

Land Use in the Delta: Current Trends and Future Alternatives

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Mounting urbanization pressures around the Delta pose major new challenges for the sustainability of the Delta, and for the potential success of the Delta Vision Process. Though planning attention remains focused on crucial concerns about water supply, flood control, and ecosystem management, Delta land use is now an equally important consideration with significant consequences for all of these other values.

Key Report Conclusions: According to one projection discussed in our report *ReEnvisioning the Delta*, the five Delta counties² could *add* more than 3.8 million people before 2050 – more than the entire current population of Connecticut. From our research we generated a map of urbanization risk in the Delta, which shows many flood-prone areas to be urbanized if current trends continue. This urbanization, if not channeled away from sensitive Delta lands, will:

- place tens of thousands of people and houses in the path of potential floods,
- reduce Delta water quality (including that of exported water),
- severely limit flood control options to protect existing urbanized areas,
- potentially *increase* flood risks in the central and western Delta, and
- greatly reduce long-term management flexibility in the Delta ecosystem.

"Charette" Process & New Ideas. Because land use is so important to the Delta's future, the UC-Berkeley Delta Initiative created a process for stakeholders to envision a sustainable land use pattern for the Delta 50 years from now. Entitled *The Great Delta Charrette*, this event (in October 2006) brought together 19 key Delta experts to envision land use, infrastructure, and levee configurations that could make the Delta resilient to the threats posed by earthquakes, river floods, and climate change. The four visions produced by these diverse participants shared some critical features, including:

- preventing urbanization in the primary zone of the Delta,
- restoring wetlands and riparian corridors throughout the Delta, especially in the western Delta islands and along the main stems of the rivers,
- creating a flood bypass on the San Joaquin River and expanding the Yolo Bypass,
- preserving agriculture as the dominant land use in the region,
- expanding recreational and tourist assets to diversify the regional economy

Many other creative ideas, such as bundling infrastructure into levee-protected corridors, merging islands, or creating a Delta National Monument on Sherman Island, were also explored. The charrette demonstrated the value of spatial visioning: Spatial scenarios focus attention on specific planning opportunities and dilemmas in ways that years of report writing can never do, allowing dialogue among stakeholders to proceed with reference to specific places, proposals and outcomes, rather than abstract principles. The Delta Initiative will conduct further charrettes in May as part of the Delta Vision Process's Stakeholder Coordination.

The report *ReEnvisioning the Delta* (to be released this afternoon) makes the case for holding off on further development below sea level while future options can be considered and creating a Delta Land Trust to help implement positive futures for the Delta.

¹ The Delta Initiative is a multi-year research effort at UC-Berkeley to understand the consequences of Delta urbanization for the region and the state. It also explores alternative futures for the Delta that improve public safety, secure water supply and infrastructure, reduce taxpayer liability, and provide habitat, open space and recreation.

<http://landscape.ced.berkeley.edu/~delta/>

² Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo.