



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN

DELTA CONSERVANCY

A California State Agency

2021 Implementation Plan

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INTRODUCTION

This Implementation Plan (Plan) articulates goals which the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy (Conservancy) has established for 2021 to implement the goals, objectives, performance measures, and metrics included in the Conservancy's 2017-2022 Strategic Plan.

The activities reflected herein are funded by the California General Fund; the California Environmental License Plate Fund; state and federal government grants; the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1), and the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68). The Conservancy continuously seeks funding to expand efforts in furtherance of its mission. The Governor and the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency have prioritized initiatives that address public access, biodiversity, and climate resilience activities.

The Conservancy approaches all aspects of its mission with a mindset of collaboration and local engagement. In 2020 the Delta Mercury Exposure Program completed its work with community organizations to educate them about health hazards presented from consumption of mercury contaminated fish and provided them with small grants so they could share important information with those most at risk in their communities. The Community and Economic Enhancement Grant Program launched its first solicitation and is currently working with seven organizations to develop comprehensive proposals for Board consideration in 2021. The Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program remains a highlight of the ability of the Conservancy, its board, and local interests to work in partnership; to date the program has advanced 29 projects with positive impacts to more than 4,700 acres of the Delta ecosystem. The Delta Carbon Program completed the first ever validation and certification of wetland carbon credits and continues to work with several public and private landowners to forward additional pilot projects. Despite the inevitable constraints imposed by our response to COVID-19, 2020 was a very productive year for the Conservancy.

Goals for 2021 reflect the continuation of established programs such as the Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program which will run its 5th, and possibly final, solicitation and enter a new phase as the project stage of grants concludes and monitoring work begins. With its launch, the Community and Economic Enhancement Grant Program will contribute to a robust Delta economy through grant funding for projects that will increase public access to the Delta through recreation and tourism opportunities, historic and cultural preservation, and environmental education. Support for carbon emission reduction and land subsidence related efforts is increasing – the Conservancy will continue work to ally interests to realize funding to incentivize landscape scale land-use changes and develop pilot projects to verify greenhouse gas reductions.

Internally focused, succession planning remains a priority into 2021, with comprehensive updates to policies and procedures. Additionally, staff will focus on planning for the upcoming Strategic Plan update for 2022 – 2026, updating internal work plans, reorganizing the Conservancy's shared drive, and completing required COVID-19 pandemic reports and drills including updating work from home policies.

AGRICULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ENHANCEMENT

The Delta is a unique natural resource of local, state, and national significance. Intertwined with this important ecological system are a rich agricultural and cultural heritage, a distinguishing history, and an abundance of recreational opportunities. Preserving and enhancing the Delta’s agricultural, cultural, historic, and recreational assets can play a valuable role in enhancing Delta communities and economies. The Conservancy has worked closely with the Delta Protection Commission over the years to synergistically advance the priorities of both agencies in support of Delta communities and economies.

This partnership will continue in 2021 by incorporating Delta Protection Commission’s review of proposals submitted to the Community and Economic Enhancement Grant Program.

Community and Economic Enhancement Grant Program

The Conservancy will continue assisting seven current applicants to develop eight different full proposals. The Conservancy will continue to accept concept proposals on an ongoing basis and will assist applicants to develop the concepts into full proposals as merited. Staff anticipates presenting the proposals currently in development to the Board for funding consideration in 2021. Staff will increase outreach for the Program through implementation of a recently developed outreach plan. This noncompetitive grant program is made possible by funding allocated by the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68).

