



Delta Drought Response Pilot Program Update Staff Report

This agenda item provides an update on the development and initiation of the Delta Drought Response Pilot Program (DDRPP), a collaborative effort between the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the Delta Watermaster, and the Delta Conservancy. The objective of the program is to reduce drought stress in the Delta watershed, protect Delta water quality, and improve mutual understanding of agricultural practices and water conservation opportunities in different regions within the Legal Delta.

DESCRIPTION

The Delta Drought Response Pilot Program is in response to consecutive dry years, low combined storage in State and federal Project reservoirs, and drought-constrained water deliveries to Project contractors. Funds are available to incentivize agricultural water users in the Legal Delta to take actions expected to reduce crop consumptive water use and protect water quality. Water conserved through incentivized actions in the Pilot Program will be allocated to protecting Delta water quality and will not be available for diversion or exports. By rigorously monitoring the outcomes and impacts of a variety of actions in different settings throughout the Legal Delta, the Pilot Program will provide data to support targeted water conservation/quality protection responses during sustained and/or future droughts.

BACKGROUND

The Conservancy has entered into an interagency agreement with DWR to transfer \$10,000,000 to the Conservancy to develop and implement the grant program. The Conservancy is working with DWR and the Delta Watermaster (Program Partners) to develop the solicitation and application package and anticipates launching the program in mid-January 2022. The program will offer Delta water users \$900 per enrolled acre for practices that will reduce consumptive water use. Anticipated qualifying actions include, but are not limited to: 1. Foregoing a planned cash crop (e.g., maintaining idled farmland with appropriate drainage and appropriate healthy soil protections); 2. Shifting irrigation practices to conserve water, reduce or adjust timing of diversions, increase reuse, and/or protect water quality (e.g., converting to 60" furrows on flood irrigated crops, foregoing a portion of the irrigation cycle, or replacing flood irrigation with subsurface irrigation); and 3. Shifting to less water-intensive crops (e.g., cultivating small grains such as winter wheat or safflower that require little or no diversion of surface water for irrigations, instead of a more water-intensive summer crop like corn or tomatoes).

The Program Partners have established a Selection Committee that will review applications and make recommendations for funding based on guidance established by the Program Partners. Staff will present funding recommendations to the Board for consideration. However, due to the very time-sensitive nature of this program, it may be necessary for the Executive Officer to proceed with awards, with the concurrence of the Board chair and vice-chair, for projects that are time-sensitive and report actions taken to the Board at the next meeting.

The Conservancy will enter into an interagency agreement with the University of California Davis to assist with data gathering, monitoring, and synthesis of data from the pilot projects to ensure information resulting from the program will inform best practices for water conservation in sustained or future drought. All data will be made accessible to the public.

CONTACT

Campbell Ingram, Executive Officer
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy
campbell.ingram@deltaconservancy.ca.gov
(916) 281-4145