

Suisun Resource Conservation District

Five Year Strategic Plan

2019-2023



January 2019

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Message from the Board Chair and Executive Director



Dear Suisun Marsh Landowners,

On behalf of the Suisun Resource Conservation District (SRCD) Board of Directors and staff, we are pleased to present our Five Year Strategic Plan for 2019-2023. This plan is based on an assessment of SRCD's existing Programs and contributions from landowners, club members, partner organizations, government agencies, interested parties, staff, SRCD Associate Directors, and Board Members.

The Suisun Marsh has a long history of waterfowl hunting heritage, wetland protection, and wildlife habitat conservation. Since 1963, the Suisun Marsh landowners have supported the SRCD and its predecessor organization the Suisun Soil Conservation District in carrying out SRCD's Vision and Mission to preserve and protect the wetland resources of the Suisun Marsh. In turn, SRCD has worked tirelessly to provide Suisun Marsh landowners the ability to effectively manage, maintain and enhance the managed wetlands with minimal regulatory constraints and permitting quagmires. This has been achieved through the implementation of numerous SRCD programs to support the landowners and the completion of the 2014 Suisun Marsh Plan EIR/EIS. The Suisun Marsh Plan provides a stable regulatory and permitting process for the next 25 years in the Marsh, streamlines funding for wetland enhancement projects, and supports SRCD's on the ground assistance and technical support for the management of water and wetland habitats on your duck clubs.

This five year plan will help SRCD place priority and attention on new emerging issues facing the Marsh and increase focus on our existing programs that are most meaningful to the landowners. This Plan development process has allowed SRCD to assess our original SRCD's legislated authority, regulatory constraints, existing Programs effectiveness to the benefit of landowners and wetland resources, highlights SRCD's accomplishments over the past 5 years and provides guidance on where we should go from here. We know there are numerous natural resource issues facing Suisun Marsh in the future, the stakeholder's prioritization of SRCD's current objectives, and the assessment of the Districts strengths and weaknesses frames a path forward for the next five years. These prioritized objectives were combined into long range goals organized into three Principal Program Areas: 1) environmental permitting, 2) management and technical assistance, and 3) wetland enhancement and cost share programs.

SRCD role in the Marsh is to serve the landowner community. Over the next five years and into the future, we look forward to working with you on these efforts to ensure the Marsh is protected and enhanced for the next 50 years.

Sincerely yours,

Tony Vaccarella, Board Chair

Steve Chappell, Executive Director



Vision and Mission



Vision

Improve programs and services to provide the Suisun Marsh landowners technical assistance in environmental permitting, habitat management, water control, and funding to ensure the wetland and wildlife values of the Suisun Marsh are sustained and enhanced.

Mission

The Suisun Resource Conservation District works collaboratively with private landowners, local, State, and Federal agencies and conservation organizations to meet the environmental and conservation needs of the Suisun Marsh, Solano County, and the San Francisco Bay-Delta of California for future generations. SRCD's historic goal has been to achieve a water supply of sufficient quality so that preferred wetland habitat conditions and wildlife values can be retained through appropriate management practices. SRCD seeks to implement existing programs and develop new efforts aimed at protecting and enhancing the Suisun Marsh wetland and wildlife resources.



Legislated Authority



The principal legislative Act that governs Resource Conservation Districts in California is Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code. As a resource conservation district, the SRCD is empowered to coordinate resource management efforts for purposes of watershed restoration and enhancement (*Id.* at §§ 9001(b)(3)).



The California Public Resources Code also empowers resource conservation districts to control runoff, prevent and control soil erosion, protect water quality, develop and distribute water, improve land capabilities, and facilitate coordinated resource management efforts for watershed restoration and enhancement (*Id.* at §§ 9003, 9960 *et seq.*).

In 1977, the California Legislature enacted the Suisun Marsh Preservation Act, which stated that “The Suisun Marsh represents a unique and irreplaceable resource to the people of this state and nation; that future residential, commercial, and industrial developments could adversely affect the wildlife value of the area; and that it is the policy of the state to preserve and protect resources of this nature for the enjoyment of the current and succeeding generations” (*Id.* at § 29002).

