



## 2023 Delta Drought Response Pilot Program Update Staff Report

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This agenda item provides an update on the 2023 Delta Drought Response Pilot Program (DDRPP), a collaborative effort between the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the Delta Watermaster (WM), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Delta Conservancy (DC), in coordination with Delta water users. The objective of the program is to reduce drought stress in the Delta watershed, protect Delta water quality, support wildlife, and improve mutual understanding of agricultural practices and water conservation opportunities in different regions within the Legal Delta.

### UPDATE

The 2023 Delta Drought Response Pilot Program was opened on Monday, October 3, with bids due to the Conservancy by Tuesday, October 18. A Selection Committee made up of members from DWR, WM, TNC, DC, California Department of Food and Agriculture, University of California Cooperative Extension and the Merced and Davis campuses, will evaluate bids and make funding recommendations for consideration by the Board. We anticipate the need to have a special Board meeting on Wednesday, November 16 for the Board to consider funding recommendations. Solicitation information is available [on the Conservancy website](#).

### BACKGROUND

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 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.

In Water Year 2022, the Conservancy and partners ran the initial pilot program with \$10 million in Drought Relief funding from DWR. The program was very successful, resulting in 33 grants and enrolling approximately 8,800 acres. Due to continued drought conditions, DWR has funded the continuation of the Program for Water Year 2023 with an additional \$11.4 million. This year the program has partnered with TNC to offer a range of incentives that can also benefit migratory birds that are experiencing severe reduction in available habitat due to drought conditions. Applicants can bid water savings practices and bird benefit practices provided there is a significant net savings of applied water across the proposed project.

The Program partners will use a combination of Open ET, a remote-sensing application that can compare the evapotranspiration rates of fields enrolled in the Program and reference sites, and micrometeorological equipment distributed across the Delta to evaluate Program outcomes. The Conservancy has entered 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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