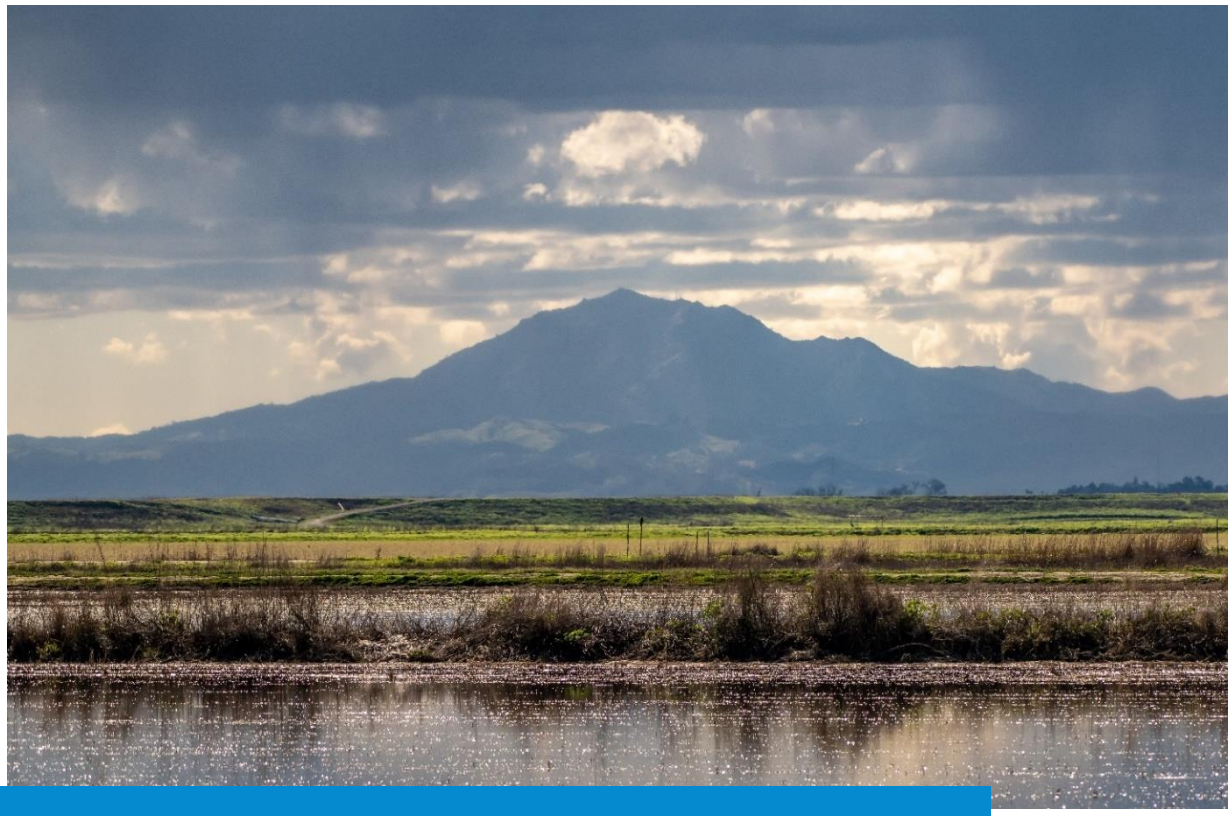

# Contra Costa County Delta Water Platform

April 2025 Final Draft

# Introduction

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) is the largest freshwater tidal estuary of its kind on the west coast of the Americas, draining a watershed that stretches from the western Sierra to the Central Valley through the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers to the San Francisco Bay. The Delta provides invaluable ecological, economic, and cultural resources to Contra Costa County and the entire Delta region, as well as a portion of the drinking water for much of the population of California.

