

Conservancy Currents

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy's Newsletter

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

Winter 2017

Delta MERP Posts First Sign in the Delta!

Eating fish is good for you in many ways. It's full of vitamins and other nutrients; it's good for your heart because it has omega-3 fatty acids that lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and it's an important part of a balanced diet. However, there are high levels of mercury in many fish caught in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Delta) which is a concern for your health. Mercury is a toxic metal that poses serious health risks and is most harmful to infants, children, and developing fetuses.

The Delta Conservancy, working collaboratively with federal, state and local agencies, along with other stakeholders, is a partner in the Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (Delta MERP) the goal of

which is to educate the public about how to make safe choices when eating fish from the Delta. Specifically, the Conservancy has coordinated and planned the posting of fish advisory signs in the Delta, including outreach to potential partners that would post physical signs.

Through this coordination, Delta MERP has developed and field tested fish consumption advisory signs that will be posted in fishing locations throughout the Delta in early 2017, with the first sign being posted recently at the Cosumnes River Preserve! Each of the advisories are also printed in trifold brochures and one-page flyers that have been translated into Spanish, Vietnamese,

Cambodian, Hmong, Chinese, Laotian, Khmer, Tagalog, and Russian.

To assist consumers of fish in making safe decisions, the signs and brochures issued by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) provide warnings and guidance on the specific types and amount of Delta fish that can be eaten safely. These advisories provide information on which fish species have low, medium, or high levels of mercury and are specific to the Sacramento River and North Delta, San Joaquin River, and Central and South Delta to help you protect yourself from harmful levels of mercury. It is important to consult your local Delta advisory before eating fish caught in the region.

Delta MERP awarded \$15,000 grants to three community-based organizations in 2015, and awarded \$20,000 grants to two

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The first Delta MERP Sign at the Cosumnes River Preserve.

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DELTA CONSERVANCY
A California State Agency

Chair's Corner

Jim Provenza

Delta Conservancy Looking to the Future with its Strategic Plan Update

It's amazing that five years has passed since the Delta Conservancy adopted its first Strategic Plan. We have come a long way and, as we look ahead, it is important to reflect on the

Conservancy's accomplishments so far:

- Secured \$50 Million in Proposition 1 funding for ecosystem and water quality grants (\$9M/yr) through 2020;
- Began development of a regional restoration strategy for the Cache Slough Complex;
- Established an invasive species program to combat the spread of *Arundo* in the Delta;
- Collaborated on developing a Delta Carbon Protocol;
- Facilitated the development of a Delta marketing strategy and tourism website;
- Collaborated on restoration tracking and the development of EcoAtlas;

- Assisted the establishment of the Regional Data Center for Water Quality;
- Collaborated on the Mercury Exposure Reduction Program with signs being posted in the Delta;
- Established the Delta Watershed Initiative Network.

The process of updating the strategic plan has been underway since last August and the Conservancy has contracted with the strategic planning firm Kearns & West to help facilitate the update.

After reviewing the outline for the updated plan at our January Board Meeting, I can tell you that I am excited for the future of the Conservancy and what we can accomplish over the next 5 years. We look forward to receiving a draft of the Strategic Plan at the March 2017 Board Meeting. The Plan will subsequently be available for a 45 day public review. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on how the Conservancy can best address the needs of the Delta.

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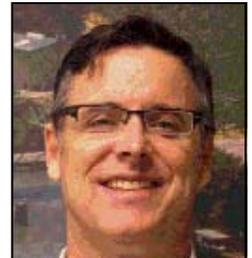
Erik Vink
Delta Protection Commission

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.

Campbell's Corner

Regional Planning is Helping to Focus Efforts

I am excited for the progress that has been made over the past few months in the development of a restoration strategy for the Cache Slough Complex. The purpose of this strategy is to identify areas for habitat restoration and projects that would be eligible for Proposition 1 funding. Through engagement in a collaborative planning process between local, state, and federal agencies and interests, a locally-supportable vision and strategic planning approach is being developed. This approach considers multiple land uses and processes focused in the Complex, reduces potential conflicts between those uses, and identifies opportunities for a landscape-level integrated approach that can result in improvement to the ecosystem, agriculture and flood protection. The development of the strategy is broken up into two phases. Phase I will assess the current readily available information in the region and then develop an initial assessment of the information needed to complete the strategy. Phase II will consist of addressing the information gaps discovered in phase I and the actual development of the strategy.



Campbell Ingram

On November 7th, there was a kickoff meeting for Phase I of the project held at the Solano County administrative building and there have been three meetings since, on December 16th, January 13th, and February 10th. The group, made up of county, reclamation district, water district, resource conservation district, and state agency representatives, has been vetting the data and information necessary for the planning process. The group is beginning to overlay data layers to see what insights present when agricultural needs are compared to ecosystem and flood protection needs.