Table 1: Community and Economic Enhancement Grant Program

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Continue accepting concept proposals	Ongoing
Assist applicants to develop full proposals	Ongoing
Manage awarded grants	Qtr 2-4
Implement outreach plan	Qtr 1 & 2
Funding: \$12,000,000 from Proposition 68 for duration of the program	

Delta Marketing

The Conservancy and the Delta Protection Commission (Commission) partner in assisting Delta residents and businesses to develop sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities in the Delta. The Conservancy and the Commission created and worked with the Delta Marketing Task Force to create a Delta Tourism Awareness 5-Year Marketing Plan in 2017, the Delta Sign Plan in 2018, and the Delta recreation and tourism website VisitCADelta.com. The Conservancy contracted with the Commission to implement components of the marketing and sign plans. In 2019, the Commission worked with the task force to design 11 “Welcome to the Delta” signs. In 2020, Caltrans denied the initial applications for encroachment permits to post the signs. The agencies then revised the signs to fit the newly-established Delta National Heritage Area, and received approval from Caltrans and the California Traffic Control Devices Committee to amend the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices to allow for National Heritage Area signs to be posted on Caltrans rights of way. In 2021, the Conservancy and the Commission will coordinate with Caltrans, local jurisdictions, and the California Conservation Corps to apply for permits and, if approved, install signs at locations identified in the plan. The project should be complete by June 2021.

Complimenting the signs will be distribution of a map, 6,000 copies of which were printed in 2019, that shows recreational opportunities in the Delta and provides heritage and cultural facts. Distribution efforts began in 2020 but were put paused because of the COVID-19 pandemic which caused many targeted distribution locations to close to the public. The Conservancy and the Commission will begin distributing maps again once the public health situation allows businesses to resume operations.

The website VisitCADelta.com highlights businesses and recreational opportunities; it is a key strategy of the Marketing Plan and is noted on the aforementioned map. While the Commission, with support from the Conservancy, has managed the website thus far, management was intended to rest with a Delta entity. However, an entity with capacity to assume this responsibility has yet to be identified. With the designation of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area (NHA) in 2019, there may be opportunity to align VisitCADelta.com efforts with the NHA activities; the Conservancy and the Commission will collaborate to explore each entity’s role in VisitCADelta.com and develop a sustainable management plan.

Table 2: Delta Marketing

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Distribute recreation maps	Ongoing
Develop sustainable management plan for visitCADelta.com	Ongoing
Install 11 signs per Delta Sign Plan	Qtr 2
Funding: Maps, sign plan, and installation: \$72,913.53	

ECOSYSTEM VIABILITY

The Conservancy, in collaboration with myriad partners, is working on the following initiatives to protect, enhance, and restore the Delta ecosystem.

Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program

This competitive grant program focuses on multi-benefit ecosystem and watershed protection and restoration projects that address at least one of the following.

- Ecosystem Protection, Restoration, and Enhancement
- Water Quality
- Water-related Agricultural Sustainability

Through this program, the Conservancy has demonstrated its capacity to align state and local interests to make great progress – this is the hallmark of the Conservancy’s mission. As of January 1, 2021, the Conservancy has implemented four grant cycles and awarded almost \$39.3 million for 29 projects that collectively increase ecosystem resilience of approximately 4,800 acres. The Conservancy anticipates opening the fifth, and possibly last, solicitation in the summer of 2021, with approximately \$3.0 million in available funding. As grants for implementation projects are closed, Conservancy staff will continue to work with the grantees as they conduct post-project management and monitoring of the projects for at least 15 years.

In 2020, the Department of Finance completed a routine audit of the Conservancy’s Proposition 1 program. In the first half of 2021 the Conservancy will consider the audit results and adjust its granting process as needed.

Table 3: Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Manage active and closed grants	Ongoing
Plan Cycle 5 solicitation	Ongoing
Adjust granting processes based on audit results	As Required
Funding: \$50,000,000 from Proposition 1 for the duration of the program	

Invasive Species Coordination, Control, and Restoration

Arundo Control and Restoration

Arundo donax is an invasive riparian plant that damages levees and waterway banks, utilizes more water than native vegetation, and displaces native plants and wildlife. Phase 1 of this project was initiated in 2014. Through its partners, Solano Resource Conservation District and Sonoma Ecology Center, the Conservancy completed maps and prioritization for control of arundo sites and initiated a control and restoration pilot project in the Cache Slough Complex with funding from the Department of Water Resources (DWR). The Delta Conservancy is also collaborating with the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) on biocontrol agent release trials and integrated biological/chemical control at three Delta sites. The USDA-ARS project has ended, and the DWR project will end in early 2021.

