Chapter 7 – Implementation, Evaluation, and Conclusion

# Introduction

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area Management Plan outlines the core mission of the National Heritage Area and its goals for the initial 15 years and shares a vision for the future created by the residents of the region. The hallmarks of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA are its unique natural and engineered landscape of water and farmland, the historic communities and the diverse cultures that built them, and the extensive partnership network that has already begun to work collaboratively. This management plan will be used as a guide and a catalyst for the Delta Protection Commission and the NHA partnership network, leveraging the existing synergy within this network and emphasizing that the strategic collaboration outlined within this plan is critical for attaining success.

With the Delta Protection Commission's strong fiscal and organizational capacity as a state agency, as well as its long-standing history of planning and project implementation in the region, the NHA coordinating entity is well-positioned as a regional leader. The organization's leadership role encompasses the continuation of successful programs, the development of new projects and programs identified during the planning process, and the support of partners' efforts to further the NHA's mission. The DPC and the NHA network of partners are prepared to carry out the strategies recommended in this plan and to adapt as new opportunities arise that are consistent with the National Heritage Area's mission, vision, and goals.

# Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA Implementation Plan and Priorities

Designating legislation requires the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA develop an implementation plan (Sec. 6001(c)(2)(C)(iv)). The management planning process that the DPC, partners, and residents carried out resulted in the development of an implementation plan built around overarching goals comprised of measurable objectives, and a set of strategies to achieve those objectives. The strategies are projected activities that the DPC and partners will implement during the initial 15 years after designation.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA Implementation Plan, presented in Appendix I, is organized by the NHA's five primary goals. Under each goal, the key objectives and strategies are listed along with the anticipated role of the coordinating entity. Where known, primary partner roles and opportunities are described, as well as the funding commitment that strategies entail. Each strategy also has a suggested timeframe during which programs and projects will begin. The DPC and its partners have already begun many activities that are likely to be continued, expanded, and enhanced in the future.

The anticipated starting timeline for new programs and projects is delineated as follows: short-term, denoting strategies that will commence in years one through three, beginning in the calendar year this plan is finalized; mid-term for strategies that will commence in years four and five; and long-term for the aspirational strategies that are projected for years six through ten. While a few projects may have distinct, relatively short timeframes for completion, many programs and projects will be ongoing. The timeframe is designed to be adaptable, enabling the coordinating entity to establish priorities for both new and ongoing activities, and to provide guidance to the NHA partnership network in determining a realistic pace for executing the plan's strategies.

Designating legislation also calls for strategies that will be undertaken in the first five years to be identified in the management plan. These are the short- and mid-term strategies listed in the implementation plan. Where possible, the implementation plan includes estimated project costs for specific expenditures but does not include the DPC or partner staff time or operations except in the business plan (Chapter 6). Additional potential sources for funding are noted where they are known.

All strategies are grounded in the interpretive themes for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA found in the interpretive plan (Chapter 2). Strategies contribute to stewarding and building on the natural, scenic, recreational, historic, and cultural assets of the region, developing interpretation that connects residents and visitors to those assets, and strengthening the partnership network and building capacity for communities and organizations. Strategies will be undertaken according to the best practices in each applicable field.

The DPC will develop an annual work plan of programs and projects based on the goals, objectives, strategies, and timeline set forth in the management plan. As part of the federal financial assistance agreement award process, the work plan based on management plan priorities is submitted annually to NPS.

Proposed programs or projects to be included in the annual work plan may include the following information:

* Project overview
* Measurable objective(s) and performance metrics
* Alignment with management plan goals and activities
* Detailed tasks and their timeframes for completion (including phased approaches if necessary)
* Responsible task group(s) for coordination or leadership
* Partners and their respective roles
* Cost estimations
* Staff allocations

## Preliminary Work Plan for Year 1

* Holding the one-day Delta Heritage Forum conference.
* Releasing Delta Heritage Courier newsletter.
* Work with Delta Leadership Foundation on hosting Delta Leadership Program.
* Developing and installing welcome, wayfinding, and interpretive signs.
* Reorganizing and setting up advisory bodies.
* Updating marketing plan to Include NHA activities.
* Establishing subgrant program.
* Working to augment staffing.
* Organizing America250 activities.
* Creating Passport program.
* Preparing Junior Ranger program.
* Partnering with Operation Pollination.

