

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

October 13, 2023, 9-11am
Zoom Virtual Meeting

Meeting Objectives

- Recommendations to the Steering Committee on Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria
- Input on Phase I Report concepts

Action Items

Program Team

- cbec
 1. Update the proposed Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria to include a March 1st planting start date for Butte, Colusa, and Sutter Bypass subregions.

Participants

- Steering Committee
 1. Consider approval of the Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria.

Advisory Committee Recommendations

The Advisory Committee recommends the Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria to the Steering Committee with the amendment of a March 1 planting start date for Butte, Colusa, and Sutter Bypass subregions.

- This recommendation supports development of criteria to evaluate the performance of potential concepts on their lands. This evaluation criteria are meant to inform growers so they can decide whether they want to participate in any future floodplain connectivity and inundation concepts.
- The March 1 planting start date is meant to provide an initial threshold to use for performance evaluation. Start dates may be refined based on landowner input and needs for analysis.
- When and if landowners consider project development, some will be interested in a flexible window of time for their planting start.
- The Advisory Committee's recommendation to the Steering Committee does not represent support for any proposed concept to increase floodplain connectivity or increased duration or frequency of inundation.

Welcome and Introductions

Julie Leimbach (Leimbach), Kearns & West, welcomed all attendees. All attendees are listed in the table at the end of the document.

Leimbach reviewed the meeting agenda and objectives, outlined the focus, and presented the key question to be addressed:

- Does the Advisory Committee recommend the proposed Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria to the Steering Committee?
- What are your questions and clarifications about the Phase I Report?

Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria

Introduction

Leimbach introduced the proposed Evaluation Criteria within the Priorities, Objectives, and Criteria already approved by the Program.

Leimbach presented the priorities and objectives that the proposed Evaluation Criteria would evaluate:

- Priority: Agriculture
 - Objective:
 - Do no harm to existing property, operations, and water rights
 - Limit actions to voluntary actions
 - Maintain planting, growing, and harvest seasons
 - General agriculture interests
 - Voluntary
 - Local control
 - Flexibility
 - Predictability

Proposed Evaluation Criteria

Jesse Rowles (Rowles), cbec, presented the agricultural compatibility evaluation criteria.

Rowles presented the following information:

Examples of Similar Analyses Conducted

- Bay Delta Conservation Plan
- Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Project
 - 34-day preparation time
 - Assumes March 15 operational start date
- Lower Sutter Bypass Anadromous Fish Habitat Enhancement Planning Assessment
 - 34-day preparation time
 - Assumes March 15 operational start date
- Sutter and Tisdale Bypasses Flood and Multi-Benefit Management Plan
 - Assumes March 1 operational start date

Rowles explained the criteria parameters:

- Last Day Wet
 - Identified based on landowner feedback from the 2013 and 2017 agricultural economic studies
 - If a field is less than 30 percent wet, farmers are likely able to begin field preparations
 - Timing is based on landowner feedback
 - Assumed the need for 34 days of preparation time prior to planting
 - Dry-down time of 6 days
 - Field preparation time of 28 days
 - Can vary from year to year depending on weather and precipitation conditions

Rowles outlined the Season/Operational Start Date Rationale using rice fields as an example.

- If rice is planted after mid-April, the crop yield potential diminishes.
- Assuming a 34-day total preparation time, inundation occurring after March 15 may cause crop yield impacts.

cbec proposed a March 15 operational start date for the following subregions:

- Butte Basin
- Colusa Basin
- Lower Sutter Bypass – below Nelson Slough

Questions and Comments

The participants provided the following questions, comments, and recommendations.

Support for the March 1 Start Date

- Recommendation to implement a start date of March 1 rather than March 15 because it provides more of a time buffer. It could also allow the farmers to get into the fields earlier and potentially produce a better rice crop. [Hans Herkert, RD 1004]
 - Previous projects have also seen several requests for March 1; it's a reasonable request. [Technical Team]
- Support for recommendation to change the start date to March 1. [Paul Buttner, California Rice Commission]
 - March 1 seems perfectly acceptable for rice growing. [Andy Duffey, Reclamation District 70/1660, Tisdale Irrigation District, Butte Slough Irrigation]
 - Support the landowners' preference for a March 1 start date. [Jacob Katz, California Trout; Brian Ellrott, NMFS]
 - Support for March 1 over March 15 due to variations in soil type, hydrology, and temperature in the various basins. [Craig Isola, USFWS]
 - Support for a March 1 start date, although I'm more on the wetlands management side of operations. [Michael D'Errico, USFWS]

Use of Evaluation Criteria and Analysis

- The hydrologic connection at specific times of year is necessary for fish, such as getting water and fish through the levees. This evaluation tool could be helpful for modeling feasibility and benefits of scenarios. [Katz, California Trout]
 - That’s a separate conversation, but one we could have. Noting that we are not requiring approval for scenarios today. [Program Team]
 - Noting the distinction between this Agricultural Compatibility Criteria and other operational incentive programs that could preserve landowner flexibility. [Program Team]
- Identification of timing of analysis of impacts should be informed by the experiences shared today by Buttner, Herkert, and other landowners. [Ellrott, NMFS]

