

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Ecosystem Restoration Program

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) is an ambitious 30-year plan to restore ecological health, improve water management in the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and support the regulatory framework for restoration of the Delta. The decline of populations of native Delta fish species, e.g. the Delta smelt, longfin smelt, and both green and white sturgeon, the exploration of water conveyance alternatives, the expected alterations to the landscape, ecology and hydrology of the Delta due to climate change, the need for adequate flood protection and management and levee reinforcement, and litigation challenging the regulatory framework of the state and federal water operation systems has highlighted the need for cohesive planning and management in this sensitive area.

State and federal fishery agencies support the program, which is headed by implementing agency managers from the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Non-governmental organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, California Waterfowl Association, River Partners, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, the Central Valley Joint Venture and the Bay Institute, have participated in restoration efforts funded by the ERP and have provided stakeholder guidance in developing and implementing the ERP's long-term restoration plan.

Some consider the plan for restoring a healthy ecosystem in the Delta and its tributaries to be excessive in its attempt to balance environmental needs with the need for a reliable water supply. It has been argued this effort will result in insufficient water supplies for urban and agriculture uses, and lead to the excessive loss of agricultural lands as habitat is restored. It is also surmised this loss will affect the tax base and economies of some agriculturally rich counties.

The DFG ERP has funded more than \$600 million in projects to address the multiple concerns within the Delta and currently manages approximately 80 active grants. DFG is coordinating its activities with other planning efforts and entities involved, including the Delta Stewardship Council, DWR FloodSafe Program, Bay Delta Conservation Plan and the Delta Conservancy, and is developing the plan for the next stage of ecosystem restoration. This plan will contain strategic objectives to achieve recovery for at-risk species, rehabilitate natural processes, maintain or enhance populations of selected species for sustainable commercial or recreational harvest, protect or restore functional habitat types, prevent or reduce harmful impacts from nonnative (invasive) species, and improve or maintain water quality conditions that support healthy ecosystems.