

**Delta Protection Commission Meeting
November 18, 2021**

AGENDA ITEM 11: Draft Great California Delta Trail Master Plan Release

Prepared by: Virginia Gardiner

Presented by: Virginia Gardiner and Sofia Zander, TrailPeople

Requested Action: **Receive report and consider release of Great California Delta Trail Master Plan for public review and comment**

Type of Action: Action

Background: Public Resources Code (PRC) section 5852-5855 requires the Commission to develop and adopt a plan and implementation program for a continuous recreation corridor, including bicycle, hiking, and water trails, around the Delta. Since the legislation was passed in 2006, two planning documents involving extensive public outreach have been completed: the 2010 Western Blueprint for Solano and Contra Costa Counties, and the Eastern Blueprint for Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Yolo Counties in 2019. The Commission does not itself develop trails, but works in partnership with local entities to coordinate planning and implementation across jurisdictional boundaries. Trail segments are conceived, developed, built, and managed by local entities. Currently, a total of 47.3 miles of the Great California Delta Trail (Delta Trail) segments are designated and open to trail users including the River Walk, Clarksburg Branch Line and Sycamore Trails (City of West Sacramento); Sacramento River Parkway (City of Sacramento); Big Break Regional Shoreline and Marsh Creek Regional Trail (East Bay Regional Park District [EBRPD]); and Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail (multiple agencies).

Recreational trails provide multiple tangible benefits to communities. The 2020 update to the Economic Sustainability Plan Recreation and Tourism chapter (ESP) identified the Delta Trail as among immediate action priorities for improving the Delta recreation economy, recommending that the Commission:

- Partner with local and regional park and economic development agencies and State Parks to expand access to existing public facilities.
- Prioritize planning and implementation of the Great Delta Trail and Delta National Heritage Area.

Recreation focus group participants for the ESP update reinforced the need to improve visitation, with suggestions such as adding new businesses and public access facilities.

The Great California Delta Trail Master Plan (Plan) is an element of the Commission’s overall mission to support the Delta economy. Many of the most effective ways the Commission can support the economy are simply by encouraging and supporting the activities, projects and programs that Delta communities have identified through the Community Action Plans as well as their local programs. These include several trail projects that will enhance and highlight the many diverse qualities of the Delta, and play an important role in the National Heritage Area as well.

Plan Approach and Structure: While the Western and Eastern Blueprints offered a starting point, the Stakeholder and Technical Advisory Committees and public survey helped to develop the vision, which is a continuous recreational corridor through the five California Delta counties (Contra Costa, Solano, Yolo, Sacramento, and San Joaquin). The vision for the Delta Trail includes routes accessible to all with connections to other trails, recreational facilities, water access sites, and public transportation. As required by statute, the trail will link the San Francisco Bay Trail system at the Carquinez Bridge in Contra Costa and Solano Counties to planned Sacramento River trails in Yolo and Sacramento Counties, ending with the Sacramento River Parkway Trail at the Jibboom Street Bridge. The Plan provides a framework that lays out the important considerations trail planners should account for, including both opportunities and constraints in development of the trail. As well, it is intended to help the public understand the goals and strategies for the trail, and the range of possible benefits from the trail. The Plan is meant to support agency planning efforts and is not a mandate for local agency land use changes.

The first chapter lays out the background, enabling legislation and vision, describes the Study Area, plan development process, organization, and content. Chapter 2 covers the planning context for the Master Plan including plans, maps, and reference documents. Maps illustrate the physical infrastructure context such as levees, roads, bridges, and transportation considerations. They also emphasize considerations when establishing trails such as the agricultural landscape, and natural and cultural resources, such as sensitive wildlife areas and opportunities for appreciating the history and culture of those who settled the Delta. Chapter 3 contains many of the Plan’s recommendations for the Commission. Four regional maps (Western, Northern, Central, Southern) depict existing local and proposed trails and associated features. Trail Design Guidelines are contained in Chapter 4, with recommended Delta Trail types and classifications; specific trail design standards for the Delta; principles for designing

trails in different settings and accommodating specific user types; suggested trail road crossings and connections; signage and wayfinding guidelines; and guidance for trail amenities. Finally, Chapter 5 addresses trail planners and engineers, providing guidance and steps for building out the planned trail network, including planning-level estimated costs for trail types; funding opportunities and sources; and approaches to operating and maintaining the trail system.