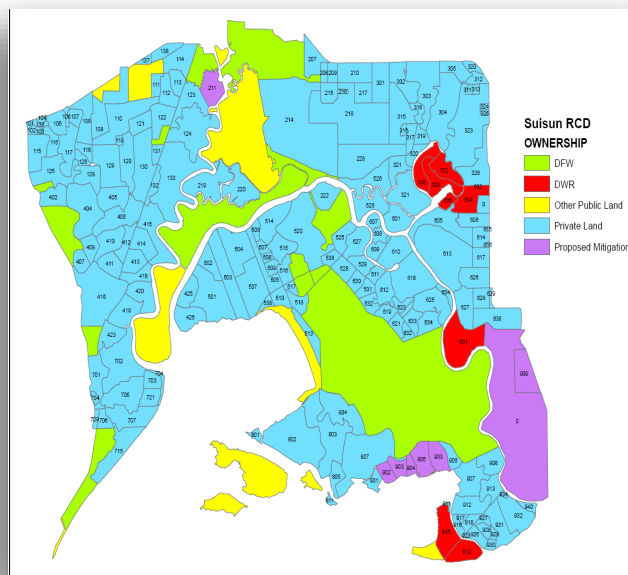


The Suisun Marsh Preservation Act empowered SRCD with the “...primary local responsibility for regulating and improving water management practices on privately owned lands within the primary management area of the Suisun Marsh” (*Id.* at § 9962 (a)). Also, SRCD was given the authority to issue regulations requiring compliance with any water management plan or program for privately owned lands within the primary management area (*Id.* at § 9962 (b)).



About the Suisun Resource Conservation District

Suisun Marsh is the largest brackish wetland in the Pacific Flyway and comprises 10% of California's remaining natural wetlands. It is located at the confluence of Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers downstream of the Delta and upstream of the San Francisco Bay. It has had an extensive waterfowl hunting heritage that predates the mid 1800s. It is comprised of public and private ownerships including duck clubs that support more than 221 bird species, 45 mammal species, 40 fish species, and 36 species of reptiles and amphibians. Among them are several rare, endangered, or unique species.



The Marsh is about 116,000 acres which is comprised of approximately 52,000 acres of managed wetlands, 7,000 acres of unmanaged tidal wetlands, 30,000 acres of bays and sloughs, and 27,000 acres of upland grasslands. Over the years, several different environmental actions have been implemented to protect the existing land use and ecology of the Marsh, and details on the implementation actions and management practices are available in the Suisun Marsh Plan (2014).

Today, SRCD provides the landowners technical assistance in environmental permitting, water control, habitat management, grants, and cost share programs to ensure the wetland and wildlife values of the Suisun Marsh are sustained and enhanced. SRCD also coordinates with numerous government agencies to represent landowner interests and concerns and partners with several groups that have mutual goals or similar interests.

The SRCD Board of Directors is the governing body for the special district comprised of five unpaid members appointed to 4-year terms. SRCD's 7 full-time and 3 part-time staff are led by the Executive Director and provide assistance and direction to the landowners of Suisun Marsh to benefit habitat management and resource protection. SRCD is also a landowner of the Marsh and conducts scientific research on the 1,330-acre Lower Joice Island located between Suisun and Montezuma Sloughs on the southwest side of the Marsh.



Recent Highlights

Over the last 5 years, SRCD has....

- Contributed to the development and completion of the Suisun Marsh Plan that was signed in 2014 to provide a blueprint for management in Suisun Marsh for the next 30 years
- Completed a 5-year renewal of the U. S. Army Corp of Engineers Regional General Permit 3 for ongoing managed wetlands operations and maintenance
- Completed the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Letter of Permission (LOP) for the Suisun Marsh exterior levee maintenance dredging program
- Worked with landowners to meet evolving water quality regulatory requirements including Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) of dissolved oxygen
- Implemented the SRCD Water Manager and Portable Pump Programs to assist landowners in water and habitat management
- Conducted a managed wetland infrastructure assessment in 2018 with CWA and Resource Management Associates (RMA) to assess the managed wetlands water management capabilities and provide support for future grants funding landowner managed wetland drainage improvements
- Promoted invasive species treatment and management including spring control of pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*) and fall control of common reed (*Phragmites australis*)
- Hosted Annual Spring Landowner Workshops and a 2018 Fall Science Workshop
- Produced regular “Land of the West Wind” newsletters with educational information for the Marsh community and regularly attended individual and group landowner meetings
- Modernized the SRCD website to meet new regulatory requirements and Little Hoover Commission Recommendations for Special Districts
- Pursued wetland enhancement grants with partners and implemented cost share programs for landowners



Key Natural Resource Issues Facing the Marsh

Waterfowl habitat conservation: Conserving habitats for waterfowl remains the primary goal for most landowners in Suisun Marsh. This includes providing habitat to support wintering waterfowl, migratory populations, and breeding birds.