Delta Inter-Agency Invasive Species Coordination (DIISC) Team

The Conservancy leads this forum for state and federal agency participants to exchange information, coordinate activities, and identify research needs and funding sources. The DIISC Team holds quarterly coordination meetings and organizes a biennial Delta Invasive Species Symposium. The Conservancy is in the early stages of coordinating with the DIISC team and other stakeholders to explore the development of a strategy for early detection and rapid response to invasive species.

Table 4: Invasive Species Coordination, Control, and Restoration

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Lead planning and execution of 2021 Delta Invasive Species Symposium	Qtr 1
Coordinate arundo control and restoration activities	Qtr 2
Facilitate quarterly Delta Inter-Agency Invasive Species Coordination (DIISC) meetings	Ongoing
Develop draft Delta interagency collaboration strategy for early detection and rapid response to invasive species	Ongoing
Funding: Arundo: ~\$1 million Department of Water Resources grant and ~\$91,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant for the entirety of the project	

Land Ownership, Easements and Management

The Conservancy’s enabling legislation authorizes the organization to hold title and easements for lands within the Delta. During outreach for the development of the Strategic Plan, staff heard repeated requests from agencies and community members to explore and define the Conservancy’s potential role in future land ownership and management. Staff began exploring the issue in 2019 by developing a draft white paper and having discussions with the Conservancy Board’s Program and Policy Subcommittee. In 2020, at the request of sister agencies, this effort shifted to a more focused exploration of easements and what expertise, resources, and policies would be required to enable the Conservancy to effectively hold and manage easements. In 2021 this exploration will continue with a focus on one or more specific, real-world scenarios that will allow a comprehensive assessment of requirements to negotiate and execute easements, manage lands according to easement requirements, estimate and endow sufficient funds in perpetuity to cover costs of stewardship, and conduct all appropriate monitoring and reporting.

Table 5: Land Ownership Easements and Management

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Refine draft ownership/management white paper	Ongoing
Present findings from exploration of easement management requirements to Board	Qtr 4
Provide updates to the Board	Ongoing
Funding: General operating budget	

Project Tracking, Reporting, and Improved Data Integration and Access

For the past several years, the Conservancy has worked with many partners to identify needs, secure funding, and implement multiple projects to facilitate project tracking, reporting, and improved data integration and access to support habitat restoration and water quality management in the Delta.

With funding from U.S. EPA, the Conservancy is implementing the Delta Aquatic Resources Inventory (DARI) project. DARI will result in a standardized mapping system and base map of aquatic resources for the Delta. Activities planned for 2021 include integrating DARI into EcoAtlas, scoping the application of the Riparian Zone Estimator Tool (RipZET) to the Delta, and having final meetings and trainings for DARI regional data stewards from state and local agencies.

Table 6: Project Tracking/Reporting and Improved Data Integration/Access

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Work with restoration project managers to enter or update project information in EcoAtlas	Ongoing
Final update to DARI mapping SOP and protocols for submitting data and maintaining the DARI base map	Qtr 2
Integrate DARI into EcoAtlas	Qtr 3
Funding: DARI: \$300,000 U.S. EPA grant for entirety of the project	

Pesticides Management Best Management Practices

The Conservancy, in coordination with the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition and the San Joaquin and Delta Water Quality Coalition, will implement a suite of best management practices to reduce non-point source pollution and improve water quality in the Delta. The goal of this project is to develop, certify, and implement Farm Water Quality Improvement Plans (Farm Plans) through the Fish Friendly Farming (FFF) Program to reduce the generation and transport to waterbodies of agricultural chemicals, sediment, and nutrients from sites within the Delta. These efforts utilize tools and build upon outreach funded by the Conservancy’s Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program.