The Delta is a complex and essential ecosystem that has been substantially altered by human activities in recent history. Covering approximately 738,000 acres, there are 1,100 miles of levees and 700 miles of sloughs and waterways that wind through the landscape. It serves as home to more than 750 different plant and animal species, including over 35 species of special status like the Delta smelt and Chinook salmon, and is closely linked to the health of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem. The Delta also represents a region rich in cultural history. For thousands of years, indigenous populations inhabited the region, serving as stewards for the land and waterways until the arrival of European settlers. By the late 19th century, a massive reclamation turned marshland into farmland, and agricultural and recreational communities emerged along Delta shores. With the 20th century came the development of large-scale federal and state infrastructure projects to send Delta water to irrigate agriculture in the Central Valley and supply drinking water to cities from the San Francisco Bay Area to Southern California.

The importance of the Delta has been recognized at all levels of government. In 2019, Congress designated the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as California's first National Heritage Area, recognizing it as a place where natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. The Delta is an evolving place that must be protected, enhanced, and sustained.

The eastern portion of Contra Costa County is located within the Delta, and the County's entire northern border is bounded by waterfront that flows from the Delta to the San Francisco Bay. In addition to its ecological importance, the Delta provides a multitude of benefits for those in Contra Costa County and beyond: water for drinking, agriculture, and commercial and industrial processes; flood control for local Delta communities; a variety of recreation opportunities, including fishing, boating, and hiking; and an important commerce corridor that connects the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, and Central Valley. The physical, societal, and economic well-being of those who live, work, and recreate in Contra Costa County is deeply linked to the health of the Delta.

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Looking towards the Delta's future, it is essential to address the impacts of climate change on the Delta ecosystem in all actions pertaining to the Delta. A healthy Delta requires sufficient water supply of good quality, which is negatively impacted by south of Delta exports and becoming more at risk due to a changing climate. Sufficient freshwater flows through the Delta are essential for maintaining good water quality as they move pollutants out of the Delta, prevent salinity intrusion, and preserve suitable habitat for fish and other species. According to the Delta Stewardship Council's 2021 Delta Adapts Vulnerability Assessment, climate hazards like flooding and sea level rise, extreme heat, drought, and wildfire smoke pose risks to Delta communities, ecosystems, and various regional assets, including agriculture, community facilities and services, water management and flood control infrastructure, parks and recreation, transportation, and water supply.

Actions to reduce reliance on the Delta, such as supporting regional self-sufficiency and creating local water supply options throughout the state, conserving water, and implementing water reuse programs, can increase the Delta's resilience to climate change and help adapt to a changing water supply. These actions must be centered in environmental justice to improve the quality of life and health of those in historically underserved impacted communities and support the inclusion and participation of members of these communities in decision-making processes.

Contra Costa County adopted the Delta Water Platform in 2008 and updated it in 2014 to identify and promote activities and policy positions that protect and improve the health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Contra Costa County uses this Delta Water Platform to guide its actions and advocacy regarding the future of the Delta, with a focus on environmental justice and the urgent need to address climate change impacts. The Delta Water Platform, together with the County's 2045 General Plan and Climate Action and Adaptation Plan 2024 Update, establishes the priorities, principles, and policy statements that guide the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and Water Agency's positions on key policy matters that would impact the County and the Delta.

