DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
SYSTEMWIDE MULTI-BENEFIT INITIATIVES
715 P Street
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: California Department of Water Resources

Date: June 13, 2023

Subject: Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meetings for the Little Egbert Multi-Benefit Project Environmental Impact Report

Notice is hereby given that the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), is planning to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Little Egbert Multi-Benefit Project ("Proposed Project"). DWR has issued this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to provide responsible agencies, trustee agencies, and other interested parties with information describing the Proposed Project and its potential environmental effects. Public scoping meetings will be held to receive comments on the scope and content of the EIR. Two virtual public scoping meetings will be held via Zoom on **Monday, June 26, 2023 from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m.** and on **Thursday, June 29, 2023 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.** An in-person public scoping meeting will be held on **July 11, 2023 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.** at the Rio Vista Veterans Memorial Hall (details below).

DWR invites each responsible and trustee agency, and each Federal agency, including NEPA cooperating agencies involved in approving or funding the Proposed Project, to provide input as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to the agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the Proposed Project. DWR is also accepting comments from members of the public and Native American Tribes on the scope and content of the EIR, as well as suggested alternatives to the Proposed Project that may be considered in the EIR.

INTRODUCTION

CEQA specifies that a public agency must prepare an EIR on any project that it proposes to carry out or approve that may have a potentially significant or significant direct or indirect effect on the physical environment. DWR is proposing to implement flood system and ecosystem improvements, and recreational opportunities to the lower Yolo Bypass/Cache Slough complex to increase flood capacity and provide floodplain habitat and ecosystem benefits. DWR has determined that these improvements may result in potentially significant effects on the physical environment. Therefore, DWR will prepare a project-level EIR that evaluates the potential significant environmental effects of these proposed improvements.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Proposed Project is located at the southern end of the Yolo Bypass, immediately upstream of the city of Rio Vista, in Solano County, California. The site includes State Plan of Flood Control Levees maintained by Reclamation District 536 on the west and Solano County Water Agency on the south (Mellin Levee), farm berms and levees on the southwest, and a restricted-height levee maintained by Reclamation District 2084 on the north and east. The site

is located downstream of the confluence of Lindsey Slough, Prospect Slough, Cache Slough, and the Sacramento River Deep Water Ship Channel; referred to as the Cache Slough Complex. Near the south end of the site, Cache Slough combines with the Sacramento River and Steamboat Slough. Highway 84 and the Cache Slough "Real McCoy" Ferry landing are also located at the southern end of the project area (see Figure 1). The Proposed Project is located in the legal Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Water Code Section 12220).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the Proposed Project is to actively manage the transition of the land from agriculture to tidal wetlands, subtidal, and riparian habitat in a manner that maximizes flood benefits and climate resilience and enhances ecosystem processes and recreational opportunities. The Proposed Project site is currently privately owned and cultivated in row crops and alfalfa. The site is below sea level and protected by a restricted-height levee that is designed to overtop during high water events to reduce pressure on upstream levees. Sea-level rise and climate change are expected to significantly decrease the viability of maintaining the tract under existing conditions as a reclaimed landscape protected by aging limited-height levees. The Proposed Project would restore approximately 3,000 acres of habitat, while allowing increased flood conveyance at the southern end of the Yolo Bypass.

Goals for the Proposed Project include:

- **Enhance Public Safety:** Enhance public safety, health, and quality of life for the State's citizens as outlined in State and local planning efforts (Central Valley Flood Protection Plan [CVFPP], Lower Sacramento River/Delta North Regional Flood Management Plan, Solano County planning efforts). Reduce local and regional flood risk to agricultural and urbanizing areas through flood stage reductions and increased flood flow capacity within the Lower Yolo Bypass.
- **Protect and Enhance Natural Ecosystem Processes to Increase Habitat and Support Species:** Provide ecosystem and habitat restoration, as well as preserving and enhancing riparian and other native habitats to contribute to the recovery and sustainability of native species, where compatible with construction, operation, and maintenance of flood risk–reduction infrastructure, and consistent with adopted State and other plans. Create opportunities for environmental offsets and habitat restoration as outlined in State and local resource planning efforts (CVFPP Conservation Strategy, Delta Plan, Solano Habitat Conservation Plan, Cache Slough Habitat Conservation Plan, and Yolo Bypass Cache Slough Partnership planning efforts).
- **Protect and Enhance Opportunities for Recreation:** Provide improved or new public outdoor recreation, education, and open space opportunities, where compatible with construction, operation, and maintenance of flood risk-reduction infrastructure, and consistent with the State and local plans and related efforts underway (Yolo Bypass Cache Slough Partnership Recreation Work Group planning efforts and Cache Slough Recreation Action Plan [currently in development]).