Table 7: Best Management Practices

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Conduct Fish Friendly Farming (FFF) workshops for landowners	Qtr 3
Train certifying agency (National Marine Fisheries Service, local resource conservation districts, and others) representatives, as needed, on details of the Fish Friendly Farming Program’s best management practices, assessment practices of the properties, and certification process.	Qtr 4
Funding: \$399,400 State Water Resources Control Board grant for the entirety of the project	

Waterway Cleanups

The Conservancy has historically participated in two annual waterway cleanup events: the Delta Waterway Cleanup and the Sacramento Area Creeks Council Creek Week Cleanup. The Conservancy partners with the Delta Protection Commission, the Sacramento Area Creeks Council, the California Coastal Commission, Sacramento County Parks, Sacramento Regional Sanitation District, California State Parks, and corporate and non-profit volunteer groups. The goals of the cleanups are to: (1) protect and improve water quality; (2) raise awareness and understanding of good stewardship practices; (3) provide the community with environmental stewardship opportunities; and (4) collect data on types and amounts of trash in the Delta. Data collection contributes to the development of community-based science efforts across the state and provides a snapshot of the trash moving through the Delta. The 2020 cleanups were canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Conservancy will continue to participate in organizing and conducting these events when restrictions are eased, and it is safe to do so.

Table 8: Delta Waterway Cleanups

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Plan and conduct clean-up events	Ongoing
Collect data on types and amounts of trash in the Delta	Ongoing
Funding: General operating budget	

DELTA CARBON MANAGEMENT

The Conservancy Board adopted an updated climate change policy in 2017. The policy guides the Conservancy in developing, establishing, and supporting projects that mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and that can increase the system’s capacity to adapt to climate change effects. For the past several years, the Conservancy has worked with a large partnership to address the ongoing subsidence that threatens western Delta communities, agriculture, and the state and federal water projects, and that produces more than 2,000,000 tons of carbon emissions per year.

The partnership developed a California Wetland Protocol which was adopted by the American Carbon Registry (ACR) in the spring of 2017. The protocol provides a basis to monetize the carbon benefits of converting to rice cultivation and managed wetlands, thereby giving landowners economic incentives to consider practices that stop subsidence. The partnership is now working with public and private landowners and project developers to develop pilot projects to verify greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions. Verifying GHG reductions will allow landowners and developers to realize revenue by trading credits on the voluntary carbon market. In late 2020, the Conservancy supported the first ever third-party validation/verification of wetland carbon for three Department of Water Resources (DWR) wetland projects.

The Conservancy continues to work with the California Air Resources Board to encourage their consideration of adopting the ACR protocol under the Cap-and-Trade compliance market, thereby more than doubling the value of the credits, which further incentivizes change. Staff continues to create a coalition of interested organizations to develop appropriate messages and strategies to realize additional funding to support this effort.

These activities will continue in 2021 by continuing to partner with and support public and private landowners in their efforts to engage the carbon market. Effecting meaningful change will require significant investment to assist landowners with the cost of land conversion and technical assistance. The Conservancy continuously seeks funding up to support this program.

Table 9: Delta Carbon Management

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Support two additional pilot projects through the carbon estimation/validation process	Ongoing
Seek funding to support future projects	Ongoing
Funding: \$125,000 General operating budget for the entirety of the project	

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Environmental education and outreach are important components of the Delta Conservancy programs, which is reflected throughout the Conservancy’s initiatives. Current outreach strategies include posts on social media (Facebook and Twitter), flyers and other collateral about Conservancy projects, and promotions of campaigns such as Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Week and Creek Week. In 2021, the Conservancy will continue to maintain and enhance its website; expand social media profiles; develop new educational materials, including fact sheets for Conservancy programs; increase participation in events in and of relevance to the Delta; and otherwise broaden outreach as resources and COVID-19 restrictions allow.

Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Week

In 2018 and 2019, the Legislature designated a week in September as Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Week. The designated week is a focus of Conservancy education and outreach initiatives; past promotion included social media posts and a press release coordinated with Senator Bill Dodd’s office. In 2020, the Legislature did not make a formal designation for Delta Week due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Conservancy still promoted Delta Week through social media and blog posts. In 2021, the Conservancy looks to once again have the Legislature designate Delta Week, and Conservancy staff seeks to expand those efforts to potentially include a community activity, Delta Week-specific collateral, features in online and print publications, and possible media opportunities.

Table 10: Environmental Education and Outreach

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Conduct education and outreach for Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Week	Qtr 3
Education and outreach via social media, events, and other opportunities	Ongoing
Develop fact sheets for Conservancy programs	Ongoing
Funding: General operating budget	

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

To meet the Delta Conservancy mission we must understand the complex ways that underlying social and cultural issues may impact the Delta community and our team. In September, a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) working group was formed and in October all staff completed implicit bias training. The goal of the working group is to continue advancing Conservancy staff’s understanding of the social and cultural issues related to JEDI. To date, the working group has facilitated six staff-wide discussions and provided staff with a variety of resources to improve their understanding of JEDI.

In 2021 the working group will coordinate with Conservancy staff to develop JEDI Guidelines that will provide a framework for internal and external approaches to addressing JEDI issues. These guidelines will cover the advancement of JEDI education and awareness internally by outlining Conservancy goals for future JEDI curriculum. Lastly, the Guidelines will articulate the principles which guide the Conservancy’s existing JEDI work, as well as any future work conducted by our agency.

Table 11: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Develop Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Guidelines	Qtr 2
Continue implementation of the JEDI curriculum	Ongoing
Develop an outreach plan for engaging with organizations representing diverse communities within the Delta	Qtr 3
Funding: General operating budget & Proposition 68 Technical Assistance funding	

ADMINISTRATION

In 2020, the Conservancy focused on developing work plans as an internal planning tool to aid in tracking annual workload and accomplishments, optimizing use of resources, analyzing budget to task balance, and assist with strategic planning to meet priorities. Additionally, staff continued succession planning by designating secondary personnel for key functions, cross training to ensure proficiency, and documenting processes and procedures. The COVID-19 pandemic required significant additional reporting and drills for health and safety, human resources, budgets, and planning.

In 2021, Conservancy staff and management will update internal work plans, reorganize the Conservancy’s shared drive, update and maintain policies, develop a records retention schedule and Workforce Plan and Succession Plan, initiate an organizational assessment, and complete required COVID-19 pandemic reports and drills. The Conservancy will also increase its tracking of legislative bills and assessment of their potential impacts on the Conservancy and the ability to achieve its mission.

While the Conservancy cannot avoid turnover due to staff seeking advancement, it can engage and empower staff and create an environment to help attract and retain quality staff. The Conservancy will continue to monitor staff engagement and make continuous improvement efforts toward maintaining high morale and employee satisfaction.

Table 12: Administration

2021 Project Goals	Timeline
Submit and update State Leadership Accountability Act Implementation Plan and Biannual Implementation Plan	As Required
Update internal work plans	Qtr 2
Release Request for Proposal and contract for an organizational assessment	Qtr 2
Develop records retention schedule	Qtr 3
Establish legislative tracking system	Qtr 3
Submit indirect cost rate proposal	Qtr 4
Develop Workforce Plan and Succession Plan	Qtr 4
Develop new/update existing policies and procedures	Qtr 4
Reorganize shared drive	Qtr 4
Ensure accessibility of Conservancy web content	Ongoing
Submit financial reports and information (such as Governor’s budget building, bond accountability reporting)	As Required
Fulfill human resource related mandates (such as Disability Advisory Committee)	As Required
Various administrative and operational requirements (e.g. State Agency Recycle Campaign and State Agency Reporting System reports, Contracting Activity Report and Improvement Plans, Continuity Plan)	As Required
Participate in Audits (e.g. Dept. of Finance audits of bond funded grant programs, State Personnel Board audit of human resources practices, General Services audit of purchasing and procurement)	As Required
Submit required COVID-19 pandemic reports and drills for health and safety, human resources, budgets, and planning.	As Required
Funding: General operating budget with proportional support from Proposition 1 and Proposition 68 funds	