Landowner Interest in Flexibility

- As a landowner who farms a few acres of land across the valley and provides wildlife habitat, it would be nice to have a few more days to allow the land to dry out and prepare it. Those same flexibility considerations apply to River Partners, too. Every year conditions are a little different, so it’s difficult to identify a general date or place threshold dates, such as “good by X date, but problematic after Y date.” [Julie Rentner, River Partners]
- I also feel it’s really important to stay flexible and not be rigid with farmers who could be really impacted by this issue. We can’t force them to exist in a model that doesn’t fit well. [Buttner, California Rice Commission]
 - Reminder that similar to the other criteria presented, this is just a first step at a macro level. In Phase II of the Floodplains Reimagined program, we’ll be looking at scenarios at a more localized level, and there will be ways to refine these details. These evaluation criteria are merely a tool to help us understand potential impacts to help landowners make the decisions about what happens on their properties. [Program Team]

Limits to Recommendation for Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria

- Despite giving support for the March 1 start date, I still do not support notching the weirs. Large volumes of water coming through the notches has previously resulted in loss of land use, land erosion, and other negative impacts. The voluntary aspect would be voided with that amount of water. [Herkert, RD 1004]
 - We are not asking for a recommendation for the *concept* today, but for using this Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria as a tool to support decision making. [Program Team]
- 30 percent wet levels could still be problematic for some growers. [Buttner, California Rice Commission]
 - The Technical Team cannot guarantee there won’t be precipitation after these proposed start dates, but we would not create inundation later in the growing season that would cause impacts. [Technical Team]

- For some row croppers, March 1 could potentially cause an issue, but we can work through that. [Duffey, Reclamation District 70/1660, Tisdale Irrigation District, Butte Slough Irrigation]

Recommendation

Advisory Committee members recommended that the Technical Team amend the proposed March 15 operational start date to March 1 for incorporation into the Agricultural Compatibility Evaluation Criteria. Members caution that this recommendation does not assume support for any preliminary concepts for increased duration and frequency of inundation. The Advisory Committee also distinguishes between this criteria as a tool to inform decision-making and the potential future incentive program which could allow more operational flexibility for landowner implementation.

Phase I Achievements

Leimbach presented the Floodplains Reimagined program's achievements during Phase I. As Phase I is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2023, Leimbach reflected on the participation and contributions from the Advisory and Steering Committees that, along with the Program and Technical teams, have developed the following components of the program:

- Charter with vision and structure
- Priorities and Objectives
- Opportunities and Constraints, and Considerations
- Potential solutions to risk
- Input on scenario development
- Evaluation Criteria
 - Juvenile Salmon Habitat Suitability Criteria
 - Bird Habitat Suitability Criteria
 - Zooplankton Productivity and Export Criteria
 - Managed Wetland and Waterfowl Hunting Criteria
 - Agricultural Compatibility Criteria – *in progress*

Leimbach also acknowledged the more abstract accomplishments of the Committees:

- Building landscape scale engagement
- Engaging participants at varying levels and interest areas
- Building foundational understanding of the region's existing conditions, interests of different parties, shared understanding of performance criteria

Questions and Comments

The group did not offer any questions or comments at this time.

Phase I Report

Holly Dawley (Dawley), KSN, provided an update on the Phase I Report. She shared that the report will reflect:

- Program achievements, including:
 - Steering Committee approvals
 - Advisory Committee recommendations
 - Ad hoc Group and Advisory Committee input
- Diverging viewpoints
- Uncertainties
- Next steps, including:
 - Examining the feasibility of technical aspects on the landscape
 - An upcoming, combined Advisory/Steering Committee meeting that will address:
 - Phase I documentation
 - How to continue the program process into 2024

Questions and Comments

- Noting the November meeting conflicts with the Floodplain Forward group. [Ellrott, NMFS]
 - The Program Team will look into other potential meeting dates.

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Leimbach reviewed the action items, thanked participants for their participation, and adjourned the meeting.

Participants

Advisory Committee Members	
Affiliation	Name(s)
California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW)	Bjarni Serup
California Rice Commission	Paul Buttner
California Trout	Jacob Katz
California Waterfowl Association	Mark Hennelly
Ducks Unlimited	Dan Fehringer
FlowWest	Mark Tompkins
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)	Brian Ellrott
Reclamation District 70/1660, Tisdale Irrigation District, Butte Slough Irrigation	Andy Duffey
Reclamation District 1004	Hans Herkert

River Partners	Julie Rentner
United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Craig Isola Jeff Beauchamp Matt Brown Michael D’Errico Tricia Bratcher
Wild Goose Club	Roger Swanson
<i>No affiliation provided</i>	Jeremy (last name not provided)

Program Team	
Affiliation	Name(s)
Aquatic Resources Consulting Scientists	Keith Marine
cbec	Chris Campbell Jesse Rowles
Cramer Fish Sciences	Steve Zeug
Kearns & West (K&W)	Julie Leimbach Bethany Taylor
Kjeldsen Sinnock Neudeck (KSN)	Holly Dawley
Larsen Wurzel & Associates (LWA)	Eric Nagy Mark Cowen
San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI)	Alison Whipple