Water quality and salinity adaptive management: Meeting existing water quality and salinity standards are critical to protect existing Suisun Marsh beneficial uses. Retaining the natural resource value of the managed wetlands requires flooding and draining through water control structures and leaching to reduce salinity in the soils and promote plant growth. Predicted increased salinity and droughts are challenges facing future wetland managers.

Exterior levee protection: The primary feature in Suisun Marsh that protects the managed wetlands from flooding and prevents saltwater intrusion into the Suisun Marsh and Delta are the exterior levees. Maintenance of the exterior levees and continued escalating cost of repairs is a critical concern with rodent, wind, and wave damages, frequent winter storm events and floods, and sea-level rise impacts that may increase with climate change.

Fish population enhancement: Suisun Marsh is a nursery area for native fish within the greater Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta watershed. Zooplankton and phytoplankton that develop in managed wetlands are exported to the slough in managed wetland drainage water provides food resources for resident migratory fish species.

Endangered species recovery: Several state or federal listed species are found in the Suisun Marsh ecosystem. These include both animals and plants, and special consideration must be given to protect their populations while benefiting other biota and allowing the ongoing operations and maintenance of managed wetlands.

Tidal marsh restoration: Tidal restoration has been promoted in the San Francisco Bay, Delta, and Suisun Marsh as a means to restore historical ecosystems and support recovery of listed species. However, tidal restoration in Suisun Marsh results in a direct loss of existing managed wetland habitats.

Mosquito vector control: Brackish wetlands of the Suisun Marsh harbor mosquitoes throughout the year. The growth of their populations has a negative effect on area communities public health and safety through transmission of disease and are ongoing management consideration and constraint.



Prioritized Objectives

The Priority Objectives were developed during several different discussion sessions and questionnaires. The Key Natural Resource Issues were used as the background to develop a list of priority objectives for the SRCD. Those objectives were then shared with Suisun Marsh stakeholders during the 2018 Spring and Fall Landowner Workshops, several small group meetings, and in individual discussions. Stakeholders were asked to rank each goal from a scale of 1 to 6 with 6 as their highest priority. The 14 objectives listed below are ranked in priority order from respondents.

1. Increase grant dollars for the wetland and wildlife habitat improvement, enhancement and preservation activities in the Marsh. **(5.8)**
2. Support the SRCD Water Manager Program. **(5.7)**
3. Promote the establishment of a long-term funding source for Suisun Marsh exterior levee maintenance. **(5.5)**
4. Assist private landowners in implementing and improving water management practices within the Primary Management Area of the Suisun Marsh. **(5.4)**
5. Continue environmental permitting for managed wetland operation, maintenance and enhancements activities RGP 3 and LOP Dredging permits. **(5.4)**
6. Provide detailed location and elevation information of club management structures and marsh surface for planning and club improvements. **(5.0)**
7. Increase landowner participation in Suisun Marsh policy issues, recruit active SRCD Associate Directors to serve a future SRCD Board members, and increase education outreach to landowner. **(4.9)**
8. Increase partnerships with local, State, and Federal agencies and conservation organizations to support SRCD's Mission. **(4.8)**
9. Continue implementation of the 30- year Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation and Restoration Plan. **(4.7)**



Prioritized Objectives (continued)

- 10.** Improve invasive plant control activities in managed wetlands. **(4.6)**
- 11.** Increase monitoring information (water salinity, soil salinity, temperature, DO, pH) provided to landowners for making decisions on wetland management. **(4.3)**
- 12.** Provide the SRCD Portable Pump Program **(4.3)**
- 13.** Support increased scientific research for Suisun Marsh waterfowl, wetland resource management and how managed wetlands interact with the adjacent slough and bay habitats. **(4.2)**
- 14.** Participation in other Delta and Bay conservation planning activities that influence the Marsh. **(4.0)**



2018 Suisun Science Workshop



Landowner Assessment of SRCD's Strengths and Weaknesses



Strengths

1. Providing staff support for landowners
2. Sharing news affecting clubs and the Marsh
3. Being readily available when needed
4. Providing information and the website
5. Hosting workshops to share information and introduce landowners and stakeholders

Weaknesses

1. Needing improved communication to landowners
2. Increasing turnaround time for permits
3. Providing more updates
4. Offering a platform for owners to communicate with each other



Strategic Goals

Nine Strategic Goals were established from the list of prioritized objectives and from written and verbal comments offered by stakeholders through discussion forums.