To achieve project goals, elements of the Proposed Project could include:

- Degrade portions of the existing restricted-height (eastern/outboard) levee along Cache Slough and construct inflow and outflow openings along Cache Slough to connect the floodplain and improve conveyance during flood events.
- Improve and/or repair existing State Plan of Flood Control levees, and other local infrastructure and flood features to accommodate increased on-site flows.

- Grade and place fill material to construct subtidal swales and habitat berms, to provide rearing habitat for fisheries and establish native habitats.
- Revegetate with native trees, shrubs, and marsh plant species to restore and enhance upland, tidal, subtidal, and floodplain habitat.
- Provide new or enhanced opportunities for recreation consistent with flood protection and habitat restoration goals.

The EIR will analyze the potential environmental effects of construction, operation, and maintenance associated with the Proposed Project and alternatives. A proposed project concept is illustrated on Figure 2. Project concepts will be refined and adjusted based on the information gathered during the scoping and environmental review processes.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The environmental analysis will focus on examining the potential environmental impacts associated with the improvements implemented as part of the Proposed Project and identifying feasible measures and alternatives that can be implemented to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate such impacts. The EIR will also evaluate cumulative effects of the proposed system improvements when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

On the basis of preliminary evaluations, the proposed flood risk-reduction and ecosystem improvements could have the following direct, indirect, and/or cumulative environmental effects:

- Aesthetics: Changes to the existing visual characteristics of the site.
- Agricultural Resources: Conversion of farmland to non-farm use.
- Air Quality: Temporary and short-term increases in pollutant emissions associated with construction activities.
- Biological Resources – Aquatic: Short- and long-term effects on special status fish species or their habitats.
- Biological Resources – Terrestrial: Short- and long-term effects on special-status terrestrial species or their habitats.
- Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Temporary and short-term increases in greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction activities.
- Cultural Resources: Potential disturbance or destruction of archaeological resources during construction.
- Energy: Temporary and short-term consumption of energy resources during construction.
- Geology and Soils: Temporary and short-term increases in erosion during construction.
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials: Potential introduction of contaminants into water courses and exposure of construction workers to hazardous materials as a result of construction activities. The Proposed Project is located within two miles of a municipal airport, which necessitates evaluation of impacts to people working and residing in the area.
- Hydrology and Water Quality: Modification of hydrology and hydraulics to improve flood flow capacity and biological conditions of the project area. Potential impacts to water quality.
- Land Use and Planning: Consistency with relevant land use plans and policies will be evaluated.
- Mineral Resources: Upon project completion, access to known natural gas

resources and other potential mineral resources may be limited.

- Noise: Temporary and short-term increases in noise levels during construction, as well as a potential long-term change in noise levels due to changes in land use. The Proposed Project is located within two miles of a municipal airport, which necessitates evaluation of noise impacts to people working and residing in the area.
- Public Services: Potential changes to public service requirements for operation.
- Recreation: Potential construction of recreational facilities, which may have an effect on the environment.
- Transportation: Project construction will generate traffic along local roadways. Access to new recreational facilities may result in increased traffic in the local area.
- Tribal Cultural Resources: Potential disturbance or destruction of Tribal cultural resources during construction.

ALTERNATIVES

A number of project alternatives, including the No Project Alternative, will be evaluated in the EIR in accordance with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines.

SCOPING MEETINGS

The scoping meetings will include a brief presentation about the Proposed Project at the beginning of the meeting with time for public comments on the content and scope of the EIR to follow.

Two virtual public scoping meetings are scheduled for:

- **Monday, June 26, 2023 from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. at** https://ca-water-gov.zoom.us/j/82221394870?pwd=S3RRN250aHNIN3Rxc2JFSUNDNkxBZz09
- **Thursday, June 29, 2023 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at** https://ca-water-gov.zoom.us/j/81660832719?pwd=Zm5ZbnVoU0JQSXQvc3dDVnBIMnptUT09

An in-person public scoping meeting will be held on **July 11, 2023 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.** at the Rio Vista Veterans Memorial Hall, 610 St. Francis Way, Rio Vista, CA 94571.

The objective of the meetings is to brief interested parties about the Proposed Project and obtain input on the scope and content of the EIR, including alternatives and potentially significant environmental impacts.

WRITTEN COMMENTS

This NOP is being circulated to obtain suggestions and information from interested parties, including responsible and/or trustee agencies, Native American Tribes, and members of the public, on the content and scope of issues that may be addressed in the EIR. Written comments from interested parties are invited to ensure that the full range of issues related to implementation of the Proposed Project is identified early in the CEQA process. Agencies, organizations, Native American Tribes, and interested parties should provide a contact name and contact information in their letters. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines section 15082(b)(1)(B), within 30 days of receiving the NOP, responsible and trustee agencies shall provide DWR with specific detail about the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the Draft EIR related only to that agency's area of statutory responsibility.