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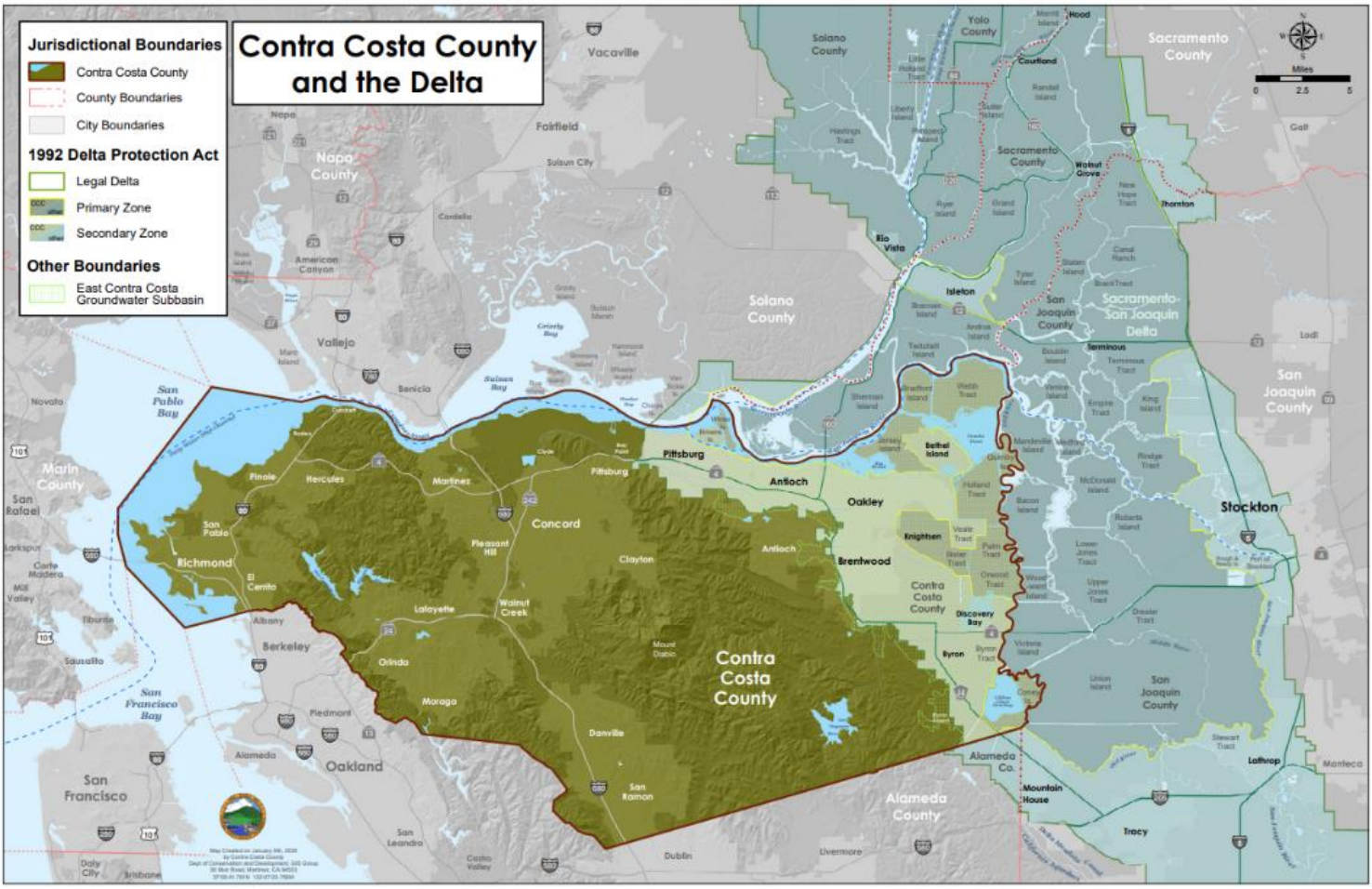
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Vallejo
Benicia
Concord
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Antioch
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Corte Madera
Mill Valley
Larkspur
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Novato
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# Policy Areas

To protect the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta from various detrimental forces that threaten its health and resources, it is the policy of Contra Costa County to support implementation of projects and actions that will help improve the Delta ecosystem and economic conditions of the Delta.

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*The policy areas and policies are not ordered based on priority. The numerical order of the policies is used solely for the intention of organizing this document for reference.*

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# Conveyance

1) Support continued through-Delta conveyance, also known as the Freshwater Pathway, by protecting and improving Delta levees and channels.

2) Support efforts that further the obligation of all users of water flowing through the Delta to restore, maintain, improve, and protect this shared resource and referred to as the "Delta pool" concept.

