



M e m o r a n d u m

Date: July 14, 1998
To: Ecosystem Roundtable
From: Cindy Darling
Subject: McCormack Williamson Tract

Summary

As part of the Cosumnes River Project, the Nature Conservancy and their partners are working to acquire the McCormack-Williamson Tract. Information is provided so the Roundtable can provide input on how a variety of policy and technical issues are being resolved on projects. This project was selected because of the wide range of issues raised by this project. The CALFED Bay-Delta Program and the Nature Conservancy will also be presenting information on this project to the Delta Protection Commission at an upcoming meeting, most likely in September.

Roundtable Action

This is an informational item. Roundtable members may identify other issues they would like to see addressed as this project and others are developed.

Background

The Nature Conservancy is negotiating with the current owners of McCormack Williamson Tract to purchase the property. They have a tentative agreement on the price of the property (\$5.1 million) but an option is not yet in place. The project will be funded from the state Proposition 204 Category III funds previously approved for the Cosumnes River Project.

1. **Project Location:** The property is located in the Primary Zone of the Delta, in Sacramento County. The site is all of Reclamation District 2110, known as the McCormack Williamson Tract or the "Bean Ranch". The property covers approximately 1,650 acres. The site is entirely bounded by water: Lost Slough to the north, an unnamed slough to the east, the Mokelumne River to the south and Snodgrass

CALFED Agencies

California
The Resources Agency
Department of Fish and Game
Department of Water Resources
California Environmental Protection Agency
State Water Resources Control Board

Federal
Environmental Protection Agency
Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Department of Commerce
National Marine Fisheries Service

Slough and the Delta Cross Channel to the west. Access is via a private road on the north levee of the Mokelumne River from Benson's Ferry Bridge.

Adjacent landowners include the State of California, private landowners, and the Bureau of Reclamation. Adjacent land uses include farming, marinas, and ecosystem habitat.

2. Description of the site: The site is a flat area which slopes gently from east to west and north to south. The highest elevation is +3 feet and the southern one-third is below sea level. The site is surrounded by 8.8 miles of levees. The east levee has a height restriction on it through an agreement with RD 348 and certain adjacent landowners signed in 1947.

The site has been farmed since the late 1800's. Currently, the site is in row crops. There are no permanent crops on the site. There are several gas wells on the property as well as a television broadcasting tower. There are some farm structures and other small structures. There are no public roads and no public recreation facilities.

There is quite a lot of shaded riverine aquatic vegetation on the exterior of the levees but very little habitat currently on the interior of the island. It is not flooded for seasonal wetlands habitat. There is a scour hole and adjacent excavated land on the east side which is no longer cultivated and is developing into habitat.

3. History of Flooding: McCormack Williamson Tract flooded in 1955, 1958, 1964, 1986, and as recently as 1997. In 1997, the east levee was overtopped, flooding the island. Subsequently, the levee at the southern end of the island was overtopped from the interior. The levees on Dead Horse Island then failed and houseboats from local marinas were swept against the bridges on the North and South Forks of the Mokelumne River.
4. Proposed Project Description: The Nature Conservancy and their partners are in the process of acquiring the land to develop it as habitat as part of their larger Cosumnes River Preserve. Current holdings in the Cosumnes River Preserve total approximately 11,000 acres. With the additional acquisitions being funded by CALFED, a habitat corridor will be created from the Valensin Ranch upstream of Highway 99 down the Cosumnes River and the Mokelumne River to the Delta Meadows in the north Delta.

The funding currently being provided by CALFED will cover the acquisition of the property, initial stewardship activities such as signage and fencing, and a portion of the long-term operations and maintenance such as patrolling to limit trespass and vandalism, administering any farm contracts, controlling invasive plants and animals, and other general maintenance activities. Once the property is acquired, there will be an appropriate title reservation or other instrument to ensure the property is permanently dedicated to conservation objectives.

Following acquisition, the Nature Conservancy and their partners will begin to develop the parcel specific habitat restoration plan. This will be done with public input through the Delta Protection Commission, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and the Ecosystem Roundtable. Adjacent landowners will be contacted to identify any concerns as part of this process. Implementation of the parcel specific habitat restoration plan will require additional environmental documentation and funding. Any implementation of flood control aspects of the restoration project would require additional environmental documentation. Regulatory permits would not be required for continued agricultural operations or small scale habitat enhancement. However, permits would be required for any modification or breaching of the levees, construction of facilities or any grading or major construction.

Habitat restoration options to be evaluated will primarily include tidal wetlands, seasonal wetlands, and riparian restoration. Wildlife friendly agricultural practices will also be evaluated. Implementation of the habitat restoration plan may also provide recreational and flood control benefits, however, the primary purpose will be ecosystem restoration.

5. Consistency with CALFED alternatives: The CALFED Programmatic EIR/EIS evaluated both breaching the levees on McCormack Williamson Tract to allow the island to flood and setting existing levees back to widen the adjacent channel. Staff have evaluated the acquisition of the property and have indicated that it is consistent with all CALFED alternatives. CALFED staff who are working on the conveyance program will be available at the Roundtable meeting to answer questions about this issue.
6. Other issues: A wide variety of issues have tentatively been identified which will be addressed in the development of the habitat restoration plan. These issues include fish and wildlife habitat baseline values and enhancement potential, agriculture, recreation, mosquito control, levee maintenance and reliability, local and regional flood control needs, and effects on adjacent land uses and land owners. The Delta Protection Commission and other interested parties will have an opportunity to identify any other issues that they are concerned about.