1. Assist private landowners in implementing and improving water management practices within the Primary Management Area of the Suisun Marsh

Implementation of the Water Manager Program, Portable Pump Program, and the Preservation Agreement Improvement (PAI) Program. The PAI program provides funding to improve wetland facilities, water management capabilities, and operational efficiency of managed wetlands. SRCD facilitates effective water management and conveyance facility operations on properties with shared water levels or joint-use water control infrastructures. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 2, 4, 6, 11, and 12 to support the water manager program, improve water management practices, provide infrastructure information, increase environmental monitoring, and maintain the portable pump program.

2. Increase wetland and wildlife habitat improvement, enhancement and preservation activities in the Marsh

SRCD seeks grant opportunities to support managed wetland conservation and enhancement projects. We also assist CWA and DU in wetland enhancement project development, design, and delivery, including water management considerations, landowner coordination and permitting. SRCD staff will assist landowners and DFW in the maintenance of conical fish screens within the Suisun Marsh including annual removal, cleaning, replacement of cathodic protection, and any necessary repairs. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 1, 2, and 12 to increase funds for enhancement, improve water management practices, and maintain the portable pump program.

3. Continue streamlining environmental permitting for managed wetland operation, maintenance and enhancement activities

Administer the 2018 Suisun Marsh U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regional General Permit 3 for ongoing managed wetlands operations and maintenance activities and the 2014 LOP for the Suisun Marsh Dredging Program. SRCD will assist landowners in the completion of reports and measurement of diverted water, burn permit applications, and required smoke management plans for wetland habitat enhancement burns. Participate in the quarterly Applicants Compliance Team meetings and has implemented the Alternative Plan of Compliance for Diversion Measurement and Reporting in Suisun Marsh. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 2, 4, and 5 support the water manager program, improve water management practices, and assist in environmental permitting.



Strategic Goals (continued)

4. Continue implementation of the 30-year Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation and Restoration Plan and participation in other Delta and Bay conservation planning activities that influence the Marsh

Participate in the following meetings, regional planning activities, technical and advisory committees associated with Marsh management, mitigation, water supply, and habitat restoration activities: Suisun Marsh Plan Principal Agency meetings, Suisun Marsh Plan Adaptive Management Advisory Team meetings, SMPA Environmental Coordination Advisory Team meetings, Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Board meetings, Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy - policy subcommittee, Pacific Flyway Center Education Center Advisory committee, San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Advisory Committee, and the Solano County Water Agency Flood Control Advisory Committee. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 2, 4, 6, 9, and 14 to support the water manager program, improve water management practices, provide infrastructure information, implement Suisun Marsh Plan, and participate in planning.

5. Increase landowner participation in Suisun Marsh policy issues, recruit active SRCD Associate Directors to serve a future SRCD Board members, and increase education outreach to local stakeholders

SRCD will hold monthly Board meetings on the second Wednesday of every month. Distribute the triennial SRCD Land of the West Wind newsletter. Hold annual SRCD Landowner Workshops. Hold Suisun Marsh sub-regional landowner focused meetings. Upgrade and maintain SRCD website for community outreach and support. Continue to partner with Solano RCD, Solano Land Trust, and the Pacific Flyway Center to improve local community knowledge and support of the conservation of the Marsh. This Strategic Goal reflects Prioritized Objectives 7, 8, and 13 to increase landowner participation in policy issues, increase partnerships, and support applied research.

6. Promote the establishment of a long-term funding source for Suisun Marsh exterior levee maintenance needs

Working with agencies, we will seek support for long-term levee maintenance and funding. This effort will include participation in Sedimatch, a program to match those needing sediment with those that have projects with available sediment. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 1 and 3 to increase funds for enhancement and fund exterior levees.