A set of Appendices provides useful background and information including the results of the public and levee manager surveys (Appendix A and D), background document summaries (Appendix B), rail trail information (Appendix C), additional operations and maintenance guidance (Appendix E), potential funding and technical advice sources (Appendix F), liability and risk reduction (Appendix G), and a sample trail designation checklist and process (Appendix H).

Outreach to Date: Upon securing one-time funding and a consultant contract in 2019, Commission staff kicked off outreach efforts with Stakeholder and Technical Advisory Committee (SAC-TAC) meetings in December 2019. As the draft Plan was being developed in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a pause in outreach which resumed in May 2021 with a joint SAC-TAC “recalibration” meeting to consider the draft plan framework and concept, draft public survey, and the plan timetable. Outreach continued during the early summer with a public survey to help focus the overall trail vision. Feedback received from the May meeting and the survey was incorporated into an internal draft plan presented to the SAC-TAC at a workshop in early September 2021. Response to the workshop was overall enthusiastic and engaged, with much refinement and guiding comments from local agency planners, park and trails practitioners, trail advocates, and at least one agricultural operation.

On a parallel track, a survey was distributed to Levee Management Agencies (Reclamation Districts, or RDs) from July to October 2021. Fourteen surveys were received, representing over 50 RDs mostly in the northern and central portions of the Delta. This survey and two follow-up drop-in “focus group” meetings in October sought to determine the concerns RDs had with trail concepts, the kinds of issues currently experienced by RDs, and potential parameters and restrictions for trail proposals near or on levees that would need to be factored into such proposals. Response from RDs was less than enthusiastic but not entirely negative, as described in the Plan.

Staff also presented the Draft Plan to the Delta Protection Advisory Committee (September and November 2021) and received positive feedback and suggestions. The survey results are presented in the Plan Appendices A and D as noted above. All comments have been recorded and will be presented with the final report, but many are already incorporated into the final Draft Plan.

Key Plan Recommendations: The plan includes a total of 45 recommendations, many of which describe how the Commission can support various plans and projects throughout the Delta. Another set of recommendations are for the practitioner, relating to trail design elements to foster consistency across the many different potential implementing entities. The remainder are general recommendations regarding signage and maps. Attachment 1 provides a summary of the recommendations by type.

The Plan is intended to be a useful and lasting tool for our community partners who are involved in trail development. These include public works and park and recreation planners, local trail and outdoor education or environmental justice advocates, and those seeking to preserve and inspire appreciation for the unique natural, agricultural, and cultural values that make the Delta the priceless resource that it is.

Next Steps: Upon release of the draft plan for public comment, Commission staff and the consultant will continue outreach for community input at two online public workshops in November and December. We anticipate presenting a final plan to the Commission at the January 20, 2022 meeting.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): The Commission's Land Use and Resource Management Plan is an exempt Certified Regulatory Program under Article 17, Section 15251(m) of the CEQA Guidelines. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies), the Great California Delta Trail Master Plan is a planning study for possible future actions that the Commission has not approved, adopted, or funded and as such does not require preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or Negative Declaration (ND). Section 15262 does require consideration of environmental factors. Chapter 2 of the Plan details existing conditions, opportunities, and constraints to be considered by any entity proposing to implement a trail that they ultimately would request to be designated as a segment of the Trail. These include not only physical characteristics and infrastructure but natural and cultural resource considerations. Chapters 4 and 5 of the Plan provide design and implementation guidance that focuses on context-sensitive trail design. Trail segments proposed for designation as part of the Delta Trail would be reviewed and approved at the local level, and would undergo environmental review within the applicable jurisdiction.

Requested Action: Receive draft Great California Delta Trail Master Plan and authorize staff to release for a 30-day public review and outreach.

Relationship to Vision 2030 (Commission strategic plan):

Recreation and Tourism (Strategic Theme)

R.1 Partner with public agencies and private entities to increase and expand recreation and tourism in the Delta to all.

1.2 Identify recreation needs and constraints and apply available resources to meet them, including public-private partnerships and multiple use of appropriate Delta lands.

1.3 Extend the Great California Delta Trail by continuing planning, support, and collaboration efforts.

1.4 Develop partnerships to promote the Delta as a unique destination region to potential visitors, in-state, nationally and internationally.