Conservancy Reviewing Prop 1 Proposals for Round 2!

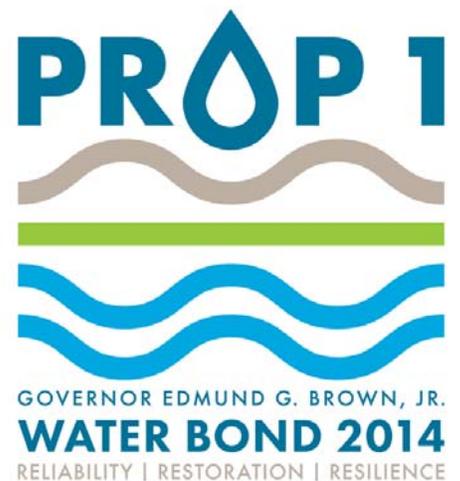
The Delta Conservancy's Proposition 1 Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program have received 5 proposals for its second cycle. These projects propose to:

- Establish and maintain native vegetation with tule-dominated tidal marshes, riparian vegetation, and native grassland at the Dutch Slough restoration site;
- Purchase perpetual conservation easements over approximately 275 acres of sandhill crane and waterbird habitat on Tyler Island;
- Enhance habitat through cattle management and ecosystem restoration on approximately 525 acres of actively farmed and grazed ground along Lindsey Slough;
- Restore 110 acres of freshwater wetlands to benefit listed species at the Cosumnes River Preserve; and,
- Identify improved methods for tidal wetland revegetation at Dutch Slough that reduce invasion by non-native plants.

The 2016-2017 full proposal solicitation closed on January 13th. Full proposals are subject to a rigorous scoring and evaluation process by both Conservancy staff and an external review panel, and recommendations are based upon score and funding availability. The counties, cities, and special districts with jurisdiction over the project sites have been given an opportunity to comment on the proposals. The Conservancy will award up to \$10

million to eligible projects that meet or surpass the minimum scoring threshold. The Delta Conservancy's Board plans to consider recommendations when it meets in April of this year.

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A Day with the SLEWS

On a bright, clear day, with a very cold north wind blowing across the grasslands, high school students, ornithologists, and habitat restoration professionals, including staff from the Delta Conservancy, gathered together on a ranch in Yolo County.

This was the second of three visits that these groups will make to this ranch as part of the Center for Land Based Learning's SLEWS Program. SLEWS, which stands for Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship, is a program in which SLEWS staff and ecology or restoration mentors from universities; non-profit organizations; and local, state, and federal agencies engage high school students in activities relating to habitat restoration, land stewardship, and ecology. Participants in SLEWS, students and mentors alike, commit to visiting the same site three times during the course of a school year. They participate in several steps in the process of restoring native habitat and learn about native plants, birds, invasive species, biodiversity, working lands, and other topics. Delta Conservancy staff, as part of their outreach efforts, are involved in the SLEWS program as mentors.

Each year SLEWS engages more than 300 students to plant thousands of native trees and shrubs, and tens of thousands native grasses. To help enrich these activities, SLEWS staff members recruit mentors who are generally graduate students or professionals, such as Delta Conservancy staff, who work in a conservation or habitat restoration-related field to guide and advise students on the restoration work and give them advice and perspectives on potential careers in science. Petersen Ranch, a landowner in the Delta, has proposed to use SLEW participants during habitat restoration activities, such as spreading mulch; tree, shrub, and plug planting; and irrigation system installation.

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Drought and the Delta

Everyone knows that California is in a constant state of water uncertainty. As a result, on October 25th the Conservancy and the Water Education Foundation brought together a panel of experts from a variety of different disciplines in order to educate, discuss the problems, and try and come up with potential solutions for the Delta.

More than 100 people attended the symposium and heard from speakers, from the University of California, Davis, the U.S.

Geological Survey, and Delta Farmers. Topics included the drought's impact on fish populations, water quality, Delta ecosystems, and farming. The attendees went home with a better understanding of the problems that six years of drought have brought to the Delta, as well as some of the solutions that can be implemented moving forward.

One of the main takeaways from this symposium was that everybody has been affected by drought in one way or another. Whether it is farmer's increased watering costs due to the need to pull more water out of the ground or the declining numbers of native fish populations due to the stresses that less water brings, the drought has had a wide impact. Most importantly, while the drought has recently lessened, there is a need to learn and adapt for the future. . . .



Attendees at the Drought and the Delta Workshop

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

Remembering Hal Schell (1929-2006)

The following introduction was penned by Hal Schell for his last book which came to pass as "Images of America: The California Delta" published by Arcadia Publishing Company in 2007. It is reprinted here on the 10 year anniversary of his passing. Hal was the original literary voice and pen of the Delta.

