



1450 Halyard Drive, Suite 6  
West Sacramento, CA 95691  
[www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov](http://www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov)

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***2019 Implementation Plan and 2017-2022 Strategic Plan –  
Update on Progress Toward Achieving Goals and Objectives***

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**Staff Report**

This item presents the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy's (Conservancy) progress toward meeting the goals and objectives of the *2019 Implementation Plan* and the *2017-2022 Delta Conservancy Strategic Plan*.

**DESCRIPTION**

Annually in July, Conservancy staff provides a mid-year update to the Board on progress made toward meeting the goals and objectives of the *2017 – 2022 Delta Conservancy Strategic Plan* (Strategic Plan) and in carrying out the tasks outlined in the *2019 Implementation Plan* (Implementation Plan). Accordingly, attached to this report are two tables that provide those updates.

During the first half of 2019 the Conservancy has made steady progress implementing the plans. The majority of tasks remain on track to meet timelines identified in the Implementation Plan, which places the Conservancy in position for achieving the goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan.

Key accomplishments include:

**Propositions 1 and 68 Programs**

Providing \$35 million for 26 projects that positively impact more than 2,700 acres, the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Program clearly demonstrates effectiveness in delivering locally supported ecosystem restoration. The ability to do this is critical in achieving future restoration targets anticipated in the revision of the Ecosystem Chapter of the Delta Plan and Delta related targets that may result from the State Water Board Flow Standard Voluntary Agreements. The Conservancy's Proposition 68 program, currently in development, will make up to \$10 million available for Delta as Place projects including efforts that promote recreation and tourism, historic and cultural preservation, public access, agriculture viability, and environmental education. Draft guidelines will be presented to the Board in the fall and the program is scheduled to begin in early 2020.

**Delta Subsidence and Carbon Program**

The Conservancy led the effort for the development and approval of an American Carbon Registry voluntary market carbon protocol that shows great promise of providing a market-based incentive for land use change. The Conservancy is currently funding an effort to verify carbon credits resulting from the Department of Water Resources' managed wetlands on Sherman and Twitchell islands as a first attempt to generate revenue from carbon management. Current practices on more than 250,000 acres of land in the Central and West Delta cause subsidence of up to 1.5 inches per year. This ongoing loss

of elevation, combined with sea level rise, increases the threat of losing the Western Delta to an inland saline sea, potentially causing the loss of entire communities and an interruption in the export of water from the state and federal water projects for up to 3 years. Subsidence is caused by the oxidation and volatilization of carbon within the highly organic peat soils and is responsible for more than 2,000,000 million metric tons of carbon emissions annually. This represents a quarter to a third of California's total plant-based agriculture carbon emissions or the equivalent of ~500,000 vehicles. The Conservancy is optimistic about the impact its efforts can make to reduce these emissions and halt land subsidence.

### **Land Ownership**

The Program and Policy Subcommittee continues to explore the feasibility, potential benefits and challenges of the Conservancy holding easements and/or title to land on behalf of the State as authorized in statute. Declining trends in the economic viability of deeply subsided islands, combined with ongoing subsidence and sea level rise, require that the State and counties begin to explore their responsibilities for long-term ownership and management of islands. Delta agencies, including the Conservancy, continue to receive inquiries from land owners interested in selling lands to the State. With regard to land currently held by public agencies, recent conversations with the land owners and local interests indicate a preference for Conservancy ownership because of local representation on the Conservancy's Board.

### **Agriculture Analysis**

During winter 2018 through spring 2019, staff brought together a small group of Delta farmers to hear their perspectives on how the Conservancy can benefit Delta agriculture and the larger community. The group explored the possibility of conducting agricultural analyses or studies to benefit Delta agriculture and did not see a need at present. Similarly, previous work with the Delta County Agriculture Commissioners, County Farm Bureau representatives, and county staff did not identify any needed analyses. The first three cycles of the Proposition 1 grants collectively advance agricultural protection and enhancement on 1,222 acres through implementation projects and 2,000 acres through planning projects, with additional acreage benefitting from forth cycle projects. Agricultural sustainability projects will also be eligible for the Conservancy's Proposition 68 grant program. Given existing and potential new projects to further agricultural sustainability, staff recommends that the Board consider this objective to be satisfied for the time being. Should the agricultural community identify a strong need for an analysis in the future, the Conservancy would certainly evaluate how it might contribute.

### **Regional Planning**

The Conservancy completed the Delta Public Lands Strategy and presented the document to the Board in March, 2019. While regional planning would benefit Delta regions not covered by existing plans, the Conservancy has limited funding to support future planning efforts and resource and time requirements seem to dissuade local participation. The Conservancy continues to provide input in the development of the Landscape Scenarios Tool that will allow collaborative planning processes as well as local interests to evaluate tradeoffs associated with restoration. This web-based tool should be available for general use in 2020.

**Administration**

Key administrative positions within the Conservancy have been filled and incumbents are quickly learning critical processes and procedures so that they can operate at full capacity. While administration of the Conservancy's varied programs will always present a significant workload that tests the Conservancy's resources, the present administrative team is strong and has begun to address deferred tasks and streamline and improve operations. Begun in 2018, succession planning to minimize the impact of future vacancies and foster staff development remains a priority. These efforts will continue throughout 2019 and into 2020.

**BACKGROUND**

The Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board in July 2017 and provides a high-level road map and sets objectives and performance measures to achieve them. The annual Implementation Plan was adopted by the Board in January 2019 and provides a more detailed accounting of the tasks the Conservancy will undertake in a given year to implement the Strategic Plan.

**Contact**

Debra Kustic, Deputy Executive Officer  
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy  
Email: [debra.kustic@deltaconservancy.ca.gov](mailto:debra.kustic@deltaconservancy.ca.gov)  
Phone: (916) 375-2086