

**CALFED**  
**Conservation Strategy Update**

**Background and Purpose.**

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program's Conservation Strategy Team, consisting of staff from CALFED, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and the State Attorney General's Office, is in the process of preparing the CALFED Conservation Strategy. The Conservation Strategy Team is assisted by a group of stakeholders.

The Conservation Strategy will address all federal and state listed, proposed, and candidate species that may be affected by the CALFED Program; other species identified by CALFED that may be affected by the Program and for which adequate information is available also will be addressed in the Strategy. The term "covered species" is used to refer to all of the species that will be addressed by the Strategy.

The Conservation Strategy, when completed, will provide the framework for compliance with the Federal Endangered Species Act, the California Endangered Species Act, and the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act, and ensure that the overall CALFED Program conserves, recovers, or assists in recovery of species and habitats covered under the Conservation Strategy. The Strategy is intended to integrate CALFED Program enhancement and mitigation actions to provide for improved species and habitat protection, increase assurances of overall Program implementation and streamline California and Federal ESA authorization of incidental take of covered species. Incidental take is take that results from, but is not the purpose of, an otherwise lawful activity.

The Conservation Strategy will not in and of itself provide take authorization. It will, however, provide the necessary biological information, impact analysis and programmatic conservation measures, that in combination with project specific details will lead to take authorization through one or more of the regulatory mechanisms provided by the Federal ESA, the California ESA, and/or the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act. In essence, the Conservation Strategy will serve as both an HCP/NCCP and as the biological assessment required for a Section 7 consultation under the Federal ESA:

The complexity of the CALFED Program contributes to the need for staged implementation. Implementing the Program in stages will allow actions that are ready to be taken immediately to go forward, while assuring that the documentation and analysis of future actions will proceed within a structured time frame. The staging of the Program's implementation allows the Conservation Strategy to focus initially on providing the necessary take authorization for Stage 1 actions, while further refining the Strategy for actions that will take place in later stages. An important aspect of staged implementation of the Program will be to reach target benefits for particular species within a given time period.

## Tasks

The Conservation Strategy Team, working with Jones and Stokes Associates (JSA), has completed draft covered species lists. The team is also developing a database which will be used to store and track information on species and habitat, CALFED Program actions, the beneficial and detrimental effects of those actions on the species, and mitigation and monitoring needs.

### 1. Database Contents

- A list of species that will either be covered in the Conservation Strategy or will be considered for coverage.
- CALFED regions and ecological zones, with a list of the species that occur in each region and zone.
- Species information, such as legal status, historical and current distribution, population status, habitat requirements, designated critical habitat, life history, reasons for decline, current conservation efforts (planned or completed) that are not part of the CALFED Program, recovery goals or requirements (to the extent known), and research or monitoring data gaps.
- CALFED's goal for the species. The CALFED program objectives include supporting sustainable populations of plant and animal species in the Bay-Delta. Thus, for some listed species, the goal is to *achieve recovery*. For others, particularly those species which are not wholly dependent on the Delta, the goal will be to *contribute to their recovery*. For other special status species, CALFED's goal will be to *ensure their conservation*.
- Habitat types used by the species.
- Program actions, as identified in the Common Programs and the preferred alternative (once selected).
- The effects of each of the actions (beneficial, neutral, and adverse) on each of the species and/or habitats.
- A list of potential conservation measures which would: (1) minimize adverse effects to species from the system as it is currently operating and will operate in the future; (2) maximize beneficial effects; and (3) mitigate (compensate), when necessary, for unavoidable adverse effects. Information developed in this category may be used to refine the ERPP, as well as to identify strategies to be used with other Program components.

## **2. Covered Species List**

The Conservation Strategy Team, in conjunction with JSA, is in the process of distributing the covered species list for public review and comment through the BDAC Ecosystem Restoration Work Group, with comments expected back to the Team by July 21, 1998. The Team will then review the responses, and complete a master list of covered species for the Strategy. The Team will also recommend that CALFED meet one of three goals for each species addressed in the Conservation Strategy: recover the species, contribute to the recovery of the species, or conserve the species.

## **3. Habitat Classification Matrix**

Simultaneously, JSA is developing a habitat classification matrix which will allow the Team to analyze Program impacts to habitats and ecological processes and the suite of species associated with them.

## **4. Conservation Measures**

The Conservation Strategy Team is also beginning the process of contacting species and habitat experts within the CALFED agencies and academia, to determine the conservation measures necessary to offset any potentially detrimental impacts of the Program on the covered species. The Conservation Strategy Team will work in close association with ERP staff, and the core team from the Strategic Plan to refine the ERPP as necessary to ensure that the goals of the Strategy are met.

## **5. Revised Technical Appendix**

At the revised draft stage of the Programmatic EIS/EIR, the Conservation Strategy Team expects to have completed the covered species list with the recommended species goals, the habitat classification matrix and its correlation with suites of species, the preliminary analysis of potential Program impacts, both beneficial and adverse, on the covered species, as well as preliminary work on the conservation measures.

### **Key Issues**

- Ensuring that the Conservation Strategy content supports ESA/CESA required findings and determinations.
- Ensuring that the Conservation Strategy will provide an adequate framework for take authorization needed for Stage 1 actions.
- Coordinating with CMARP to ensure that the monitoring and research needs of the Conservation Strategy are included in the rest of the Program.

- Coordinating with the Strategic Plan team to ensure that the needs of the Conservation Strategy, in particular adaptive management needs, are included in the rest of the Program.
- Coordinating with the BDAC Assurances Work Group to ensure that adequate and feasible (biologically and legally) assurances are reached.

### **Time Line**

Covered Species List	July 31, 1998
Database Completion	Final EIS/EIR
Habitat Classification Matrix	July 8, 1998
Conservation Measures	August 28, 1998
Revised Technical Appendix	August 28, 1998