

Delta Protection Commission

ESP Recreation and Tourism Update: Input on Draft Findings and Recommendations

Public Meeting - Via Zoom

December 16, 2020, 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Meeting Summary

Purpose:

Solicit input on Public Draft Update, focused on review of key issues, recommendations, implementation actions, and strategies.

Participants:

Invitations sent to Delta Marketing Task Force, Delta as Place Interagency Working Group (cities, counties, state agencies, park districts), Delta Protection Advisory Committee, Delta community members.

Approximately 30 people attended the meeting.

Meeting Agenda

Welcome and Introductions

Erik Vink, Commission Executive Director, provided a welcome and introduction to the group.

Update Presentation

Karin Winters, Dangermond Group Project Manager, provided an overview of the update.

Clarifying questions were asked during the presentation. The questions and responses are listed below.

Plenary Discussion:

After the presentation, key questions were discussed. The questions and discussions are also listed below.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Virginia Gardiner, Commission Program Manager wrapped up by presenting a summary of next steps. Responses to any questions that could not be answered during the workshop will be provided in follow-up email to participants together with the meeting summary. Staff will be presenting to the Commission at their January meeting, and the next public meeting for input will be held on January 26, 2021. The report will then be finalized based on input and will be presented at the Commission's March meeting.

Clarifying Questions on Key Trends, Data, Findings:

Note: All Section numbers and appendices cited refer to the *Economic Sustainability Plan for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Recreation and Tourism Chapter 2020 Update*, which can be accessed at the Commission website at this link:

<http://delta.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/RecreationChapterESP110220DRAFT-508-1.pdf>

Question: I don't see any mention of the special event business that was flourishing pre-COVID. No mention of weddings, reunions etc.

Answer: These businesses are included in the establishment data, just not called out specifically. See Section 8.3.2.1. in the report.

Question: How were the visitation numbers derived? What is estimated? What were the key assumptions? What are the limitations?

Answer: An entire model was built based on participation rates and population within the defined market area. See Section 8.3.4 and Appendix H for specific information.

Question: Why law enforcement mentioned?

Comment: Heard from Contra Costa County constituents that greater enforcement of on-water laws/rules would help a lot too.

Answer: Recommendations from several sources on the need to increase funding for law enforcement. See Sections 8.3.3.7, 8.3.3.8, 8.3.3.9, 8.3.3.11, 8.3.4.4, and 8.4.1.3 for more information.

Question: When speaking of recreation-related establishments, what types of establishments are included? Marinas, parks?

Answer: Recreation-related establishments include Boat Building, Boat Dealers, Scenic and Sightseeing, Museums, Recreation Industries, Accommodation, and Food Services. Marinas are included. Public Parks are not included in the establishment data, but are included separately. See Section 8.3.2.1 and Appendix I for more information.

Question: Did the analysis look at recreation opportunities that have a dual recreation and conservation purpose?

Answer: The analysis did include some information about recreation and conservation and the conflicts between them. Please see Sections 8.3.3 and 8.4.2 for more information.

Question: The report mentioned changing demographics - and a younger and more diverse population. How else is the population changing? Who is moving there and who is leaving?

Answer: Population data was taken from California Department of Finance (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/Forecasting/Demographics/Projections/>). Determining specific demographic changes was outside of the scope of this project. Short discussion can be found in Section 8.4.2.1 and Section 8.3.7.

Question: Explain where and why so many marinas closed? How many berths were lost?

Answer: Specific research on where and why marinas closed was outside of the scope of this project. However, the Commission prepared an *Inventory of Recreation Facilities in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta* in 2015. One can compare the number of slips or berths in that report (approximately 10,000) to the number of slips in the Division of Boating and Waterways 2002 *Boating Needs Assessment*, which counted over 11,000 slips. It is unclear if the number can be compared exactly, but it does seem as though there has been a decline of about 1,000 slips between 2002 and 2015. In addition, during our marina owner focus group, participants identified a number of reasons why the marinas may have failed, including:

- Declining market share
- Need to cut costs during recession and lower margins, so investors pulled out
- Average customer base getting older
- Operators getting older and no one to take over
- People investing more money in homes so no money left for boats
- Younger people more likely to rent or share ownership, so fewer boats on the water
- Restaurants and entertainment venues closed in the recession, so less places for people to go in the Delta, so people choose to boat elsewhere

Question: Has there been any valuation of restoration and/or recreation to EJ [Environmental Justice] and urban communities in the Delta?