DELTA CONSERVANCY 2017 – 2022 STRATEGIC PLAN – GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Delta Agricultural and Economic Enhancement

Delta Economic and Agricultural Enhancement

1. Work directly with local land owners, farmers, and others to analyze the state of Delta agriculture and identify priority agricultural investments and economic offset strategies for agricultural land conversions
2. Establish an agricultural stakeholder group to consult on agricultural sustainability strategy identification and evaluation; and on agricultural sustainability project planning, prioritization, and implementation
3. Support the Delta Marketing Task Force and Delta Protection Commission in identifying and securing funding to implement priority objectives in the Five-Year Delta Marketing Plan in cooperation with local business stakeholders

Ecosystem Restoration and Protection

4. Support water quality improvements on working lands by coordinating with agencies and local interests to identify and implement best management practices
5. Increase accessibility and utility of regional water quality data

Grants and Funding

6. Fund Proposition 1-eligible agricultural sustainability projects that provide ecosystem and/or watershed protection and/or restoration benefits
7. Identify, track, and pursue funding opportunities to support implementation of agricultural analysis-identified priority investments
8. Identify, track, and pursue funding to support implementation of priority objectives in the Five-Year Delta Marketing Plan, recreation and tourism projects, and historical preservation projects

GOAL 2: Delta Ecosystem Viability

Ecosystem Restoration and Protection

1. Protect, restore, or enhance habitat and improve water quality through implementation of grant-funded projects
2. Strengthen the coordination of water quality monitoring, data integration, implementation of best management practices, and environmental education efforts in partnership with existing Delta watershed efforts
3. Complete regional restoration strategies and priorities for the Cache Slough Complex and for additional region(s) in coordination with Delta stakeholders; collaborate with partners to implement high priority projects identified in regional plans
4. Determine appropriate conditions under which the Conservancy would consider land ownership/management
5. Continue to implement an invasive species control program and implement other on-the-ground projects to protect, restore, or enhance Delta habitat

Delta Economic and Agricultural Enhancement

6. Collaborate with Delta interests and agencies to develop programs and promote incentives for land management projects that reduce carbon emissions
7. Evaluate public use opportunities on public land in the Delta and make recommendations on how to improve opportunities for recreation and education

Grants and Funding

8. Fund Proposition 1-eligible projects that provide ecosystem protection, restoration, and enhancement; water quality; and/or water-related agricultural sustainability benefits
9. Seek funding and project development resources for high priority restoration projects identified through regional planning efforts

GOAL 3: Conservancy Organizational Strength and Sustainability

Administration

1. Provide a safe, creative, inspiring, and equitable working environment for staff and management consistent with state standards
2. Employ management practices to empower staff creativity, increase staff retention, and promote organizational capabilities to match the diverse needs of the Delta community
3. Develop a staff succession plan to ensure the efficient transfer of institutional knowledge
4. Continuously evaluate and improve organizational efficiency, programmatic structure, and workplace environment
5. Enable effective and sustainable Conservancy operation within the Delta community by strengthening existing partnerships and developing lasting new partnerships with Delta agencies and local interests
6. Increase awareness of the Conservancy's achievements among funders, partners, and the public through in-person outreach, social media, and other methods

Grants and Funding

7. Diversify and expand funding sources to adequately support program work, sustain current staff, and grow staff as needed to meet program needs and Conservancy goals
8. Identify and plan for potential long-term funding scenarios to position the Conservancy to sustain and grow its programs via future bonds or other funding sources
9. Promote Conservancy goals and objectives through Board engagement to constructively support Conservancy funding efforts including the pursuit of bond funding