States combined. Much of this grain was transported by water and subsequently by rail to the McNear

Wharf and the California Wharf and Warehouse companies (Balfour Guthrie & Co.) located at Post Costa.

Fruit, nut, and vegetable production was introduced to the Delta as irrigation canals redirected water from creeks and sloughs. Placer miners at the end of the California gold rush of necessity applied their water transportation systems to crop irrigation. A series of federal Swamp and Overflow Acts beginning in 1850 allowed reclamation of land from wetlands and perimeter Delta lands, adding to

Preserving seasonal and large-production commodities such as peaches, apricots, cherries tomatoes, pears, and asparagus, was accomplished historically through heat process canning in metal containers. Even with refrigeration (ice) railroad cars, it was difficult to transport fresh seasonal fruit and vegetables across the Great Basin to the East, but air-dried or sulfur-dried fruits could make the journey. The largest fruit drying operation in California was in Oakley until freeze-dry food processing became an alternative in the 1970s. Growers’



*The canning crew at the Isleton Libby factory in 1927. The Delta at one time had several of these production facilities. Many such factories closed over time as consumers looked for fresher, not canned, food.*

the amount of land suitable for growing celery, tomatoes, lettuce, corn, and asparagus. Russet potatoes, for which Idaho and Luther Burbank are justly famous, were grown early on in these reclaimed land tracts. Bartlett pears known to tolerate “wet feet” (roots) thrive in boggy, soggy, spongy wetlands.

cooperatives (e.g., Grange) and fruit exchanges marketed and shipped local produce. Canneries such as Hickmott Foods, Western California Cannery (later known as Tillie Lewis Foods) and F.E. Booth (fish) Canning Company were large seasonal employers.

Delta farming today is part of the “food to fork” movement and the agri-tourism business. Fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables arrive daily to both farmers’ markets and traditional grocery outlets. The increasing numbers of award winning wineries merit a unique Delta appellation for quality. All are available within a 100-mile drive of the major urban/suburban population areas of San Francisco, San Jose, and Sacramento.

## Conservancy Staff

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*Mission: Working collaboratively and in coordination with local communities, the Conservancy will lead efforts to protect, enhance, and restore the Delta's economy, agriculture and working landscapes, and environment, for the benefit of the Delta region, its local communities, and the citizens of California.*



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN

**DELTA CONSERVANCY**

A California State Agency

*A partner for balanced ecosystem restoration  
and economic development in the Delta*

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