

Flood Protection Corridor Program Direct Expenditure Candidate Project Summary

Project Name: Staten Island Acquisition

Primary Proponent: The Nature Conservancy

Total Project Cost: \$35 million

Flood Protection Corridor Program Cost: \$17.56 million.

Other Funding Partners: CALFED through the Resources Agency has committed \$17.5 million from Proposition 204.

Project Summary: Staten Island is a 9,173-acre island in Northern San Joaquin County west of Terminous at its southern end and west of Thornton at its northern end. The Island is bounded on the west by the North Fork of the Mokelumne River and on the east by the South Fork of the Mokelumne. The 100-year flood stage is 14 feet above MSL at its northern end, and 7.8 feet above MSL at its southern end. Staten Island did not flood in any of the major floods of the past 34 years due to levee failure on adjoining properties. In 1986, Tyler Island to the west, McCormack Williamson Tract to the north, and New Hope Tract to the northeast all flooded. The island includes gas wells, 13 residences occupied by 35 people (1990 Census), some public roads and public utilities. It has historically been farmed with grain crops that are compatible with the site's wildlife values.

Flood Benefits: Flooding has occurred historically in the Staten Island vicinity because the Mokelumne Watershed cannot drain to the Delta quickly enough to avoid flooding in the Thornton, Interstate Highway 5, and Point Pleasant areas to the north and east. If Staten Island were used for flood management, it could provide a large (9,000 acres) area for transitory storage to drain the Mokelumne Watershed more rapidly and avoid upstream storage. Flooding Staten Island would also relieve pressure on the levees protecting nearby Delta islands. Use of Staten Island for transitory storage would require construction of a weir at the upstream (north) end and installation of pumps to evacuate the water at the downstream (south) end. Alternative flood management plans would rely on setback levees at the north end of the island to reduce conveyance limitations and allow the areas upstream to drain more quickly. Flood management options are under study by CALFED in the North Delta Improvements planning process. The acquisition of Staten Island will be done in a way which preserves the options to implement the recommendations of this planning effort.

Wildlife Benefits: Listed benefits of the acquisition include protection of critical agricultural wetlands, and protection of an important wintering area for greater sandhill cranes and migratory waterfowl, with habitat value for shorebirds, giant garter snakes and western pond turtles. The acquisition would contribute to protection of a contiguous

habitat corridor along the lower Consumnes and Mokelumne Rivers. A grant application for \$35M to acquire fee title to the island was submitted to the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program in May of 2000. The grant application states properties like this in the Delta are subject to pressures for urbanization and for changed agricultural practices that might not be compatible with preservation of the most critical wildlife values of the site. To quote from the application, "...The acquisition will interrupt the encroaching pattern of residential and vineyard development." Staten Island is considered to be among the best Greater Sandhill Crane wintering habitat in the Delta. The Greater Sandhill Crane in the Central Valley was listed as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region I, sensitive species in 1982 and a California threatened species in 1983.

Agricultural Land Conservation Benefits: Following acquisition by the Nature Conservancy, the property would continue to be farmed in the way it has been historically. These historic agricultural activities will be adapted through "development and refinement of wildlife-friendly agricultural practices." There are also plans to improve irrigation to improve management of a seasonally flooded field (1,500 to 2,500 acres of seasonally-flooded corn). The island also supports a 1,000-acre organic rice operation.

Project Linkage to State Interest: Staten Island acquisition was approved through the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Grant Program. Funding has been previously committed by California Secretary of Resources Mary Nichols and DWR Director Tom Hannigan, provided land acquisition agreement and easement negotiations can be completed in accordance with State requirements.

Status of Decision to Award FPCP Funds: The decision has been made by the Secretary for Resources and the Director of DWR to support this project as a step toward implementing the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan and toward solving flooding problems in the lower Mokelumne River Watershed and North Delta. Funding is subject to successful negotiation of State funding agreements and easement language that preserves the intended State benefits.

FPCP Project Evaluation Team Action: The Team supported this acquisition.