

SURVEY FINDINGS

your
DELTA

your
VOICE

Environmental Justice Community Survey **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Report prepared by Ag Innovations for the
California Department of Water Resources
Delta Conveyance Project

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Ag Innovations is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that facilitates collaboration and community engagement related to the complex agricultural and natural resource challenges facing California today. Ag Innovations has been supporting environmental justice outreach for the Delta Conveyance Project since January 2020.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2020, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) launched an environmental justice community survey entitled *Your Delta, Your Voice*. The survey was live from September 30 through December 11, 2020. Survey development and outreach was led by Ag Innovations and supported by numerous partners and agency staff.

The survey had the following goals:

- 1) to gather information from disadvantaged communities in the Delta region about how they work, live, recreate and experience the Delta,
- 2) to understand how the community values and uses its natural, economic, and social resources, and
- 3) increase awareness of the proposed project and interest in participating in public engagement among disadvantaged community members in the Delta region.

These goals were pursued in order to inform the proposed Delta Conveyance Project environmental review and planning process, with a particular emphasis on the environmental justice chapter of the CEQA Environmental Impact Report. Ag Innovation's intent was to faithfully reflect the input and perspectives gathered via the survey within this report.

In January 2021, DWR began developing a Delta Conveyance Project Community Benefits Program. The information gathered from the survey will also be used to inform DWR's efforts to work towards community benefits in the Delta region, although that was not part of the original intent of the survey as the program did not exist at that time.

Who Responded to the Survey?

The survey sought direct input from disadvantaged communities, or historically burdened, underrepresented, people of color, and low-income communities of interest, including indigenous and Tribal members—that may be disproportionately affected by the proposed Delta Conveyance Project—in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta region (Delta). For simplicity, we refer to these communities as “disadvantaged communities” (DAC) and “severely disadvantaged communities” (SDAC) throughout this report, and we defined the “Delta-region” as slightly larger than the Delta.

Of the 2117 survey participants, 979 were categorized as living or working (or both) in the Delta region. Of those, 540 were categorized as disadvantaged community (DAC) respondents, and 166 of them were further subcategorized as severely disadvantaged community (SDAC) respondents. For more information on how Delta-region DAC and SDAC respondents were identified and categorized, please refer to chapter 2 and Appendix B: Analytical Assumptions.

Survey Outreach

We promoted the survey in English, Spanish, and Chinese on DWR's website and via postcards, eblasts, social media posts, radio, and more. To disseminate the survey as widely as possible and capture the attention of minority, low-income, or otherwise vulnerable community members who live and work in the Delta, we also conducted extensive grassroots outreach to build partnerships with community-based organizations, local leaders, schools, social service providers, and Tribes. Many volunteered to distribute flyers at school meals distribution sites and food banks, post the survey to social media, send postcards and text messages, and more. More details on the outreach goals, results, and lessons learned can be found in Appendix A.

About the Survey

The survey was designed in MetroQuest (www.metroquest.com). It was designed to be highly interactive and engaging, ask many questions in a short amount of time, and to perform equally well on computers, smartphones, and tablets. The survey was made available in English, Spanish, and Chinese. A hotline was provided to respond to inquiries and provide assistance as needed, such as for those who do not have access to or comfort with digital devices. A demonstration of the survey can be found [here](http://demo.metroquestsurvey.com/fc5r5w) (<http://demo.metroquestsurvey.com/fc5r5w>).

The survey invited participants to provide information about their priorities, favorite aspects and concerns about the Delta, economic wellbeing, experiences in nature, and project opinions. It also contained a mapping exercise that enabled participants to share the locations of the places that matter most to them as well as to share their thoughts about these places, how they interact with them, and more. The survey contained quantitative questions – such as multiple choice, ranking, checkboxes, etc. – that allowed participants to make choices among the available options. It also included many open-ended questions and other opportunities to provide input in their own words.

The survey was organized into five sections, each of which were tied to the following screens.

- **Screen 1: Welcome and Overview**
This screen describes the purpose, goal, and potential timeline of the proposed Delta Conveyance Project.
- **Screen 2: Priorities: What's important to you?**
This screen provides respondents an opportunity to rank six of twelve different possible priorities, in response to the question, “What is most important to you for maintaining or improving the quality of your life in the Delta? ,” with an option to suggest another priority and provide comment.
- **Screen 3: Special Places: Places that matter to you**
This screen was an opportunity to drag markers onto a map-based survey. This screen was intended to help the state investigate potential impacts and understand more about historic and cultural sites, fishing, gathering spots, outdoor activities, businesses or services, or other special places in the statutory Delta.
- **Screen 4: Delta Community Needs**
This screen included four sub-screens of multiple choice and open-ended questions about what respondents like best and have concerns about the Delta region; economic wellbeing and identifying social services; experience in nature, including frequent activities and what would make respondents spend more time visiting Delta waterways or natural areas; and the respondents' opinion about the project, including concerns about its effects as well as inquiring about potential benefits.
- **Screen 5: Demographics**
This screen included multiple choice questions about ethnicity, language, zip code, income, and how the respondent learned about the Delta Conveyance project. This information was used during the survey outreach effort to target outreach and to analyze the survey afterwards.

Survey Highlights

Following are global highlights from the survey.

1. **People who live in the Delta region recreate, fish, and travel to visit friends, restaurants, and other towns by boat. Day-to-day life happens on the water, and the Delta’s waterways are central to the region’s identity.**

Many Delta-region DAC participants indicated that they routinely gather and recreate on the water as well as travel via the water. In fact, of the outdoor activity sites participants added to the Special Places map, most were places where they participated in water activities. In addition, when participants placed gathering spots and businesses on the map, one of the most common types was restaurants located at marinas.