All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official

administrative record and may be made available to the public. You may request DWR withhold your contact information from public disclosure, which will be honored to the extent allowable under California law. If you wish DWR to consider withholding this information, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments.

This NOP is also available electronically on DWR's website: https://water.ca.gov/News/Public-Notices

Written comments on the scope of the EIR must be received by DWR no later than 5 p.m. on July 28th, 2023. Comments or questions should be sent:

- By mail to:

  California Department of Water Resources
  c/o Lori Price, Division of Multibenefit Initiatives
  P.O. Box 942836
  Sacramento, CA 94236-0001

  with the letter subject heading "RE: Little Egbert Multi-Benefit Project NOP", or

- By email to: littleegbertmbp@water.ca.gov with the subject heading "RE: Little Egbert Multi-Benefit Project NOP"

Interested parties may also provide written or oral comments on the proposed content and scope of the EIR at the public scoping meetings listed above. If you submit comments on the document, you will automatically be added to the distribution list for future notices and information about the environmental review process for the Proposed Project. If you do not wish to submit comments on the scope and content of the EIR, but would like to be added to the mailing list, you can submit your contact information, including email address, with a request to be added to the mailing list at the contact above.

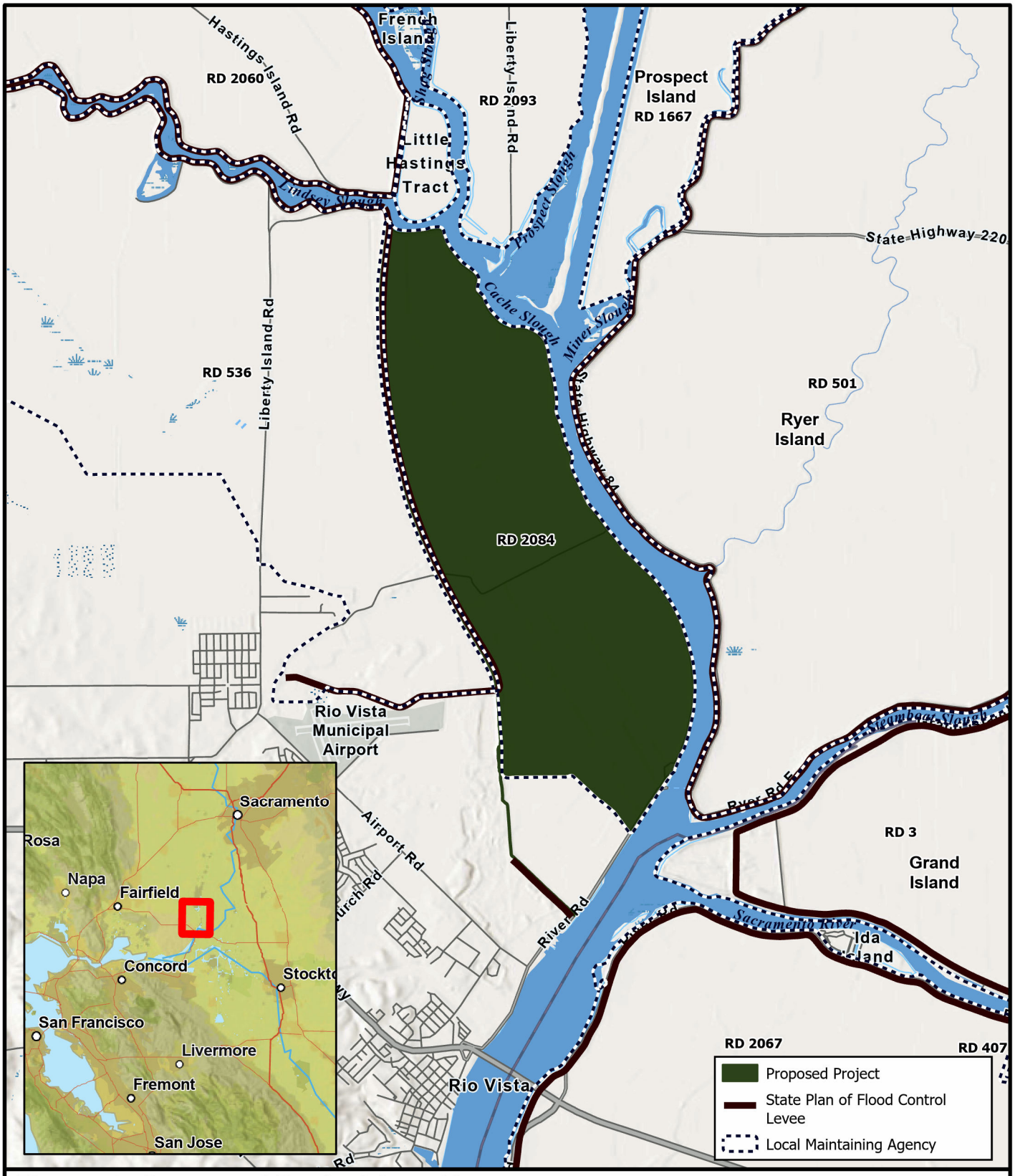

Figure 1. Proposed Project Location
USGS 7.5-Minute Quadrangle: Rio Vista

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Little Egbert Multi-Benefit Project

