

Conservation Strategy for the 2017 Update of the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan

As the California Department of Water Resources works toward a 2017 update of its Central Valley Flood Protection Plan, an associated Conservation Strategy, simultaneous Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basin-wide Feasibility Studies and the plan itself all represent major planning initiatives with significant potential consequences for affected farming communities in California's Central Valley.

Senate Bill 5 (Machado, 2007) required the Department of Water Resources to prepare the 2012 Central Valley Flood Protection Plan. The CVFPP identified potential modifications to improve performance of California's state-federal network of project levees, spanning the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers from Redding to Fresno. At the same time, SB 5 required the department to consider enhancements to achieve multiple benefits, including structural as well as nonstructural ways to achieve improved ecosystem functions (for example, traditional structural approaches such as levees, weirs and dams, as well as nonstructural approaches such as levee setbacks, overflow areas, multi-use floodways and the like).

Responding to this mandate, the CVFPP proposed creation of up to 10,000 acres of permanent new habitat within the 35,000 to 40,000-acre footprint of a proposed expansion of the existing Sacramento Valley Sutter and Yolo bypass system. In addition, the 2012 CVFPP included an initial Conservation Framework.

The department's January 2015 Draft Conservation Strategy builds and significantly expands on the 2012 CVFPP and Conservation Framework documents, detailing wetland and riparian habitat objectives amounting to some 20,000 acres in the Sacramento River and Feather River basins, and some 9,000 acres along the San Joaquin River. Conservation Strategy [maps](#) for the Upper Sacramento, Feather River, Lower Sacramento, Upper San Joaquin and Lower San Joaquin River regions show Restoration Opportunity Areas within adjacent corridor areas along existing bypasses and major river reaches.

A summary breakdown of the total acres of proposed levee setbacks and bypass expansions, existing habitat, proposed permanent habitat and proposed floodplain agriculture is summarized [here](#).

Habitat acreages identified in the department's Draft Conservation Strategy increased the 10,000 acres originally identified in the 2012 CVFPP roughly three-fold. The CVFPP's proposed 10,000 acres in the Sacramento Valley have doubled to 20,000 acres. Added to this, the Department's Draft Conservation Strategy proposes 9,000 acres of new habitat enhancements along the San Joaquin River.

Total acreages for setbacks and proposed habitat areas combined increases the overall footprint to some 35,000 acres in the Sacramento Valley and some 15,000 acres along the San Joaquin River, including some 5,000 acres of proposed wildlife-friendly agriculture on either side.

At the same time, the Draft Conservation Strategy identifies large areas of already existing habitat, including 89,000 acres of the existing riparian and marsh habitats in the Sacramento

Valley and 33,000 acres in the San Joaquin Valley. The Draft Conservation Strategy lists existing floodplain inundation habitat in the Sacramento Valley at 44,000 acres and 13,100 acres in the San Joaquin Valley.

Conservation objectives detailed in a Final Conservation Strategy to follow the Draft Conservation Strategy will be informed by cost-benefit and engineering studies to be detailed in Sacramento and San Joaquin river basin-wide feasibility studies to be prepared by the Department of Water Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Information regarding projects identified in the basin-wide feasibility studies, conservation objectives in a Final Conservation Strategy, and local priorities identified in six [Regional Flood Management Plans](#), will be incorporated in an update of the 2012 Central Valley Flood Protection Plan. This larger Flood Plan Update must in turn be approved and adopted by the Central Valley Flood Protection Board in 2017.

Related Ag Alert Coverage:

- [Collaborative projects aim to aid salmon](#) (March 23, 2016)
- [Flood plan impact on farmland continues to evolve](#) (February 25, 2015)
- [Flood plan could require more land as habitat](#) (February 4, 2015)

The 2015 Draft Conservation Strategy can be seen [here](#).