## Priorities for Years 1-3

In Years 1-3, the NHA's priorities will be:

* Continuing existing programs and projects such as the Delta Heritage Forum, Delta Heritage Courier, Delta Leadership Program, and signs development and Installation.
* Developing and implementing a subgrant program.
* Exploring additional funding sources.
* Producing interpretive content, programs, and materials.
* Supporting educational programs.
* Working with partners on NHA-wide events such as America250.
* Supporting the conservation of historical, cultural, and environmental resources.
* Creating a sustainable tourism program.
* Developing online presence, trip planning tools, and marketing materials.
* Establishing locations to provide NHA information.
* Expanding and supporting partnership network.
* Working with existing and new advisory bodies on Interpretation, resource stewardship, heritage tourism, and communication and marketing.
* Implementing projects that have a high benefit-cost ratio such as a passport program, Junior Ranger program, joining Operation Pollination, and posting plaques on historic buildings.

## Roles for the National Heritage Area

Broadly, there are seven fundamental roles that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA may assume. These various roles that other NHAs have played across the nation are described below. The specific role the NHA will play in each of the strategies outlined in the management plan is integrated into the strategy descriptions set forth in the preceding chapters and identified in Appendix I.

* Leader: Actively advancing the efforts of partners in the implementation of programs and projects that hold local, community, regional, or heritage area-wide benefits, providing direction in fostering collective endeavors.
* Convener: Acting as an organizer and facilitator for regional dialogues among partners and stakeholders, fostering discussions on specific topics to coordinate their independent initiatives and collaborative efforts.
* Project Implementer: Undertaking an independent project of benefit to partners and/or the NHA.
* Collaborator: Engaging in partnerships with various stakeholders to implement joint programs, projects, or initiatives that align with the overarching goals of the National Heritage Area.
* Funder: Providing NHA funding through grants or direct support for specific projects or programs.
* Promoter: Taking on the responsibility of raising public awareness regarding the independent initiatives and work carried out by partners within the National Heritage Area.
* Provider of Technical Assistance: Organizing or facilitating the sharing of skills, training, and information that assist in implementing projects and programs and building capacity within the partnership network.

## Implementation Summary

As implementation advances, the DPC will be proactive in assessing regional needs and opportunities and evaluating potential alignment with the mission and goals of the NHA. The DPC and the partnership network will learn and grow, expanding their understanding of the shifting priorities in preservation, conservation, tourism, interpretation, and economic development. The management plan leaves flexibility for the DPC and the partnership network to add or eliminate strategies that will help the NHA to continue to achieve the long-term vision established through the collaborative management planning process.

# Performance Outcomes and Evaluation

Performance assessment and evaluation constitute a critical, continuous process for every organization. There are two fundamental categories of evaluation. The first is the regular, yearly programmatic assessment integrated into an organization's administrative procedures. This practice serves as a compass for determining and executing programs and projects on an ongoing basis. The second is the comprehensive, long-term evaluation that examines the overall programmatic performance over an extended period.