We all need to drive up to the top of Mount Diablo someday, or maybe hike up, or better yet, gallop up on horseback. Once there, we can squint our eyes and peer off to the east and see what Spanish explorers and clergy saw on that March 30, 1772, with the Delta swollen by spring rains and runoff, looking very much like what they thought they were seeing – a large inland lake. Explorers and others came later: Gabriel Moraga in 1805; mountain man, Jedediah Smith in 1827; and French trappers from the Hudson Bay Company in 1829. By 1837, John Marsh had built his adobe at Los Meganos and established Marsh's Landing for water transport and commercial shipment. In 1839, John Augustus Sutter sailed up the Sacramento River in two small ships and founded New Helvetia. Sacramento got its start. Captain Charles Weber sailed the sloop "Maria" up the San Joaquin River in 1848 and founded Stockton.

On January 24, 1848 James Marshall, while toiling on a sawmill for John Sutter at Coloma, saw some flecks of yellow in the millrace. Sure

enough, it was gold. This was not an easy secret to keep, in quick time the whole world knew about the discovery of gold in California. And the craziness began, in what they called the Gold Rush. The rest, as they say, is history.

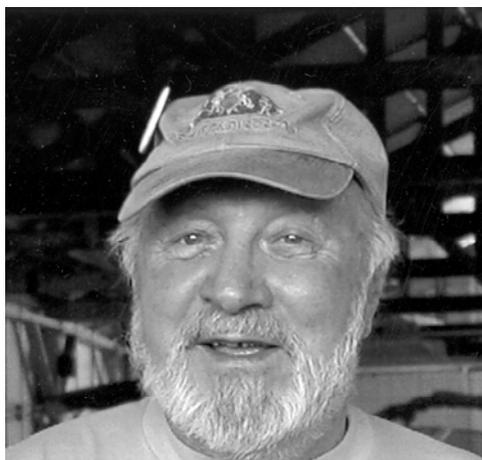
Always there is the tendency to describe the California Delta (officially, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta) in terms of its geographic and economic attributes. One-thousand miles of navigable waterways say the chambers of commerce. Fed by five major rivers and lesser streams and sloughs mumble those who try to get a handle on this elusive place. Deepwater ports visited by vessels from around the world say the economists. Incredibly rich farming

soil on over 55 major reclaimed islands, totaling over 500,000 acres say those with an agricultural bent. Pretty good fishing too and outstanding duck hunting say the sportsmen. Good birding, say the bird-watchers. One of the ten best sail boarding spots in the world, say the sailboarders. Nearly 70 percent of the population of California gets part of its drinking water from the Delta, say the water barons.

But the true Delta people have different ways of explaining their love for this Delta, and what it is that is so unique about this great place. They speak of the River Route mail carrier who delivers mail six days a week over a 65-mile water route – rain, tule fog, heavy wind, whitecaps on the water will not stop him. Hotel magnate Barron Hilton for decades now has been staging an "ooh-ah" fireworks display on Independence Day for some 25,000 boaters anchored out in maybe 6,000 boats of every size and description.

The Delta river towns, some not so much changed in 120 years, stage their traditional festivals. In the hamlet of Courtland, it is the Bartlett pear they worship; in Isleton the crawdad; in Rio Vista the striped bass; in Pittsburg seafood; and in Stockton asparagus. In Old Sacramento they get all worked up over Dixieland jazz, and in Bethel Island it's '50s-era automobiles. Eight or ten yacht clubs are involved in

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Hal Schell wrote about the California Delta for three decades. His Delta works included five books and a few thousand articles and columns. His monthly column, "Dawdling on the Delta" appeared in the "Bay & Delta Yachtsman" magazine. Schell built and ran the Delta Chambers and Visitors Bureau website for more than six years and his monthly e-mail newsletter, the *California Delta Scuttlebutt*, which is still published today, has more than 8,000 subscribers.

Delta Marketing Plan and Website to Launch Soon

The Delta is an amazing place. Whether you want to go boating, wine tasting, shopping, or birdwatching, the Delta has something for you. As a result, tourism and visitors are one of the main drivers of the Delta economy, and yet most people outside the Delta do not know how much that it has to offer.

The Delta Conservancy, in collaboration with the Delta Protection Commission, has been facilitating the development of the tools to address that gap over the past few years and that effort is soon to come to fruition. Since 2014, the Conservancy and Commission have been working with a Delta Marketing Task Force, made up of various tourism interests in the Delta, to identify the marketing needs of the Delta to help bolster visitation.

The Task Force, assisted by the consulting firm Design Media, is close to finalizing a Delta Tourism Awareness 5-year Marketing Plan and a Delta-centric tourism website. The Marketing Plan will be a tool for the Delta community to refer to and use to implement creative strategies to attract visitors. The tourism website will highlight the many activities or businesses you can enjoy or visit while staying in the Delta. The website will be located at www.visitCAdelta.com and will be linked with Visit California.