3) Oppose isolated Delta conveyance projects.

    a) Any isolated conveyance projects in the Delta must incorporate the following principles at a minimum:

        i) Achieve both coequal goals of providing a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem, consistent with the Delta Reform Act of 2009.

        ii) Maintain and restore Delta water quality and supply for existing Delta region water users.

        iii) Ensure adequate inflows through the Delta and outflows to the San Francisco Bay for ecosystem health.

        iv) Reduce average- and dry-month exports in favor of wet-month exports.

        v) Incorporate regional self-sufficiency as part of any new water supply systems. Each region must maximize conservation and reuse, implement storage options and multi-benefit stormwater projects, and consider desalination and other alternative water sources to help reduce reliance on the Delta.

        vi) Implement Bay-Delta ecosystem restoration and improvements and through-Delta conveyance improvements before an isolated facility is substantively planned, designed, or constructed.

        vii) Any isolated conveyance projects and mitigation related to such projects must be paid for by the direct beneficiaries of the project rather than by the taxpayers.

        viii) Incorporate protections for and improvements to the Delta ecosystem, fisheries, water quality, water supply, and levees into any new water management plans.

        ix) Include a seat at the table for locally affected counties in any governance structure to manage conveyance.

4) Oppose federal and state funding or other actions that support or facilitate the design, construction, operation, mitigation, or maintenance of isolated Delta conveyance projects.

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a) Advocate to ensure any state bond placed on the ballot by the Legislature includes language ensuring the funds do not directly or indirectly support isolated Delta conveyance projects.

# Water Resources

## Governance and Delta Counties Coalition

1) Advocate for local government representation in decision making for the Delta that recognizes and validates Delta Counties' authorities related to land use, water resources, flood management, tax revenues, public health and safety, economic development, agricultural stability, recreation, and environmental protection in any projects, policies, or operations.

2) Continue active and full participation in the Delta Counties Coalition based on its adopted guiding principles.

## Water Quality, Water Quantity, and Delta Outflow

1) Support efforts to protect and improve water quality, water quantity, and Delta outflow.

   a) Advocate for increased freshwater flow from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers through the Delta into San Francisco Bay as the best available science demonstrates is necessary to restore and sustain Bay-Delta ecosystems and conserve salmon and other native fish and wildlife.

2) Support measures that improve water monitoring and accounting systems within the Delta watershed, especially in upstream areas.

   a) Encourage development and implementation of discharge and runoff tracking within the entire Delta watershed.

3) Require that operational decisions regarding water quality, water quantity, and Delta outflows be based on a system-wide, watershed-wide analysis of the Delta and San Francisco Bay.

4) Oppose proposals that allow or cause increased salinity in the western, central, and southern Delta unless impacts are fully mitigated.

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5) Support efforts to prevent the occurrence of harmful algal blooms, including but not limited to reducing nutrient loads from discharges into Delta waterways.

    a) Explore opportunities to identify causes of and develop additional measures to detect, monitor, manage, and eliminate harmful algal blooms.

## Reduce Reliance on the Delta

1) Support regional self-sufficiency where all regions that use Delta water are required to implement a variety of local water supply options and institute conservation, reuse, and water efficiency programs to reduce reliance on exports from the Delta in alignment with the Delta Reform Act's coequal goals of securing a reliable water supply and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem.

2) Support south of Delta water suppliers increasing local water supplies through alternative sources, so their reliance on the Delta is reduced. Alternative sources include but are not limited to desalination, recycled water, and storm water capture.

3) Advocate for incorporating regional self-sufficiency as part of any new water supply system.

## Water Conservation

1) Promote water conservation and efficiency at the local, state, and federal levels as a primary first step in any proposed statewide water management strategy to reduce reliance on water from the Delta.

2) Support and promote sustainable use of Delta water resources.

    a) Promote efficient water practices in urban areas, agriculture, and industry to reduce overall water consumption.

    b) Support and encourage an increase in reuse and recycled water, stormwater capture, and desalination operations where feasible.

    c) Support maintenance and improvements to existing water delivery infrastructure to reduce water loss and increase efficiency.

