



## Delta Drought Response Pilot Program Update Staff Report

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This agenda item provides an update on the Delta Drought Response Pilot Program (DDRPP), a collaborative effort between Delta water users, 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.

### UPDATE

The Delta Drought Response Pilot Program has been exceedingly successful, resulting in strong partnership with the Delta farming community, significant water savings and better understanding of viable water conservation practices. Between January 19, 2022, and March 4, 2022, the program received 85 project proposals and approved 33 projects, enrolling just over 8,800 acres with an estimated water savings of 22,000 acre feet and expending all of the available funding. The solicitation was closed on March 4. Funded projects included a wide variety of practices and were well distributed throughout the Legal Delta. Conservancy staff have executed all 33 grant agreements and initial invoices are being processed. A list of project summaries is attached. Staff continues to develop an interagency agreement with the University of California Davis to assist with data gathering, monitoring, and synthesis.

### 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 entered into an interagency agreement with DWR to transfer \$10,000,000 to the Conservancy to develop and implement the grant program. The Conservancy worked with DWR and the Delta Watermaster (Program Partners) to develop the solicitation and application package and launched the program in mid-January 2022. The program offered Delta water users \$900 per enrolled acre for practices that reduce consumptive water use. 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 established a Selection Committee that reviewed applications and made recommendations for funding based on guidance established by the Program Partners. Due to the time-sensitive nature of the program, Staff presented funding recommendations to the Conservancy Board Chair and Vice Chair for approval.

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**

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Figure 1. Draft Map of Drought Response Pilot Program

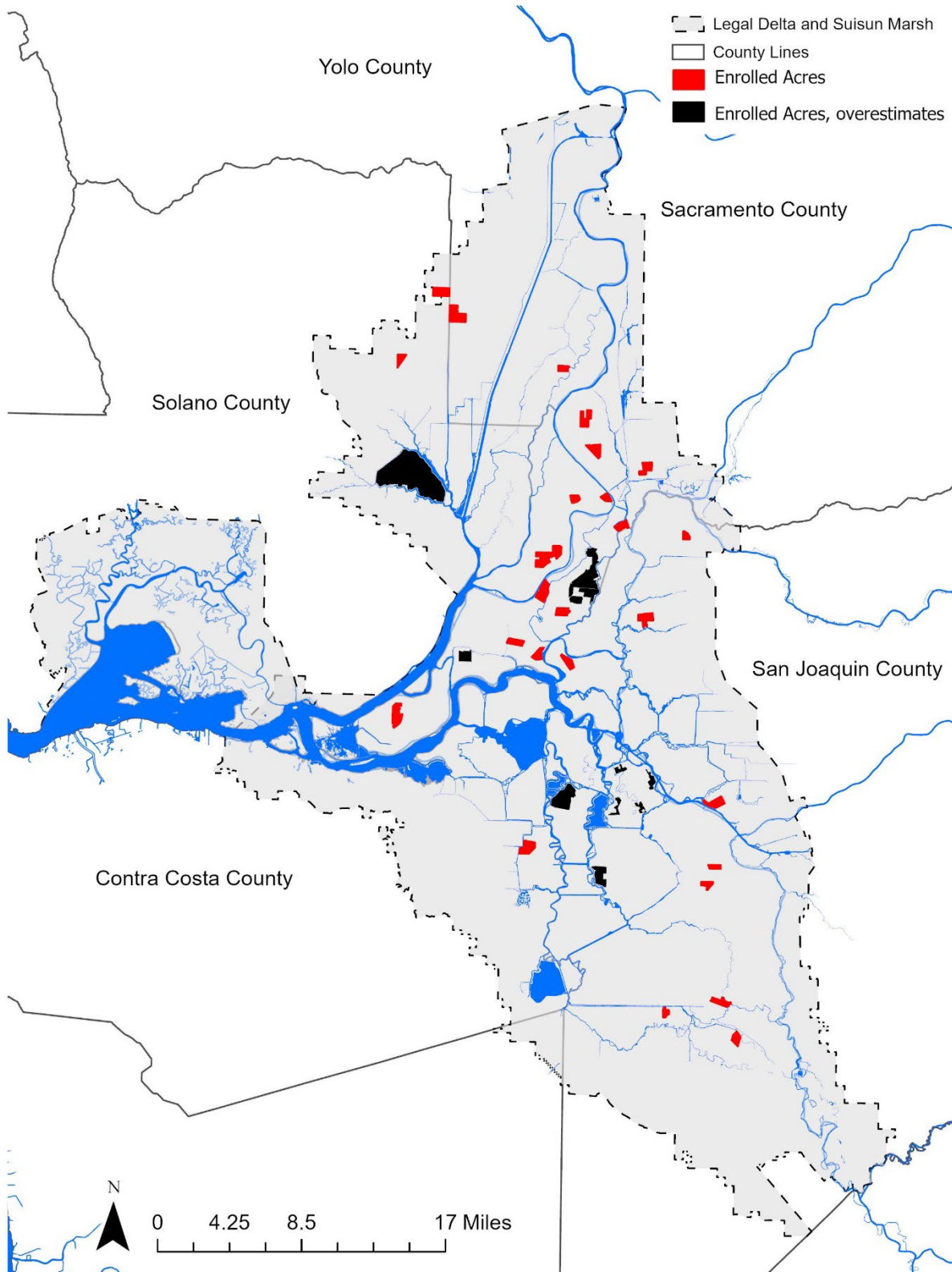


Figure 1 shows enrolled acreage (red) and over estimates of acreage (black) for which accurate maps are still being finalized. Two applications are not included in this draft of the map, but this data will be added when available.