Answer: Value of restoration to specific communities was outside the scope of this project.

Question: How were focus group participants recruited? Has any work been done to assess how representative participants were of their respective communities?

Answer: Focus group participants were recruited through several means including social media, Commission contact lists, community-based organizations, activity groups, and others. See Appendix N for more information on the methodology. Several steps were taken to ensure adequate representation among focus group members.

Question: Did you look at impacts of the NHA [National Heritage Area] designation and/or marketing task force on recreation funding and coordination efforts?

Answer: Both efforts are too new to determine impacts, but Focus Groups were asked about these programs. Focus Group participants thought both programs can be helpful to the Delta.

Question: Are non-motorized boating trends included?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Was there any primary data collected, or were all the models just based on state and federal surveys?

Answer: The focus groups gave us some Delta-specific qualitative data, and we were able to get Delta-specific data taken from state boating data. See Appendix H for more information.

Issues/Constraints

Issues/constraints to recreation and tourism were presented to the group. Using a simple polling instrument the group was polled on their top issues or constraints. The top three issues were identified as aging infrastructure, lack of facilities, and water quality/waterway obstructions. The results were then discussed.

Comment: Lack of internet capability must be one of the top concerns.

Comment: Notable conveyance is so low.

Answer: Conveyance is a major threat to recreation and tourism; the Commission's role is represented in other forums.

Question: What does infrastructure refer to?

Answer: Mostly related to marinas and parks infrastructure, but also related to roads, cross channel gates, levees.

Comment: Interesting that climate change is also low along with conveyance.

Answer: That may be related to focus on issues that have a short-term impact.

Comment: As a business owner, the lack of coordination is a huge issue. There is very little coordination amongst businesses and other entities and in fact, there is a lot of working at cross-purposes.

Answer: This issue also came up in the Focus Group discussions, and they recommend having Delta marketing coordination.

Question: Did the analysis look at how climate change is expected to impact recreation in the Delta?

Comment: Extreme heat days may make outdoor recreation less desirable during heat waves.

Response: Increased fires and smoky air can also make outdoor recreation less desirable.

Answer: Climate change may have many direct and indirect impacts on recreation, including rising sea level, changes in water flow, drought, fisheries, etc. Climate change was discussed briefly in trends and issues. See Sections 8.3.7 and 8.4.2.8.

Priority Recommendations

The group was asked if there had to be a focus on only a handful to begin with, what are the top five priority issues facing Delta recreation and tourism, and what would be solutions, in your opinion? Thoughts, input on recommended key high priority issues for immediate action/focus?

Another snap poll was taken with recommendations grouped into the following categories: Planning/Organizational, and Capital Improvement/Funding. The top three priority action preferences for Planning/Organizational were chosen as:

- Expand promotion of VisitCADelta.gov,
- Implement permitting assistance, and
- Establish a facilitator entity.

The top three preferences for Capital Improvement/Funding priority actions included a tie, and were:

- Implementation of the Great Delta Trail,
- Maintain and upgrade existing facilities, and
- Expand public facilities, followed closely by
- Implementation of the National Heritage Area.

Following is the discussion on priority actions and categories:

Question: I have never heard of the Save the Waters you Love campaign. Can you explain what that is?

Answer: It is a campaign out of the San Francisco Estuary Project to educate boaters and others about ways to protect water quality. See Section 8.4.3.4.

Question: Was any research done on boat theft in the Delta?

Answer: Not specifically, but we understand it is a problem.