Strategic Goals (continued)

7. Support increased scientific research for Suisun Marsh waterfowl, wetland resource management and how managed wetlands interact with the adjacent slough and bay habitats

Assist USGS, DFW, UC Davis, and other partners in conducting waterfowl breeding, survival, wintering, foraging, and predator interaction research projects in the Suisun Marsh. Assist San Francisco State University, UC Davis, and the Department of Water Resources in the completion of scientific studies to document the contributions of managed wetland, which support food web for native fishes in Montezuma Slough at Lower Joice Island. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 2, 4, 6, 11, and 13 to support the water manager program, improve water management practices, provide infrastructure information, increase environmental monitoring, and support applied research.

8. Improve invasive plant control activities in managed wetland

Continue the *Phragmites* and *Lepidium* Pest Weed Control Program and coordinate treatment and best management practices with participating landowners. Identify new invasive species threatening managed wetland diversity and identify appropriate control methods. Apply for additional grants to assist landowners in invasive species control. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 2 and 10 to support the Water Manager Program and improve invasive plant control.

9. Increase partnerships with local, State and Federal agencies and conservation organizations to support SRCD's Mission

Improve coordination with the Solano County Mosquito Abatement District to ensure effective wetland management, while protecting the public health, and safety from vector production. Assist CWA and DU with the delivery of the Suisun Marsh grant programs to enhance water delivery and habitat management capabilities on public and privately managed wetlands in the Suisun Marsh. Continue to build and expand existing partnerships, and identifying new partnerships, as needed with BCDC, Solano County, DWR, USBR, DFW, DSC, etc. This Strategic Goal will address Prioritized Objectives 2, 8, and 14 to support the Water Manager Program, increase partnerships, and participate in planning.



Program Areas and Future Implementation

The Strategic Goals will be accomplished under three SRCD Program Areas:

I. Environmental Permitting — lead coordination with government agencies to facilitate habitat work and water management practices for Suisun Marsh landowners. SRCD will administer major permits and will provide advice and assistance on permitting processes.

II. Management and Technical Assistance — provide support to implement best management practices for wetland habitats. Assistance will include supporting a pump rental program for drainage and leaching, pest weed management, and fall flood-up.

III. Enhancement and Cost Share Support — seek funding opportunities for improving habitats and infrastructure and to oversee cost share programs. This program will include establishing partnerships with other interested groups to support obtaining funds to achieve mutual or complementary goals.



Program Area I: Environmental Permitting

SRCD will continue to administer the USACE Regional General Permit (RGP) #3 for managed wetland maintenance and habitat enhancement work, and applications will be updated each year and made available on the SRCD website. Under Program Area I, SRCD will address Strategic Goal 3 and strive to streamline the permitting process for operation, maintenance, and enhancement of managed wetlands. SRCD will work with BCDC to improve Marsh Development permits for authorization associated with RGP #3. These permitting process will be on-going through 2044.

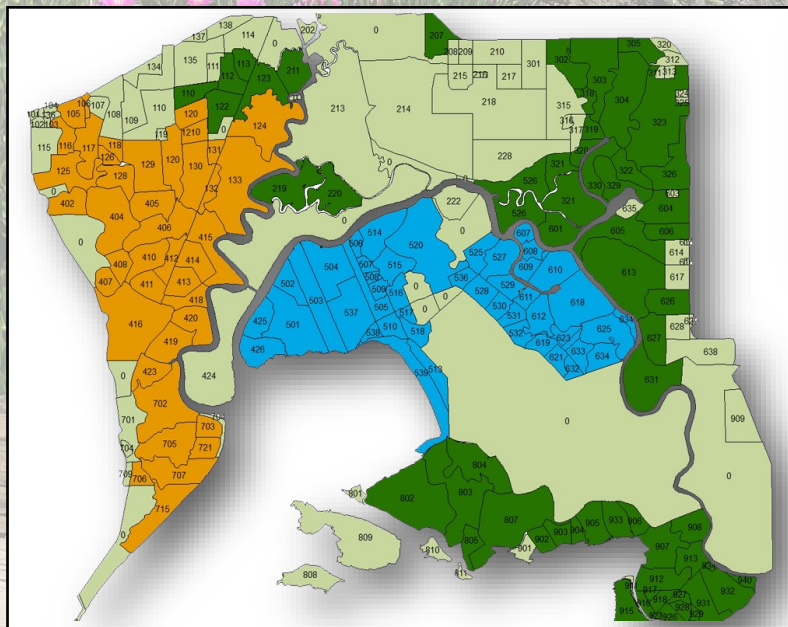
SRCD also will administer the USACE LOP for dredging activity and will assist landowners with their reporting requirements. Assistance will be provided for those landowners who would like help filing online diversion reports. Regular announcements will be sent to landowners with permit restrictions for species of concern including the California Ridgway's Rail, Chinook Salmon, and Delta Smelt. Support also will be provided for marsh burning as a management tool. Strategic Goal 4 implement the Suisun Marsh Plan, will also be addressed within all of the Program Areas including Program Area I. SRCD will represent landowners and coordinate with the agencies that developed the Suisun Marsh Plan during regular meetings.