2. **Fishing in the Delta is a way of life. For 90% of the fishing locations respondents identified, they indicated that they eat fish from the Delta four or more times per week.**

After outdoor activity sites, the second most frequently chosen sites were locations where participants fish. At 90% of the fishing locations identified by Delta-region DAC respondents, the respondent indicated that they or their family eat fish from the Delta four or more times per week. For almost half (47%) of the fishing spots identified, the respondent indicated fishing throughout the year. In comments there was a strong desire for “fishing to continue,” and many spoke about how fishing is “a way of life.”

3. **Throughout the survey, participants consistently expressed interest in the natural environment; clean air and drinking water; maintenance of flows and water quality in the Delta waterways; and healthy habitat for fish, migrating birds; and other wildlife.**

Survey responses also mentioned water quality concerns related to diversion of Delta water flows, harmful algal blooms or invasive species, trash, and pollution. Participants felt these issues impacted the continued health of the Delta, and the local community, economy, agriculture and recreation.

4. **There is a strong desire to preserve the Delta and the communities that make up the Delta.**

There is concern that construction impact would alter the way of life in the Delta, as well as present risks to important places in the Delta, including historic sites such as Locke, historic homes, fishing sites, businesses, and other places. The town of Locke was by far the most identified historic site in the “Special Places” mapping section. Many respondents drew a connection between preserving regional agriculture – including multi-generational farms – and preserving the history of the Delta and its community.

5. **The majority of Delta-region DAC respondents visit the Delta’s waterways and natural areas at least monthly. More than half spend their time hiking, walking, or running or participating in water activities, such as boating, fishing, and swimming.**

More than 60% of Delta-region DAC (including SDAC) respondents visit the Delta’s waterways and natural areas at least once per month. More than half of Delta-region DAC (including SDAC) respondents participate in hiking, walking or running (59%) or water activities (53%) most frequently.¹ The region’s SDAC participants similarly chose indicated participating in hiking, walking in running most frequently (58%). For this subset of respondents, there was a much larger gap between this most frequent activity and other activities. For SDAC participants, only 40% indicated participating in water activities most frequently, and in fact, 42% indicated that their most frequent activity is just hanging out (picnicking, sunbathing, etc.). In response to a question about what would make them want to spend more time outdoors, 68% of Delta-region DAC (including SDAC) respondents selected “better

¹ Note that respondents could select their first and second most frequent activity, so responses total to more than 100%.

parks, trails, or other recreational amenities.” Participant comments focused strongly on wanting clean, safe, accessible outdoor recreation, particularly around walking and biking trails, parks, and fishing spots.

6. Two thirds of Delta-region DAC respondents indicated that additional community services are needed in the Delta. Services to support the homeless (e.g., affordable housing and other basic services) and the food insecure (e.g., food banks) were the most frequently cited.

In addition to services for related to food and homeless residents, other services frequently identified included youth programming, health and medical services, affordable and quality housing, mental health and substance abuse programs, and senior services, and accompanying facilities to support these services.

7. There was a strong “no tunnel” sentiment expressed by Delta-region DAC respondents in several comment sections of the survey. Simultaneously, 95% of Delta-region DAC (including SDAC) selected “I don’t know enough to have a strong opinion at this time” in response to the question, “what is your opinion about the proposed project?”

The “no tunnel” sentiment against the Delta Conveyance Project was a theme throughout comments and was related to concerns about the Delta Conveyance Project benefiting only places outside of the Delta, and potential impacts to the natural environment, community and economy of the Delta. Concerns about the tunnel were extensive throughout the survey. However, of the Delta-region DAC and SDAC group who answered the question, “what is your opinion of the proposed project,” 95% responded, “I don’t know enough to have a strong opinion at this time.”

8. Almost three-quarters of Delta-region DAC respondents said “no benefits” in response to the question “What potential benefits [of the Delta Conveyance Project] could you see for your community?”

Nearly 70% of Delta-region DAC and SDAC commenters stated that no benefits are possible for the Delta region from the project. Others suggested that there would be ‘short term’ jobs, or reflected a hope that that the project could support cleaner water, air and restoration. At the time of the survey, the DWR Community Benefits program was not in existence.²

9. The survey drew in new participation.

In response to a survey question that asked, “Have you ever participated in a public process related to a Delta tunnel proposal?,” more than 60% of both Delta-region DAC and SDAC respondents responded “no.” This indicated that there was significant increased participation from those who had never participated in the Delta Conveyance Project planning process before.

10. Outreach by individual community leaders generated more survey participation than any other outreach approach.

We did extensive, traditional outreach as well as what face to face outreach we could in a time of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, local leaders were the most important means for inviting participation from disadvantaged communities in the Delta. (Read more in Appendix A). From that experience and others, it was clear that working with embedded community leaders and organizations was an effective avenue for outreach in the community.

² As of 2021, DWR is developing a Community Benefits Program (<https://water.ca.gov/Programs/State-Water-Project/Delta-Conveyance/Community-Benefits-Program>) for the proposed Delta Conveyance Project which will ultimately identify and implement commitments, if the Delta Conveyance Project is approved, to help protect and enhance the cultural, recreational, natural resource and agricultural values of the Delta. More information can be found about the Delta Community Benefits Program at <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/State-Water-Project/Delta-Conveyance/Community-Benefits-Program>.

The survey input was rich and varied, with strong themes around the preservation of the Delta, its water ways, and way of life; about the Delta community and how it uses and depends on the Delta; and concerns about the impact of the proposed Delta Conveyance Project on the Delta.

This report provides an overview of survey participation, including key definitions, as well as a summary of the responses and comments for each section for DACs, SDACs and all respondents. It also includes two appendices: Appendix A outlines survey outreach and marketing methods, including lessons learned and samples of outreach collateral; Appendix B details analytical assumptions of the survey and report.