3) Support water conserving landscapes.

    a) Encourage new and retrofitted landscapes to be designed to surpass the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO) requirements.

    b) Continue to support local water districts' water efficiency rebate programs, e.g., lawn to garden conversion, smart irrigation controller replacement, and laundry to garden graywater systems.

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4) Support wastewater reclamation and reuse programs that maximize the use of recycled water.

    a) Partner with water suppliers to expand recycled water systems as feasible, including considering additional treatment to allow for additional recycled water uses.

    b) Encourage expansion of graywater capture programs offered by water districts.

5) Support and advocate for improved agricultural water conservation practices.

## Flood Protection and Floodplain Management

1) Advocate for funding assistance for responsible parties, public and private, as well as continue to identify and pursue federal and state grant funding to support flood protection efforts and floodplain management in alignment with the 2045 General Plan.

2) Support public and private efforts to improve protection against flooding, subsidence, and inundation, especially projects that achieve 200-year flood protection or better, factoring in anticipated sea level rise, in areas of the county covered by the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan.

## Levee Maintenance and Restoration

1) Advocate for significant funding for western and central Delta levees to support water quality and the existing through-Delta Freshwater Pathway and to protect critical infrastructure.

2) Support local and regional efforts to procure additional funding for levee maintenance and improvement to ensure levees retain their effectiveness at reducing flood risk and protecting property, critical infrastructure, and environmental resources.

3) Advocate for expanded funding for Delta levee rehabilitation to cover all priority islands and tracts, including very high, high, and other, as identified in the Delta Levees Investment Strategy.

    a) Advocate for immediate rehabilitation of priority levees on the western and central Delta islands and tracts.

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4) Advocate for funding assistance for small urban and urbanizing communities within the Delta to attain 200-year flood protection with levees within the State Plan of Flood Control that meet Urban Levee Design Criteria standards.

5) Support using PL 84-99 as a minimum design standard for levees.

6) Support improvement of lowland levees to a higher Delta-specific standard that provides additional protection from earthquakes, extreme floods, and sea level rise; improved protection for legacy communities; and opportunities for habitat improvement on the water-side of levees.

7) Support a multi-year funding commitment to restore and improve non-project levees and levees outside the State Plan of Flood Control, which is defined in the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan.

8) Support and advocate for the Delta Dredged Sediment Long-Term Management Strategy and the beneficial reuse of dredged materials for levee rehabilitation.

9) Oppose the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' policy to require removal of all shrubs and trees from levees, unless it can be demonstrated that shrubs and trees negatively impact the structural integrity of the levee.

10) Support actions outlined in the Contra Costa County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan that reduce risks of levee failure and flooding.

## New and Expanded Water Storage

1) Support multi-benefit storage options that incorporate water quality, water supply, flood control, surface water and groundwater storage, groundwater management, and ecosystem components to improve water supply reliability for California.

2) Advocate for clear regulations pertaining to groundwater storage and beneficial use.

3) Support Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations on all state and federal reservoirs.

4) Support groundwater management programs and advocate for funding for groundwater storage and conjunctive use projects that reduce reliance on the Delta in meeting California's future water supply needs.

## East Contra Costa Subbasin Groundwater Management

1) Manage the County's groundwater supply and quality through implementation of the East Contra Costa (ECC) Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), adopted by the Board of Supervisors in December 2021 and approved by the Department of Water Resources in July 2023. The GSP includes the sustainability goal to manage the Subbasin to:

a) Protect and maintain safe and reliable sources of groundwater for all beneficial uses and users.

b) Ensure current and future groundwater demands account for changing groundwater conditions due to climate change.

c) Establish and protect sustainable yield for the Subbasin by achieving measurable objectives set forth in the ECC Subbasin GSP in accordance with implementation and planning periods.

d) Avoid undesirable results defined in the ECC Subbasin GSP as sustainability indicators in accordance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

## Water Rights and Legislative Protections

1) Support and preserve existing water rights and legislative protections established for the Delta and its environments.