Program Area II: Management and Technical Assistance

Management and Technical Assistance is conducted through the SRCD Water Manager Program funded by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) through Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement 2015 (SMPA). The Water Manager Program aims are to: ensure proper water management; provide technical support to landowners; educate landowners on best management practices; promote efficient use of channel water; avoid impacts to fisheries and protect sensitive species; administer the portable pump program; assist landowners in planning yearly maintenance and enhancement projects; monitor fish screen facilities and perform routine maintenance; and minimize water quality issues including low dissolved oxygen and elevated salinity.

Program Area II will address Strategic Goals 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8 by assisting with water management, increasing habitat, improving outreach, supporting applied research, and controlling invasive plants. SRCD will coordinate with Solano County Mosquito Abatement District to minimize the need for mosquito control actions.



Zone 1

Jeff Taylor

Zone 2

Tim Edmunds

Zone 3

Phelan McKinney



Program Area III: Enhancement and Cost Share Support

SRCD will continue to work with our conservation partners such as CWA, DU, and DFW to pursue grants and funding to promote the enhancement of Suisun Marsh managed wetland values and wildlife resources. SRCD will continue to implement the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement Implementation (PAI) Fund which provides funding from the DWR and Bureau of Reclamation for specified managed wetland infrastructure improvements. The SMPA maintains a dependable water supply and mitigates the adverse effects on the Marsh of the CVP and SWP and a portion of the adverse effects of other upstream diversions to improve wildlife habitats on Marsh managed wetlands.

SRCD also will pursue grants for activities needed to improve managed wetland facilities, operational efficiency and water management capabilities. Each cost-share programs eligibility guidelines specify which types of infrastructure improvements may be eligible for participation. The PAI program currently provides 75:25 funding support for drainage infrastructure improvement on individual parcels, 50:50 for interior structures and drainage, and joint 75:25 support for projects benefitting two or more properties.

This Program Area will address Strategic Goals 2, 6, 7, and 9 to enhance and improve habitats, seek funding for exterior levee maintenance, support applied studies to improve management, and develop beneficial partnerships.



Conclusions

Prioritized Objectives

Rankings of Prioritized Objectives will allow SRCD to continue to focus our support on the objectives that landowners feel are the key to the preservation and enhancement of the Marsh.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Feedback on both Strengths and Weaknesses of our organization will allow SRCD to improve efforts that support the landowners. We will continue to enhance our communication, funding, and permitting processes which were ranked as the greatest importance to our landowners.

Strategic Goals

SRCD will align our Strategic Goals with the prioritized objectives to plan our directions over the next 5 years. We will ensure we are meeting the changing needs of the Marsh to support landowners in water management practices, habitat improvement, environmental permitting, implementation of the Suisun Marsh Plan, landowner participation, funding, scientific research, invasive species control, and partnerships with agencies.

Program Areas

SRCD will focus on three main Program Areas to accomplish the Strategic Goals: Environmental Permitting, Management and Technical Assistance, and Enhancement and Cost Share Support are direct action areas that SRCD will implement on the basis of collaboration of prioritized objectives, landowner feedback, and strategic goals. The Program Areas focuses can change overtime but will be used as SRCD's guiding principles on how to best support and represent the landowners and managers of the Marsh.



Acronyms and Abbreviations

BCDC	San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission
CVP	Central Valley Project
CWA	California Waterfowl Association
DFW	Department of Fish and Wildlife
DU	Ducks Unlimited
DWR	Department of Water Resources
LOP	Letter of Permission, United States Army Corps of Engineers
SMP	Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan Environmental Impact Statement/ Environmental Impact Report
SMPA	Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement of 2015
SWP	State Water Project
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
USACE	United States Army of Corps of Engineers
USBR	United States Bureau of Reclamation
USGS	United States Geological Survey



Suisun Resource Conservation District

Our Partners



Solano Mosquito Abatement and 13 Suisun Marsh Reclamation Districts

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