Comment: Seems some recommendations are very similar or can be blended. Marketing Task Force & VisitCADelta.com, Delta Trail & public facilities, etc.

Comment: From a planning perspective, land use planning assistance to local businesses and streamlining measures that can be used by local planning agencies would be very beneficial if possible.

Comment: Two things come to mind on increased law enforcement presence which is that research on law enforcement visibility shows mixed results: 1. Done incorrectly it can counter-intuitively increase people's perception of crime, and 2. Similar results on decreasing crime.

Comment: If the goal is to, for example, get people who are homeless away from parks, that's not a problem police can solve. If the goal is to check rowdy boaters that sounds like it might help.

Comment: Law enforcement is also safety related.

Comment: If helpful, our interviews with Delta [CA Fish and Wildlife] wardens and law enforcement found that they are very understaffed and stretched beyond the demands asked of them.

Comment: It's unfortunate that homelessness and crime get lumped together (not just here -- it often happens). Most of the crime in the Delta I'm aware of is not related to homelessness, but is crime that might be lessened by increased law enforcement presence.

Responsible Entity or Facilitator Organization

The group was asked, would it help the Delta to have an action oriented responsible entity or facilitator organization focused on recreation and tourism? If so, how should it be structured? What responsibilities should it have? What should it focus on first?

Question: I like the recreation consortium initiative. What does that look like? There are so many opportunities in the Delta, is the hope to develop a single or simple umbrella "lead" identity?

Answer: The recommendation is to have a single action-oriented entity. The structure of such an entity is unknown at this point. However, if there is interest, it is hoped that potential participating agencies and organizations will continue the discussion. More discussion can be found in Section 8.4.3.

Question: One aspect I don't hear in this long-running discussion is creating an organization that can "get things done" to benefit both public and private recreation facilities and entities. Seems like you'd need two: Something like a Chamber of Commerce, to coordinate synergies of tourism businesses like wineries, Legacy Communities, and marinas. Plus, a multi-county JPA [Joint Powers Authority] to address the dearth of public recreation sites -- these need O&M [operations and maintenance support], and expansion...

Answer: Good comment. Both the public and private sectors are necessary to sustain Delta recreation and tourism. Operation and maintenance funding is a real challenge.

Question: Would a JPA or some administrator of the JPA seek county, state, and federal funds for various Delta projects?

Answer: Potentially. At this point, it is unknown exactly what a JPA or action oriented entity would do. More discussion can be found in Section 8.4.3 with potential recommendations. JPA might also help lobby for new funding.

Question: I'm curious about the role of the JPA with the NHA [National Heritage Area].

Answer: At this time there is no connection envisioned

Question: There is a Delta Chamber of Commerce. How does their mission fit in with a proposed oversight group?

Answer: Unknown. However, if they are interested, there may definitely be a role for them.

Comment: I'm so happy the oversight entity is being discussed/considered. There is a plethora of organizations with little slices of jurisdiction but no one to provide coordinated oversight.

Comment: So we can get beyond "what would be great" does anyone have a specific comment on how they get their top level official(s) to approve and sign an agreement in a multi-agency project? What level(s) of authority would it take to get an approval? What would the approver need -- a simple memo? a PowerPoint presentation? a sample MOU, etc.?

Comment: How about enlisting the help of a former Director of State Parks who is a Delta resident and avid yachtsman.

Comment: Moving forward to further explore what this might look like, what form it might take, exactly what their authority would be is a great idea. As the manager of the Prop 68 program at the Conservancy, we see some great proposals, but we are limited by what is fundable by General Obligation bonds and this bond language in particular. Being able to coordinate more -- even if it's just information exchange -- with other components of expanding recreation and tourism would be great.

Comment: As a general comment I appreciate the boldness of this vision. And will be interested to see where it goes from here.

Comment: I think the subject should continue. But it must include the damage that the water diversions are doing to fisheries and water quality. Who wants to fish, swim, or water ski on water with toxic algae?