

Delta Wetlands Project

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Organization:

[State Water Resources Control Board \(California\)](#)

Summary:

In 1987, Delta Wetlands, a California Corporation, envisioned the project for water storage and wildlife habitat enhancement in four privately owned islands in Sacramento-San Joaquin delta. The four islands considered were Bacon Island and Bouldin Island in San Joaquin County and Holland Tract and Webb Tract in Contra Costa County, California, encompassing approximately 23,000 acres. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were prepared by State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as lead agencies in compliance with CEQA and NEPA to assess the environmental impacts of the proposed project. The original proposal was to store water from Delta in winter on all the four islands and to manage them as water fowl and other wildlife habitat in other seasons. However, in 1993, after receiving public comments for the first draft EIR/ EIS, the project description was revised proposing water storage on two islands and Habitat Management Plan (HMP) on two islands. The draft, revised draft and final EIR/EIS were prepared based on this project description. The recurring issues raised during the public reviews and consultations with responsible/co-operating agencies included effects on water quality, fish, wildlife and plant species and stability of levees. Several restrictions were incorporated into project operations when final EIR was approved in 2001, to minimize these effects.

Date Range:

1987-07-09 - 2001-02-15

Chronology:

July 9, 1987 - Delta Wetlands filed water rights applications to SWRCB to store water seasonally on all four of its project islands

February, 1988 - SWRCB filed Notice of preparation(NOP) for EIR/EIS and a Scoping meeting was held on February 11

December, 1990 - SWRCB and USACE released Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and subsequently withdrew after receiving comments

July 21, 1993 - Application for new water rights based on revised project description that proposed two reservoir islands and two habitat islands

September 11, 1995 - SWRCB and USACE released new Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) based revised project description and distributed it for public review and comments

October 11, 1995 - Held a public meeting to receive comments on the document

December 21, 1995 - End of public review period

1997 - No-jeopardy biological opinions from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) in consultation with SWRCB which included Final Operations Criteria (FOC) for the project

May 31, 2000 - Issued revised EIR/EIS and distributed for public comments

July 31 2000 - End of public review period

January 16, 2001 - SWRCB released Final EIR/EIS complying with CEQA. USACE will separately issue Final EIS in compliance with NEPA
February 15, 2001 - Final determination

Project description

Delta Wetlands (DW) project involves diverting and storing winter flows from Delta in Bacon Island and Webb Tract for beneficial uses in summer and developing seasonal wetlands and riparian habitats in Bouldin Island and most of Holland Tract. This entails DW to divert 312 Thousand Acre Feet (TAF) of water from Delta through large siphons during December 15 through May 1. The stored water would be discharged to Delta outflows from May through July. From August to December, the habitat islands would be vegetated with wetland plants to support wintering waterfowls. From October through December the islands would be managed as waterfowl habitat where private hunting would be permitted. The habitat islands would be managed under a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) to compensate for the loss of wetlands in reservoir islands and to protect the state listed endangered and threatened species and other species of special status.

To operate the project successfully, existing levees on the perimeters of the islands would be strengthened and new interior levees would be constructed around the water storage area. DW proposed to construct club houses, boat decks, parking areas, and water and waste treatment facilities on the perimeter levees of all the four islands to support recreation.

Alternatives

The draft EIR/EIS analyzed three project alternatives and a No-project alternative. No project alternative represented conditions that existed in all the four islands before 1987. At that time, Bacon and Bouldin islands were being farmed intensively and Holland and Webb Tracts were unevenly cultivated. This alternative was considered unrealistic because of economic non-productivity. Both alternatives 1 and 2 proposed two reservoir islands and two habitat islands, but offering different scenarios for the discharge of stored water. However, alternative 2 has highest amount of discharge causing maximum effect on fisheries. Under the third alternative, all the four islands would be used as reservoirs causing substantial habitat loss.

Impacts and issues

The significant impacts of the project would be on water quality, levee stability and seepage and fish and wildlife. Project could increase salinity and concentrations of Trihalomethane (THMs) and Dissolved Organic Carbon in export water to Southern California. Perimeter levees and the proposed interior levees around reservoirs could be susceptible to wind and erosion and seepage from the project reservoir to neighboring islands may increase. Project could also affect several fish species, federal/state listed species, candidate species and special status plants. These include effects on habitats of wintering geese and swans, steelhead, chinook salmon etc. Cumulative impacts could be the gradual water quality degradation in delta flow and increased traffic congestion in highways SR4 and SR12 due to recreation facilities.

Major agencies involved

Delta Wetlands applied to State water Resources Control Board for permits to seasonally divert unappropriated surface water and store it on islands necessitating the preparation of Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under CEQA. They have also applied to Department of the Army to discharge dredged or fill material and to construct facilities in navigable waters triggering a requirement for an Environmental impact Statement (EIS) under NEPA. Other agencies involved are California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS), U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB), and San Joaquin-Contra Costa County governments.

Resolving issues and mitigation measures

DW's application for new water rights and changes to existing water rights brought up concerns on water quality and caused protests from many entities such as California Urban Water Agencies (CUWA), East bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) and Contra Costa Water District (CCWD). Therefore, an agreement was signed between DW and CUWA to operate the project according to the terms of Delta Wetlands Project Water Quality management Program (WQMP). Stipulated agreements were also entered with Reclamation Bureau, City of Stockton, Amador County, North Delta Water Agency and Department of Water Resources affirming the water rights of those agencies and water quality criteria. Protest dismissal agreements were reached between DW, EBMUD and CCWD to ensure the stability of project island levees, protection against seepage from the reservoir islands to neighboring islands and limits to project's water quality effects.

No jeopardy biological opinions were issued by USFWS, NMFS and DFG regarding effects of the project on federally fish species and state listed fish, wildlife and plant species. However, a "Final Operations Criteria" was developed by formal consultation process between above mentioned agencies and SWRCB requiring numerous mitigation measures. The FOC stipulates many flow and water quality conditions for diversion and discharge of water.

Keywords:

Delta Wetlands, Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, water storage, Habitat Management Plan, reservoir islands, habitat islands, levee stability, seepage, Trihalomethanes (THM), Dissolved Organic Carbon

Geographic Area:

Bacon Island and Bouldin Island in San Joaquin County and Holland Tract and Webb Tract in Contra Costa County, Sacramento - San Joaquin Delta, California

Resources Used:

[Interagency Ecological Program for San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary](#)
[California Natural Diversity Database \(CNDDDB\)](#)

Related links:

<http://www.deltawetlandsproject.com/>
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/agendas/2001/february/0215-14.doc

County: [San Joaquin](#)

