

Delta Counties Coalition

Contra Costa County | Sacramento County | San Joaquin County | Solano County | Yolo County
"Working together on water and Delta issues."

June 6, 2024

Honorable Benjamin Allen
State Capitol, Room 6610
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Carlos Villapudua
State Capitol, Room 6340
Sacramento, 95814

Honorable Susan Eggman
State Capitol, Room 8530
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Eduardo Garcia
State Capitol, Room 8120
Sacramento, 95814

Re: Delta County Coalition – Climate Bond Priorities

Dear Senator Eggman, Senator Allen, Assemblymember Villapudua, and Assemblymember Garcia:

The Delta Counties Coalition (DCC) has long advocated for specific provisions in any proposed legislative bond act to fund necessary flood protection for the Delta. Delta levee improvements provide multiple benefits, including protecting communities, agriculture, through-Delta conveyance corridors, and critical infrastructure of statewide and local importance (roads, railways, transmission lines, waterways). The DCC understands that legislative leadership is currently working to “right size” the Climate Bond to current fiscal realities. As the Legislature discusses the exact parameters of the 2024 Climate Bond, the DCC respectfully requests your consideration of the priorities below:

Flood Control Funds – Continued Funding for Delta Levees Maintenance Program

Broadly, the DCC supports a bond that provides significant funding for flood control to keep the entire state and our local communities safe. The DCC understands the overall amount of flood control related funds in the current Climate Bond may be in the vicinity of \$1.5 billion, including dam safety. The DCC agrees with this overall priority, but also highlights the need for in-Delta flood management projects and other direct assistance to local Delta communities to address the threats of flood and sea level rise, as well as resources to maintain the existing through-Delta water conveyance system, while protecting the Delta ecosystem. These goals are reflected in the 2009 Delta Reform Act, which established the co-equal goals of water supply reliability and enhancing the Delta ecosystem while protecting the Delta as a place. (Water Code, § 85054.)

To the extent possible, the DCC requests that the Climate Bond include \$250 million for the Delta Levees Maintenance Program (Subventions Program, Water Code, § 12980 et seq.). This funding is essential for the ongoing maintenance and enhancement of critical levee infrastructure within the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta that protects communities, businesses, the environment and statewide water supplies that flow through the Delta region in the face of climate change and flood risks.

As background, the Subventions Program¹ is managed by the Department of Water Resources for the Central Valley Flood Protection Board² and provides technical and financial assistance (up to 75 percent of eligible costs) for approximately 70 local Levee Maintaining Agencies (primarily reclamation districts) in the Primary Delta to maintain and rehabilitate non-project and eligible project levees. Funding from 2021-2023 was approximately \$11-13 million/year. This program is critical to continued maintenance and improvement of Delta levees, which protect vital water supplies, infrastructure, transportation routes, and energy corridors (approximately \$74 billion of assets), in addition to ecosystems and habitats within the region.

Levee failures can cause catastrophic flooding and potentially cause injury or loss of life, temporarily disrupt statewide water supplies, and damage property, infrastructure, and environmental resources of importance to the entire state. According to a recent climate risk assessment, without increased funding compared to historic investments, climate-induced flooding by 2050 could expose thousands of people to flooding, jeopardize economic activity (loss of about 20% of agricultural jobs and cropland), damage infrastructure that supplies a good portion of the state's water supply, and further degrade vital ecosystems within the Delta. Investing in Delta levees is a remarkably cost-effective climate adaptation strategy, and it is imperative that sufficient resources are allocated to fortify levees and ensure the integrity of critical flood control and water conveyance systems. By investing in proactive maintenance and improvements that meet new modern levee standards, we can protect the lives and livelihoods of people in the Delta region, as well as be better prepared as a state to withstand the challenges of future climate change, sea-level rise, and flood risk.

We also ask that Delta levee funding omit multi-benefit language that requires ecosystem benefits for every levee project. Due to the unique geography and other unique constraints in the Delta, it is often not possible to include ecosystem benefits, and past bonds have failed to fund important levee projects because of this requirement. Delta levee projects provide ecosystem benefits on a programmatic level; the Central Valley Flood Control system has been meeting a net enhancement of habitat standard for the system as a whole since 1988.

The DCC urges you to prioritize flood control, and specifically the allocation of \$250 million for the Subventions Program, within the Climate Bond. Since its inception in 1973, and the subsequent passage of Prop 1E and Prop 84 in 2006, the Subventions Program has proven to be successful and effective. By securing adequate funding for the Subventions Program in the future, we can advance the long-term resilience of the Delta region and protect vital state infrastructure in the face of both current risks and evolving climate patterns.

Any Bond Must be Affirmatively Neutral on a Potential Delta Conveyance Project

A Climate Bond should include language affirming neutrality on the Delta Conveyance Project, which is historical practice on bonds since the Delta Reform Act was passed in 2009. Language has previously been included in bond proposals that affirms that no direct or indirect funding for the tunnel or any new isolated Delta conveyance facilities. This should also include a restriction on provision of funds to meet permit conditions and other mitigation requirements (including flow purchases) that could be relied upon by or somehow facilitate this controversial and risky project. It should be noted, as explained above, that the DCC supports funding of flood control and levee improvements that strengthen the state's existing through-Delta conveyance approach, which is sometimes referred to as the "Freshwater Pathway". Last, please be aware that the Delta Tunnel Project would have no flood control benefits to our area.

¹ <https://water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans/Delta-Levees-Maintenance-Subventions>

² <https://cvfpb.ca.gov/>

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Conclusion

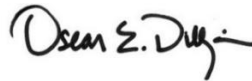
The Delta Counties, which are at the very heart of the State's water distribution system and are also home to four million Californians, appreciate the need for a robust infusion of resources to invest in our State's water and flood control systems. We offer these priorities to assist you and your colleagues in crafting a final proposal that reflects a comprehensive and supportable Climate Bond that the DCC can proudly support when the measure goes before voters for their consideration.

The DCC looks forward to working with your offices to ensure the Climate Bond contains the proper emphasis on flood protection for the benefit of our counties and the state. Please feel free to contact us through Elisia De Bord at deborde@saccounty.gov or 916-874-4627.

Sincerely,



Patrick Hume, Supervisor
Sacramento County



Oscar Villegas, Supervisor
Yolo County



Diane Burgis, Supervisor
Contra Costa County



Mitch Mashburn, Supervisor
Solano County



Tom Patti, Supervisor
San Joaquin County

cc: Governor Gavin Newsom
Delta Counties Caucus