The DPC carries out the first type of evaluation, programmatic assessments integrated into administrative procedures, through several regularly occurring activities:

* First, as an independent state agency, the DPC responds directly to the State Legislature through annual reports.
* The DPC board, which Is made up prima local officials, is engaged in the work of the DPC staff and regularly evaluates the performance of the Executive Director.
* The DPC also prepared and regularly updates the Vision 2030 strategic plan, which identifies objectives for cultural heritage and other theme areas.
* The DPC's financial and administrative staff and the agency's longevity mean there is a long-standing established protocol for reporting on financial and performance outcomes. This has involved rigorous reporting, documentation of activities and outcomes, and evaluation of programs and impact, demonstrating accountability, results, progress, and paths to improvement for these programs.
* The DPC established objectives and key results (OKRs) with the California Natural Resources Agency that are reported annually.
* The State Leadership Accountability Report, developed every two years, confirms internal controls, including assessment of accomplishments, for the whole organization.

The current system of evaluation and performance review entails attention to collecting data, understanding outcomes, and evaluating the success of the DPC's activities and programs. These practices will be applied to the annual NHA evaluation.

Going forward, responsibility for evaluation of the NHA falls in part to the NHA Advisory Committee, as recommended in Chapter 6 (Strategy 5.2.3). The NHA Advisory Committee will review NHA projects and programs on an annual basis, measuring accomplishments against the annual work plan and the goals, objectives, and strategies in the management plan. In addition, the DPC will continue to develop plans, including strategic planning, that will provide the opportunity to adjust NHA objectives and priorities for the long-term success of the partnership network and the region's resources.

Congress began including an evaluation requirement in designating legislation starting in 2008, aligning with the second type of evaluation mentioned above. As outlined in designating legislation for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA, the evaluation must:

* Assess the progress of the local coordinating entity in accomplishing the purposes of the authorizing legislation and the goals and objectives of the management plan;
* Analyze the investments of the federal government; state, tribal, and local governments; and private entities in the National Heritage Area to determine the impacts of the investments; and
* Review the management structure, partnership relationships, and funding of the National Heritage Area for purposes of identifying the critical components for sustainability of the National Heritage Area.

Public Law 117-339, the National Heritage Area Act signed into law in 2023, states that the Secretary of the Interior, "at reasonable and appropriate intervals, may conduct an evaluation of the accomplishments of the National Heritage Area," (Section 120104 (a)(1)).[[1]](#footnote-2) The law states that evaluation will assess the NHA's accomplishments of its purposes and achievement of the goals and objectives in the management plan, and will consider the leverage and impact of investments in the NHA. The 2023 legislation differs from the Dingell Act of 2019, which contained the designating legislation for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA. In the earlier legislation, the Secretary was directed to conduct an evaluation three years prior to the end of the initial authorization.[[2]](#footnote-3) The National Park Service will develop guidance for how the new legislative mandate will be carried out.

The legislated purposes and the goals of this management plan comprise the guiding intent for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA in its initial 15 years. Near the end of that period, the DPC will compile information needed for plan evaluation – including but not limited to historical budgets, program and project accomplishments, and administrative, management, and governance procedures.

The National Park Service defined an evaluation process over the course of evaluation of several NHAs that had reached the end of their authorization. The process, documented in the 2016 publication *National Heritage Area Evaluation Guide*, may be carried out by an independent entity. The National Park Service, acting on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, will review the results to determine if the DPC and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA have met the congressional mandate as established in designating legislation and the goals and objectives of the management plan. Based on the results of the NHA evaluation, the Secretary will compile a report for Congress that systematically details the achievements, the outstanding objectives, and the underlying reasons for non-fulfillment, as well as any remaining tasks. The evaluation also considers opportunities that were unanticipated during management planning and that were undertaken or could potentially evolve into NHA projects or programs.

Finally, the *Delta Residents Survey* presents an opportunity for a rigorous social scientific approach to evaluation not available to most NHAs. Carried out by the Delta Science Program for the first time in 2023, the survey measured perceptions of sense of place, community engagement, confidence in government, and response to climate change. In implementing the management plan, the NHA hopes to have a positive impact on all of these perceptions. By collaborating with the Delta Science Program to repeat the survey every three to five years, the DPC will gain valuable longitudinal insight into the overall success of the NHA.

