

Principles for Ecosystem Health and Enhancement

September 2023

The San Joaquin Valley Water Collaborative Action Program (CAP) is committed to finding solutions to create a more equitable, economically resilient, and sustainable future for the Valley. Due to water shortages, thousands of acres of farmland will be fallowed or converted to different crop types. It is essential, where possible, that habitat benefits are achieved in the transition. The Ecosystem Health workgroup has identified the following “Principles for Ecosystem Health and Enhancement” to represent the core foundation CAP envisions for applicable projects. As CAP continues to engage with funders, regulatory agencies, and project proponents, these principles will guide how support and endorsement from CAP may be determined. While not firm requirements for projects or management actions, these principles put forth the fundamental ideals CAP endorses to generate trust between community members and the agricultural and ecosystem health interest groups proposing these critical projects.

Projects that enhance ecosystem health should:

Promote...

Coordinated planning that uplifts Valley ecosystems and provides community benefits:

1. Consulting with all interested parties, including county agencies, and incorporating their input early on and substantively regarding future land use changes.
2. Repurposing as an opportunity to create assets for Valley communities through the robust rehabilitation, protection, and enhancement of native ecosystems for public benefit and improvements to community health.
3. The recovery of wildlife populations and habitats, habitat corridor connectivity, and priority habitat restoration in critical locations.
 - Use locally adapted ecotypes of native plants for restoration.
 - Prioritize the establishment of self-sustaining vegetation communities that minimize the costs of continued maintenance and management over time.
 - Promote early detection and rapid response to infestations of problematic invasive weeds in waterways and uplands; build coordinated efforts to treat weeds using durable methods.
 - Connect broken migration pathways benefitting insects and pollinators, terrestrial animals, fish, and birds.
 - Build off and expand existing and planned wildlife areas managed by local, state, and federal land management agencies.
 - Protect and make judicious use of freshwater to ensure that streamflows are augmented in a functional framework, managed wetlands are protected and adaptable to changing climate conditions, and groundwater and surface water interactions are supported and bolstered by ecosystem restoration projects.

- Learn from past experiences, seek out and share technical knowledge of ecosystem recovery amongst Valley habitat types to promote adaptation and habitat restoration success.
- Support programmatic permitting approaches that engage regulators early and often to speed up habitat restoration delivery.
- Seek coordinated, multi-benefit investment in habitat restoration to meet ambitious acreage and connectivity targets, including those identified in the:
 - Central Valley Project Improvement Act
 - Central Valley Joint Venture Implementation Plan
 - Central Valley Flood Protection Plan, Conservation Strategy
 - Comprehensive Conservation Plans for the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex
 - Recovery Plan for the Upland Species of the San Joaquin
 - San Joaquin River Restoration Program
 - State Wildlife Action Plan
 - Developing San Joaquin River Regional Conservation Investment Strategies
- 4. Water quality improvement for ecosystems and drinking water wells for disadvantaged communities and domestic well users.
- 5. Air quality improvements for surrounding communities.
- 6. The prioritization of multi-benefit projects that promote flood risk reduction or nature-based carbon sequestration. Increasing appropriate access to culturally significant and healthy outdoor recreation.
- 7. Partnerships, communication, and community engagement.

Solutions consistent with regional sustainability efforts:

- 8. The implementation of actions that are consistent with groundwater sustainability.
- 9. Maximizing groundwater recharge.
- 10. Compatibility between repurposed land with surrounding land uses.
- 11. CESA/ESA regulator agency protection for surrounding landowners and to promote ecosystem restoration and enhancement plans.

Financially viable projects and management actions:

- 12. The inclusion of a stewardship plan to ensure ongoing financial sustainability.
- 13. Local, state, federal, and private funding for land repurposing.

Avoid...

- 1. Project activities or land use development that will contribute to air pollution or become dust-inducing.
- 2. Introducing or propagating invasive or harmful species within the surrounding farmland and communities.
- 3. Trespass or encourage trespass on surrounding privately held land.
- 4. Abandoning land.
- 5. Exposure to civil or criminal liability relative to the harm or take of endangered species.