## Grassland Bypass Project

1) Monitor to ensure the San Luis Drain is no longer used to transport and discharge subsurface agricultural drainage flows, generally characterized as containing salts, boron, selenium, and other constituents, to the San Joaquin River and Delta.

2) Continue to participate and coordinate in the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board's annual meeting required by the waste discharge permit in support of actions that reduce the discharge of stormwater drainage to the San Joaquin River and Delta.

## San Francisco to Stockton Deep Water Ship Channel

1) Advocate for full federal funding of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' navigation program, which provides annual maintenance dredging for the operation and use of the federal navigation channels along the County's shoreline.

2) Continue to monitor and participate in the deepening of the John F. Baldwin and Stockton Deep Water Ship Channels.

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# Resilience to Climate Change

1) Promote increased resilience to climate change in the most vulnerable Delta communities, including resilience to climate change hazards such as flooding, extreme heat, drought, severe storms, agricultural pests and diseases, and human health hazards, in alignment with the 2045 General Plan.

2) Encourage state and regional permitting agencies, such as the State Water Resources Control Board, Delta Stewardship Council, and San Francisco Bay Conservation Development Commission (BCDC), to use the most up-to-date science related to climate change in their policies and decision-making processes.

    a) Request that reservoir and flood control operation rules be revised to adapt to rainfall-runoff changes caused by climate change.

    b) Advocate for improved modeling of the areas at risk from flooding due to sea level rise that is consistent throughout the San Francisco Bay and Delta.

3) Protect the unique physical characteristics in the Delta (e.g., hydrodynamics, levees, and Delta islands) as part of any plan developed for sea level rise.

    a) Coordinate with local, regional, state, and federal agencies; neighboring jurisdictions; property owners; utilities; community-based organizations (CBOs); community members, especially those in impacted communities; and other stakeholders to prepare and implement the Contra Costa Resilient Shoreline Plan for the entirety of the Contra Costa County shoreline from the San Francisco Bay to the Delta.

    b) Advocate for increased funding to support sea level rise adaptation planning for the San Francisco Bay and Delta.

    c) Support adoption of standards that conserve and expand the natural shoreline of the Delta in the county.

    d) Support using natural infrastructure, including ecosystem restoration and green infrastructure, to protect against sea level rise and associated shoreline flooding.

4) Support efforts that protect Delta water quality from increasing impacts of drought.

    a) Support the ongoing protection of wetlands and marshes in the Delta to protect water quality and increase community resilience during periods of drought.

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b) Advocate for enough freshwater flow to meet the Delta ecosystem's needs in the State's consideration of emergency actions to respond to drought.

c) Encourage south of Delta water suppliers to diversify their water supply to meet demand during dry years without increasing reliance on the Delta.

d) Convene the County's Drought Task Force and facilitate development and implementation of the County's Drought Resilience Plan as required by Senate Bill 552.

    i) Advocate for funding for implementation of the County's Drought Resilience Plan.

e) Discourage overreliance on Temporary Urgency Change Petitions (TUCP) to address drought that will result in negative impacts on Delta water quality.

# Communities

## Environmental Justice

1) Support and promote increased inclusion and participation of impacted Delta communities in decision-making processes that affect the Delta and its communities.

2) Support and advocate for equitable resource allocation within the Delta to ensure that impacted communities have equitable access to clean air and water.

3) Encourage infrastructure projects that increase public access to diverse, high-quality parks, green spaces, recreational facilities, trails, and natural environments in impacted Delta communities, including enhancements to existing marinas, shorelines, and regional parks.

4) Support activities that promote and improve economic opportunity in impacted communities within the Delta.

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## Economic Development

1) Encourage small business development to protect and enhance economic vitality in the Delta, particularly in Delta Legacy Communities.[1]

2) Promote sustainable tourism in the Delta that maintains and enhances the region's cultural and natural resources, character, and sense of place.

