

Dealing with the Delta: Envisioning Futures, Finding Solutions

California's Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta is a vast, low-lying inland region located east of the San Francisco Bay Area, at the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers. Geographically, this region forms the eastern portion of the San Francisco estuary, which includes the San Francisco, San Pablo, and Suisun Bays. A web of water channels and man-made islands, the Delta stretches nearly 50 miles from Sacramento south to Tracy and spans almost 25 miles from Antioch east to Stockton (Figure 1).

Before European settlement, the Delta was primarily a tidal wetland, interlaced with water channels running between natural low earthen levees and teeming with diverse plant and animal life. Much of this marshy landscape has now been drained, diked, and converted into islands, most of them lying below sea level and protected by artificial levees. Today, those who drive through the Delta see mainly huge tracts of flat farmland, intersected by narrow waterways dotted with recreational boaters.

The Delta has long been an important resource for California, providing agricultural and recreational uses, wildlife habitat, infrastructure pathways, and water supply services throughout the state. But by many measures, the Delta appears to be in poor health today. Its levee system is fragile, many of its native species are declining, and it lacks strong governing institutions. In response, PPIC research fellow Ellen Hanak and an interdisciplinary

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team of experts from the University of California, Davis (Jay Lund, William Fleener, Richard Howitt, Jeffrey Mount, and Peter Moyle) have conducted a wide-ranging analysis of Delta issues in a new report, *Envisioning Futures for the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta*.

This report explores and compares long-term Delta solutions. The authors consider a variety of options, constructing nine alternatives for Delta management and evaluating their performance in three key areas: water supply, environmental effects, and economic costs. In addition, the report includes detailed historical, ecological, and economic analysis, drawing lessons from the Delta's past and looking to its future. Today, the Delta is changing—because of a variety of natural and human pressures. It is now up to Californians to figure out how to manage those changes, for the health of the Delta and the state as a whole.

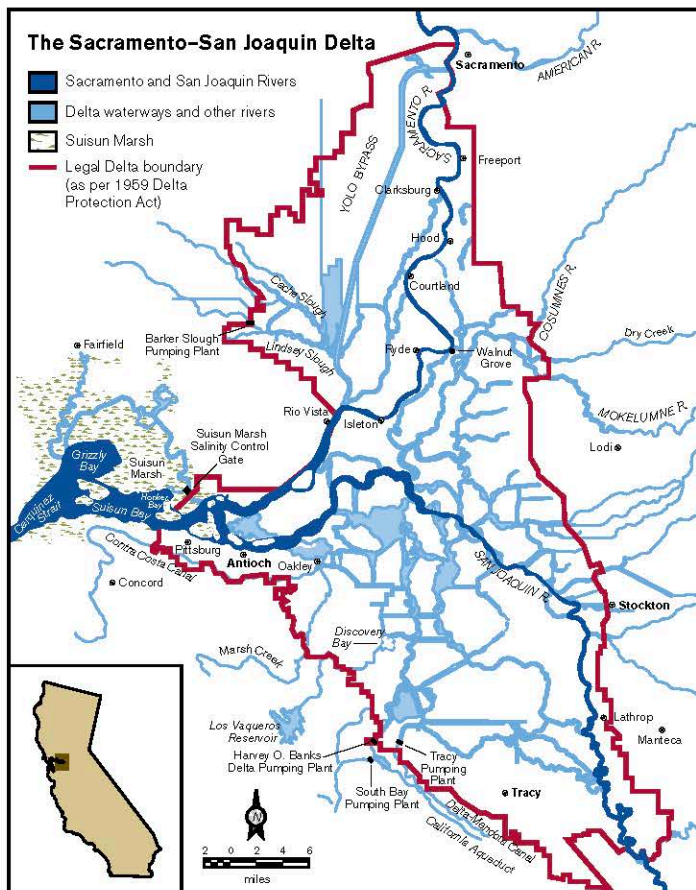


Figure 1—Map of the Delta