# Financial Projections for Implementation

Financial projections for ten years following management planning are presented in Chapter 6. As a state agency, DPC has the capacity to match NPS Heritage Partnership Program funds through the portion of the administrative budget associated with the NHA. Additional income from private and state grants and donations, as well as project matching funds leveraged by the NHA grant program and participation in partnership projects will enable the DPC to not only meet, but exceed, the federal match requirement. The table shows expected expenditures to carry out the management plan activities, including personnel, operations, subgrant program, and some specific project and program expenditures. Project costs and staffing levels suggested in the implementation plan, plus estimated inflation increases, are included in these projections.

# Commitment and Support

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA enjoys significant support from a broad network of partners. This management plan includes XX partners, many of which have provided letters of commitment and support. In the XX letters of commitment, found in Appendix K, partners affirm their dedication to collaborating with the DPC to carry out the approved management plan, with a specific focus on how their organizational missions and interests align with the goals of the NHA. Partners define their commitment, which may include allocation of staff time, financial resources, or other essential resources to support the implementation of the plan strategies. Also, partners express their willingness to participate in committees, engage in additional planning, advocate for the NHA, and collaborate with the DPC to carry out the mission and work to achieve the vision established in the management plan. Many of these commitments are described in the narrative of the plan and noted in Chapter 5, Connecting and Supporting the Partnership Network. A detailed partnership table is in Appendix F.

Time, resources, needs, and challenges can determine partners' participation in implementing any plan. The partnership network identified in this management plan could be different than the network that will exist during the period of evaluation fifteen years after the NHA's designation.

# Conclusion

The congressional designation of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA and the implementation of the *Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA Management Plan* represent an extraordinary opportunity for the region. The NHA has the potential to be a transformative force in uniting and supporting partners to achieve the outcomes of the management plan. This will be achieved by sharing the region's nationally significant story and implementing projects and programs in historic, cultural, and environmental conservation, heritage tourism, and community development.

The NHA has many strengths that can improved as efforts move from planning to implementation. The DPC has a long-established state mandate, a record of support across many communities, and an experienced staff with demonstrated success in developing and carrying out regional projects and programs. The federal mandate to the DPC and the partnership network that comes with the designation of the NHA amplifies the opportunities in heritage conservation and development.

Furthermore, as an established state agency, the DPC's financial stability and relationships with local, state, and federal governmental entities give the NHA considerable capacity that is unusual for NHAs in their initial years after designation. This capacity enables the DPC and the partners to avoid the often-lengthy start-up process experienced by many NHAs and move quickly with the federal mandate to begin implementing the recommendations in this management plan.

With the signing of a National Heritage Area program bill in 2023, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA is reassured of its authorization without the need to manage programs and projects with a sunset date approaching, as experienced previously by NHAs. The legislation provides permanence to the DPC and the partners as they work together to execute the goals and objectives within this plan. This permanent authorization and the consistent annual federal appropriation of funding for NHAs provide a basis of assurance to other funding partners knowing that their investment into NHA projects comes with a certainty of organizational and operational sustainability.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA boasts a wide-reaching network of regional partners with the DPC at its core. The organization can bridge the gap between larger federal and state agencies, local governments, and the region's diverse stakeholders, including non-profit organizations, businesses, communities, and educational institutions. The management planning process has coalesced partnerships and shaped a comprehensive regional vision that acts as a unifying platform, accommodating a diverse array of interests and capacities. The NHA partners and the DPC are unwavering in their commitment to implement this management plan and to engage a continually increasing number of stakeholders in the pursuit of this collective vision.

1. *National Heritage Area Act*, Public Law 117-339, Section 120104 Evaluation, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1942/text>, accessed November 21, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act*, Public Law 116-9, Section 6001(f) Evaluation and Report,  [<https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ9/PLAW-116publ9.pdf>,](https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ9/PLAW-116publ9.pdf,%20accessed) accessed July 15, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)