



**Consideration of Award of Proposition 1 Grant Funds for Improving Hydrological Resiliency of Managed Wetlands in Suisun Marsh
Staff Recommendation**

This agenda item presents for Board consideration a recommendation to award Proposition 1 Grant Program funding for Improving Hydrological Resiliency of Managed Wetlands in Suisun Marsh.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Applicant	Suisun Resource Conservation District
Project ID	2209
Project Type	Implementation
County	Solano
Funding Request	\$542,546
Total Project Cost	\$631,936
Funding Recommendation	\$542,546
Score	93/100

RECOMMENDATION

Conservancy staff recommends that the Board consider the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report for the Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan (Suisun Marsh Plan), and adopt Resolution 2022-02 that makes Responsible Agency Findings that the proposed project is consistent with the Suisun Marsh Plan, that no additional mitigation measures within the Board’s authority are necessary, and concurs with the lead agency’s statement of overriding considerations.

Contingent upon the Board’s adoption of Resolution 2022-02, Conservancy staff recommends that the Board approve up to \$542,546 in grant funding for Improving Hydrological Resiliency of Managed Wetlands in Suisun Marsh (Project) proposed by the Suisun Resource Conservation District conditional upon successful resolution of concerns regarding tree removal and completion of the applicant’s California Environmental Quality Act responsible agency obligations. The project proposal received overall favorable reviews from staff. Staff prepared the text below based on staff’s best understanding of the information provided in the application. Conservancy staff and the Professional Review Panel consisting of the following agencies: California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Delta Protection Commission, Delta Stewardship Council, California Department of Food and Agriculture, California Department of Water resources and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service scored this proposal against the established criteria. Conservancy staff contacted local governments and districts, water agencies, and tribes via the local notification process to receive comments and ensure project support. Prior to entering into a grant agreement, staff will work with the applicant to further refine the project’s scope of work.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The proposed Improving Hydrological Resiliency of Managed Wetlands in Suisun Marsh (Project) will improve habitat conditions in Suisun Marsh for fish, wildlife, and plants and improve water quality by installing new hydrological infrastructure at four project sites that will directly benefit 3,090 acres of managed wetlands. The four sites were identified from a previous Delta Conservancy funded project titled, "Suisun Marsh Improvement Assessment" that used hydrologic models to prioritize areas in Suisun Marsh that could benefit from habitat improvements. Specific project tasks outlined in this proposal include completion of all standard permitting processes, construction, and installation of infrastructure improvement elements (e.g., pipes and drains), and pre- and post-construction environmental monitoring to assess conditions and resilience to sea-level rise.

Results from the proposed managed wetland improvements will benefit Suisun Marsh and the Delta by enhancing ecosystem functions, wetland habitat diversity, seed-bearing plant production, carbon sequestration, improve water quality (e.g., minimize low dissolved oxygen during drainage), reduce mosquito production to protect public health and safety, and increase export of fish food resources.

COST SHARE

The cost share amount is 14 percent of the project budget. The applicant will provide \$5,705 as cost leverage from state funds to support indirect expenses and \$20,595 as in-kind services through staff hours to oversee grant management and reporting costs. The landowners will provide a total of \$63,00 as cash to support project construction expenses.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

This implementation effort is considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Beginning in the early 2000s, the Suisun Principal Agencies, a group of agencies with primary responsibility for Suisun Marsh management including CDFW, the United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, led the development of the Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan (Suisun Marsh Plan). The Suisun Marsh Plan intends to balance the benefits of tidal wetland restoration with other habitat uses in Suisun Marsh, such as salt marsh harvest mouse habitat, managed wetlands, public use, and upland habitat. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (formerly California Department of Fish and Game), acting as the CEQA lead agency, found the Suisun Marsh Plan could have impacts on air quality, noise, utilities and public services, cultural resources, public health and environmental hazards, and cumulative impacts on cultural resources. Most impacts could be mitigated, and CDFW detailed this mitigation in a Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Program; however, they also found approval of the Suisun Marsh Plan would result in the occurrence of significant effects to cultural resources that could not be mitigated. Pursuant to Public Resource Code Section 21081(b), CDFW approved the Suisun Marsh Plan upon adopting a Statement of Overriding Considerations that the Suisun Marsh Plan would provide social, biological, and flood control benefits that override the significant and unavoidable impacts to cultural resources. On December 22, 2011, CDFW filed a Notice of Determination and made Findings of Fact and adopted Statement of Overriding Considerations for the Suisun Marsh Plan.

