

Establishing a Single Blueprint for Ecosystem Restoration

The following presents a draft policy statement and several specific recommendations for more effectively integrating ecosystem restoration and species recovery activities in the Delta. This material was developed by the ERP Focus Group in an effort to address issues associated with CALFED program integration, including integration not only within the CALFED Program, but integration with ongoing resource management and regulatory actions affecting the Delta ecosystem.

The ERP Focus Group is a joint agency/stakeholder policy forum established to address, and begin to resolve, key issues affecting the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP). This material represents work in progress and should not be viewed as a final recommendation.

The Problem

Currently there is considerable confusion regarding the relationship between the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP), Multi-Species Conservation Strategy (MSCS), and ongoing regulatory activity in the Delta. There is also a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between ERP implementation, the Water Management Strategy (including the Environmental Water Account), and the development and implementation of future Recovery Plans, other regulatory documents, and regulatory actions affecting species recovery and habitat conservation in the Delta.

The relationship between the ERP and other plans and regulatory actions aimed at species recovery and habitat conservation in the Delta is a critical issue affecting the potential success of the CALFED Program. How the ERP is implemented over time relative to other restoration and species recovery actions in the Delta will strongly influence support for, and thus the ultimate success of, the ERP, and the CALFED program as a whole.

Key policy issues that need to be addressed and resolved include the following:

- Will future regulatory plans and actions be prepared/determined within the context of the ERP as "the" blueprint for ecosystem restoration and species recovery in the Bay-Delta, or will these activities occur outside the framework of the ERP Program?
- How can/will ERP priorities be set to ensure that regulatory requirements are satisfied, in both the short and the long term?
- To what extent can the ERP and MSCS aid in the development of assurances regarding future regulatory actions, and to what extent can assurances be provided that the ERPP will be implemented?

A Single Blueprint Approach

The ERP Focus Group strongly believes that the establishment of a single blueprint for ecosystem restoration and species recovery in the Delta is the key to a successful and effective restoration program, and that such a blueprint can be the vehicle for ensuring integration and consistency. Furthermore, the Focus Group believes that the CALFED ERP should describe the single blueprint and that other programs and actions should not only be consistent with this blueprint, but actively promote and facilitate its achievement.

The ERP Focus Group believes that the first steps toward addressing the relationship between the ERP and other plans and regulatory actions should be development of a clear policy statement that commits to the concept of a single blueprint for ecosystem restoration, and begins to establish a framework for the concept. The following draft policy statement was developed by the ERP Focus Group as an example of how such a policy statement might be framed and what the key elements of a single blueprint concept would be.

Draft Proposed Policy Statement

It is the intent of the CALFED agencies, through the Ecosystem Restoration Program (herein referring to the ERP plus the MSCS), to establish a single blueprint for restoration and species recovery in the Delta. The CALFED agencies will commit to ensuring that their applicable programs, including their regulatory decisions and actions, are integrated¹ to the extent possible and consistent with this blueprint over time. This is not meant to imply that the agencies would relinquish their regulatory or discretionary authorities or responsibilities, or that CALFED or the ERP would assume any regulatory authority; instead, it is meant to emphasize that regulatory tools and ecosystem implementation tools must be integrated to achieve ecosystem restoration and species recovery. The blueprint should not be viewed as static; instead as new information is developed, the constituent plans and regulatory programs that make up the blueprint are modified, and/or a regulatory decision is made that effects the ERP, the ERP itself will be updated and modified consistent with these changes.

¹ Integration in this context means that the CALFED agencies will make every effort to ensure that their regulatory decisions and actions are consistent with a single, established approach, or blueprint, and that they remain integrated into this blueprint over time. Integration is not intended to imply that regulatory agencies would relinquish their discretionary authorities or responsibilities, or that CALFED governance would assume any regulatory authority. For example, decisions regarding ocean harvest are outside the scope of the ERP; however, such decisions have a direct bearing on the recovery of several listed species covered by the ERP. Under an integrated approach, CALFED would not determine how ocean harvest should or should not be controlled, but the NMFS would commit to working collectively with CALFED governance to ensure that such decisions are made consistent with the ERP to foster the common goal of species recovery. In the event that the outcomes of a regulatory processes contradict the ERP a clear linkage must be established to change the content of the ERP so that there is only one blueprint for recovery and ecosystem restoration.

Recommended Actions

The following are specific recommended actions for facilitating program integration and advancing the concept of a single blueprint for ecosystem restoration.

1. Specifically define the geographic scope of the blueprint and the species to be included.
2. Commit to conducting a critical review and analysis of the ERP to ensure that it adequately and completely addresses species recovery needs, and that it is designed to be adequate over time.
3. Develop a listing of high priority actions that must be implemented in Stage 1 as the basis for regulatory assurances. These actions would include regulatory actions associated with operation of the CVP/SWP projects and operation of the Environmental Water Account (EWA).
4. Develop a clearly defined process, and specific mechanisms, for ensuring integration between various plans and regulatory actions influencing ecosystem restoration and species recovery in the Bay-Delta. This should include integration with the water management strategy.
5. Develop an Executive Summary for the ERPP that clearly states that the ERP is the blueprint, and that articulates the relationship of the document relative to other ongoing and future restoration actions and regulatory measures to promote species recovery and ecosystem restoration. This summary should include a description of the process of integration described in item 4 above.
6. Ensure that the ERP incorporates actions from applicable ESA Recovery Plans for listed species in the Delta. Future efforts to revise existing Recovery Plans, or develop new plans must be integrated with ongoing ERP planning and implementation and reflected in the ERP to ensure that they remain consistent and linked over time.
7. Commit to the development of integrated implementation plans, to the extent possible, for the ERP, Recovery Plans, and other actions in the Delta aimed at species recovery and/or restoration.
8. Functionally integrate the ERP and AFRP programs to promote a consistent, unified approach to restoration.