3) Promote and protect recreation opportunities in the Delta.

4) Preserve agricultural heritage and core agricultural land in the Delta by encouraging activities that reduce and/or eliminate conversion of farmland.

    a) Advocate for use of the Good Neighbor Checklist within the Agriculture Core for projects within the Legal Delta.

5) Encourage development of community action plans in the Delta Legacy Communities of Bethel Island and Knightsen, that are supportive of and consistent with the community profiles developed in the 2045 General Plan, to identify improvements that would enhance quality of life, economic development, historic preservation, transportation, and public safety.

## Emergency Response

1) Support collaborative efforts to improve emergency response among the Delta counties to help protect life, property, and the environment; ensure continued operation of critical facilities and infrastructure; and support a rapid recovery in the short, medium, and long term.

    a) Support partnerships between Contra Costa County, Bay-Delta waterfront cities, and local public agencies to develop and fund a plan that will increase resiliency of the shoreline road system that will be impacted by sea level rise to ensure emergency responders can get to those in need and community members can continue to reach services.

2) Encourage lower risk uses of flood-prone rural lands.

3) Encourage expanded participation across Delta communities in the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteer program.

[1] Delta Legacy Communities are rural communities registered as a Historic District by either a state or federal entity. Delta Legacy Communities in Contra Costa County are Bethel Island and Knightsen.

4) Support material stockpiling and equipment staging, specifically in the western Delta, for emergency levee repair.

    a) Consult with reclamation districts to identify storage sites within the Primary Zone.

    b) Protect materials found in the Legal Delta deemed essential for levee repair.

# Environment

## Protect and Restore the Bay-Delta Ecosystem

1) Support efforts to increase the health of the Bay-Delta and tributary watersheds.

2) Support existing and future protection, restoration, and enhancement of creeks, wetlands, marshes, sloughs, tidelands, natural watercourses, and riparian corridors.

3) Support efforts to promote public involvement in Bay-Delta protection and restoration.

4) Support ecosystem-based scientific research to determine what is necessary to protect and restore the Bay-Delta and support implementation of recommended actions resulting from this research.

5) Support addressing the ongoing issue of abandoned and derelict commercial and recreational vessels within the Delta.

6) Support efforts to restore native fish populations in the Bay-Delta.

    a) Encourage updates to strengthen thresholds for healthy fish populations if endangered species populations do not continue to improve.

    b) Support implementing state and federal policies for doubling salmon populations to restore and maintain the commercial and recreational salmon fishery in the Bay-Delta ecosystem.

7) Support efforts that benefit migrating waterfowl.

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8) Advocate for acquiring priority aquatic and terrestrial habitat areas and habitat restoration and enhancement projects in cooperation with local government and affected landowners in order to improve the sustainability of threatened fish and wildlife species and contribute to the overall health and resiliency of the Delta ecosystem. Examples include the Dutch Slough Tidal Marsh Restoration Project and Knightsen Wetland Restoration Project.

9) Ensure large scale wetlands restoration projects address and mitigate the formation and discharge of pollutants, e.g., methyl mercury, salt, and selenium, and their effects on Delta water quality and fish species.

    a) Encourage research and pilot projects on ways to minimize methylation of mercury in Delta wetlands to maximize the fishery and terrestrial species benefits of habitat restoration in the Delta.

## Controlling Existing Invasive Species

1) Encourage going beyond individual species management by establishing ecosystem-level knowledge, goals, and tools to address an evolving species pool and changing drivers.

2) Encourage implementation of systemic monitoring systems for invasive species and encourage agencies to collaborate on development of coordinated monitoring strategies.

3) Support integrated pest management practices to control and eradicate invasive species in critical habitats, water conveyance systems, and recreation areas in the Delta, including its tributaries and marshes.

4) Support collaboration between local, state, and federal governments to use best management practices in the control of invasive species.

5) Advocate for non-discretionary funding for the operations and maintenance of waterways, including but not limited to controlling invasive aquatic weeds.

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