

SB 458 (Steinberg/Simitian) Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Fact Sheet

SUMMARY

1) Creates the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy in the Natural Resources Agency to advance the coequal goals of restoring the Delta ecosystem and creating a more reliable water supply in California.

2) The primary mission of the Conservancy shall be to protect and enhance habitat and habitat restoration.

3) The Conservancy shall also: protect and preserve Delta agriculture and working landscapes.; increase opportunities for tourism and recreation in the Delta; promote Delta legacy communities and economic vitality in the Delta; increase the resilience of the Delta to the effects of natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes; protect and improve water quality; assist the Delta regional economy through the operation of the conservancy's program; identify priority projects and initiatives for which funding is needed; protect, conserve, and restore the region's physical, agricultural, cultural, historical, and living resources; assist local entities in the implementation of their habitat conservation plans (HCPs) and natural community conservation plans (NCCPs); facilitate take protection and safe harbor agreements under the federal Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act for adjacent landowners and local public agencies; and promote environmental education through grant funding.

4) The Conservancy Board shall consist of 11 voting members, including one Supervisor or designee of each of the 5 Delta

Counties (Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo).

5) The Conservancy may acquire from willing sellers or transferors interests in real property and improve, lease, or transfer interests in real property, in order to carry out its mission.

6) The Conservancy may pursue and accept funds from various sources, including, but not limited to, federal, state, and local funds or grants, private philanthropy, gifts, and donations.

7) The Conservancy Board shall prepare and adopt a strategic plan to achieve the goals of the Conservancy. The plan shall describe its interaction with local, regional, state, and federal land use, recreation, water and flood management, and habitat conservation and protection efforts within and adjacent to the Delta. The strategic plan shall establish priorities and criteria for projects and programs as well as determine funding needs throughout the Delta. The strategic plan shall be consistent with the Delta Plan adopted by the Delta Stewardship Council developed pursuant to SB 12 (Simitian).

8) The Conservancy may acquire water or water rights to support the coequal goals.

9) SB458 revises the provisions of the Delta Protection Act to reduce the number of members from 23 to 15 by eliminating 5 state agency representatives and three Governor's appointees.

BACKGROUND

The Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Delta) is a web of channels, natural habitat, and reclaimed islands at the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers. It forms the eastern portion of the wider San Francisco Bay Estuary, which also includes the San Francisco, San Pablo, and Suisun Bays. The Delta collects water from California's largest watershed, which encompasses roughly 45 percent of the state's surface area and stretches from the eastern slopes of the coastal ranges to the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountain Ranges.

The Delta is a unique ecosystem. Combined with the adjacent Suisun Marsh, the Delta ecosystem provides habitat for 700 species, including 12 species listed under either the federal or state endangered species laws. Eighty percent of the state's commercial fishery species live in or migrate through the Delta.

Two-thirds of all Californians rely on the Delta for part or all of their drinking water. One-sixth of all irrigated lands in the nation are located in this watershed, producing more than 45 percent of the fruits and vegetables produced in the United States.

NEED FOR BILL

Water Supply in Peril. The water supply for 23 million Californians in the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, and Southern California is in danger of collapse from multiple threats.

The Delta Is Unstable. The State Department of Water Resources has determined that the Sacramento – San Joaquin Delta is geologically unstable. Much of the Delta is below sea-level. Earlier spring runoff will make for bigger

floods overwhelming the fragile Delta levees.

Earthquakes, Flooding, and Sea Rise. A major earthquake in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta could cause widespread levee failure and flooding, costing the state more than \$30 - \$40 billion in long-term losses and tens of thousands of jobs. According to the Department of Water Resources, a magnitude 6.5 earthquake in the western delta could tear 30 breaches in the levees that protect water supplies for 23 million Californians and some of the nation's most productive farmland. Rising sea levels and increasingly large winter floods (caused by climate change) make levee failure more likely. There is a significant probability that the Delta islands will collapse relatively soon, decreasing the state water supply by more than 20%, and by as much as 40-90% in some parts of the Bay Area. According to DWR it would take 5 years and billions of dollars of work to restore all water deliveries from the Delta. In addition to significant hardships to southern California and California's agricultural economy, Silicon Valley receives 50% of its water from the Delta. Even temporary shutoffs would be catastrophic to this critical industrial sector.

Crashing Fish Populations. Salmon runs in the southern Delta are at a tiny fraction of historic levels. Delta smelt, already a threatened species, fell last fall to the lowest levels ever measured. Striped bass, chosen as the indicator species in 1959 are in rapid decline. Court actions to protect these declining populations make water export from the existing canals and channels highly unreliable.