The website and marketing plan will be available in March. If you have any questions, or are interested in helping implement the plan or add content to the website, please contact Brandon Chapin at (916) 375-2091.



SLEWS *(continued)*

On their first visit in November, the students installed portions of an irrigation system that will help sustain a native hedgerow on the ranch. On this second visit in December, the group planted about 250 native shrubs and trees which will form the backbone of the hedgerow. In March, for their third visit, the group will help maintain the plants and reduce competition from non-native weeds. Through these repeated interactions with the same



SLEWS Students Installing Irrigation

piece of land, students observe the progress of the plants they planted, and get a sense of the habitat they helped create.

Alongside the habitat restoration work, this group of students had the opportunity to meet and interact with researchers from U.C. Davis who are capturing birds at locations around the Central Valley in the winter, and in Alaska in the summer, to better understand the migratory patterns of these species. Students and researchers discussed a range of topics relating to avian evolution, ecology, physiology, habitat needs, and conservation. By seeing birds captured, banded, measured, and released, students saw how avian ecology field work is conducted and learned what an environmental

sciences career might be like.

Participating in efforts that connect young people with the natural world is incredibly rewarding and inspiring. Seeing these students get involved in planting native trees and shrubs, and seeing how connected they became with the birds they interacted with is a wonderful reminder of how important it is to get youth engaged with the natural world; The Center for Land Based Learning is doing just that. The habitat restoration completed through the SLEWS program provides a safe haven for many of the threatened and endangered plants and animals native to the Delta. The Delta Conservancy looks forward to continuing to work with SLEWS in the future.

Delta MERP *(continued)*

community-based organizations in 2016 to better educate the public about mercury in the fish they catch. The Delta Conservancy and Delta MERP are also currently working with local community-based organizations (CBOs) to extend their capacity to provide education about healthy fish choices in their communities. These CBOs serve diverse communities in the Delta region. CBO activities to reduce exposure to mercury have included distributing educational materials, providing one-on-one and group educational sessions about Delta fish, training community members to provide education, and surveying community members about their fishing habits and knowledge of mercury in fish.

If you think there is an important location to post a sign within the Delta, please contact the Delta Conservancy at (916) 375-2084. Details on current fish advisories for the Delta can be found at:

<http://deltaconservancy.ca.gov/delta-mercury-exposure-reduction-program-merp/>.

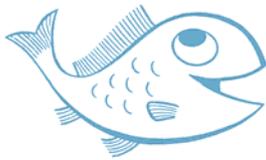
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Prop 1 *(continued)*

Last year, in its first ever grant solicitation, the Conservancy awarded \$6.3 million to nine projects to advance ecosystem and watershed restoration and protection projects. The Conservancy anticipates administering at least one grant cycle each fiscal year for five years. The Conservancy is committed to working with stakeholders and potential applicants within the Delta community to shape its solicitation process. By working with the Delta community, the Conservancy seeks to ensure that the projects it funds respect local perspectives while advancing the most important ecological priorities within the Delta.

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Hal Schell *(continued)*

staging lighted boat Christmas parades that are things of beauty. Somehow, out here in this place of tractors and crop-dusters, this place of sandhill cranes and coots, this place of ultralite seaplanes and noisy personal watercraft, the denizens of the Delta manage to coexist amiably enough. Well, no one appreciates boat wakes very much.

There is a sort of vernacular of the river here. Even non-boaters begin to speak in nautical terms. A Delta roadway becomes an asphalt slough; the front of a vehicle, whether it is a boat, a tractor, or an 18-wheeler, becomes the bow and the opposite end of the vehicle the stern. A saloon is a watering hole. Even when we go to a shore-side gas station, we are taking on fuel. Here on the river, we merely call this great place *The Delta*.

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- March 22, 2017** - Delta Conservancy Board Meeting, 9 a.m.—1 p.m., Delta Conservancy Office in West Sacramento
- April 16, 2017** - Delta Conservancy Board Meeting, 9 a.m.—1 p.m., Delta Conservancy Office in West Sacramento
- April 29, 2017** - Delta Waterways Cleanup, contact Aaron Haiman (916) 376-4023 for times and locations
- May 24, 2017** - Delta Conservancy Board Meeting, 9 a.m.—1 p.m., Delta Conservancy Office in West Sacramento
- June 28, 2017** - Delta Conservancy Board Meeting, 9 a.m.—1 p.m., Delta Conservancy Office in West Sacramento

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The Delta Conservancy's 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.

Conservancy Currents is published semiannually, usually in the Summer and Winter. If you are interested in providing content or have any questions, please contact Brandon Chapin at (916) 375-2091 or brandon.chapin@deltaconservancy.ca.gov.



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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