Conservancy staff, in fulfilling the Conservancy's role as a Responsible Agency, have reviewed these documents and findings, and staff recommends that the Board make Responsible Agency Findings concurring that implementation of the Project is consistent with CDFW's lead agency Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations that the Suisun Marsh Plan would provide social, biological, and flood control benefits that outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects to cultural resources and that all necessary mitigation measures within the Conservancy's jurisdiction have been included in the project to eliminate significant effects on the environment.

It should also be noted that the project activities may involve waters of the United States, which are covered by the United States Bureau of Reclamation's Regional General Permit 3. Regional General Permits authorize recurring activities at a regional level, such as the improvement and maintenance of managed wetland infrastructure in Suisun Marsh.

ALIGNMENT WITH STATE PRIORITIES

The project is consistent with and directly and specifically links to multiple actions and priorities identified in the Conservancy's governing statute, the Conservancy's strategic plan, the Delta Plan, and in other state and regional plans. Considerations are made to promote wildlife conservation, ecosystem and economic restoration, enhance managed wetlands and working lands, and improve water quality.

LONG TERM VIABILITY

The proposal describes long-term management that will cover the required 15-year duration. Improvement of managed wetland circulation and drainage in Suisun Marsh will consist of installing water control structures that have an expected sustainability of at least 15-20 years. The proposed infrastructure (including stainless steel or high-density polyethylene) is resilient to the effects of brackish water and will persist in a rapidly changing environment including increasing salinity and rising sea levels. Each of the landowners are responsible for the long-term maintenance of the water control structures, have existing certified management plans, and will continue to implement them for the 15-year duration.

LOCAL SUPPORT

The proposal demonstrates local support and includes a letter of support from the project's county's Board of Supervisors. The applicant provided letters of commitment from the four landowners and letters of support from stakeholders including the California Waterfowl Association, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Reclamation Districts 2127 and 2141.

SCIENTIFIC MERRIT

The proposal describes and references the scientific basis of the project and incorporates the best available science. The proposal demonstrates efforts to develop an adaptive management approach consistent with the Delta Plan's adaptive management framework and with sufficient capacity and resources to implement. The climate impacts and benefits are addressed, and the proposal provides a mechanism for incorporating climate change considerations into the project.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The applicant proposes tree removal at one of the project sites. The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's (BCDC) Suisun Marsh Protection Plan does not allow for the removal of certain trees. The Conservancy's grant agreement will not allow the removal of trees that would be inconsistent with BCDC's Suisun Marsh Protection Plan or the Suisun Marsh Plan. The Conservancy's grant agreement will require Suisun Resource Conservation District to verify CEQA responsible agency compliance.

SUGGESTED MOTION LANGUAGE

Two separate motions are required:

Move to adopt Resolution 2022-02, which makes Responsible Agency Findings that Improving Hydrological Resiliency of Managed Wetlands in Suisun Marsh implements the Suisun Marsh Plan and that all necessary mitigation measures have been included.

Move to award funding up to \$542,546 to the Suisun Resource Conservation District for Improving Hydrological Resiliency of Managed Wetlands in Suisun Marsh conditional upon the items noted in the staff recommendation.

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FIGURE 9.9 IMPROVING HYDROLOGICAL RESILIENCY OF MANAGED WETLANDS IN SUISUN MARSH PROJECT AREA