0 0.42 0.85 1.7 Miles

Base Source: ESRI Topographic; ESRI National Geographic

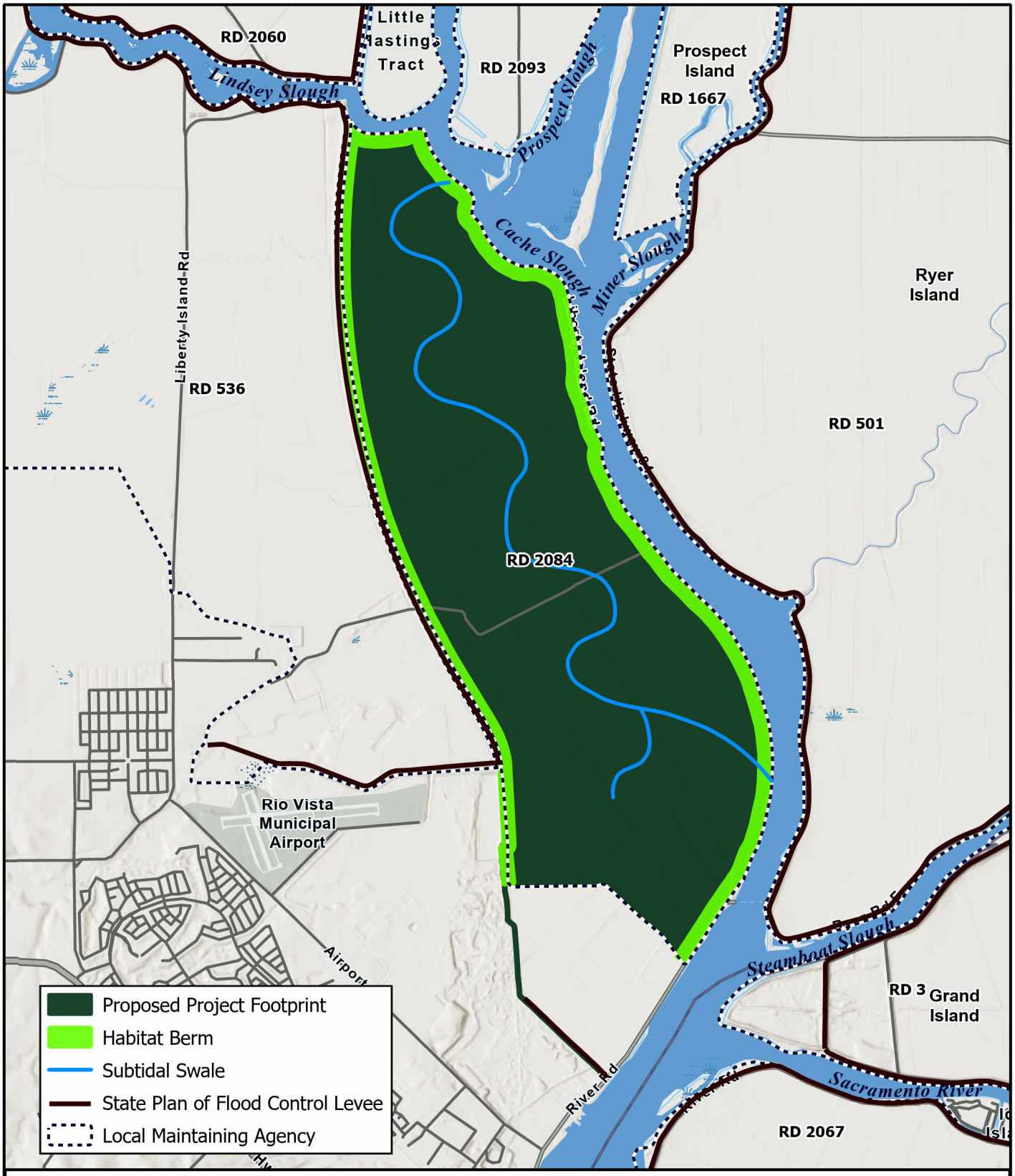

Figure 2. Concept Map
USGS 7.5-Minute Quadrangle: Rio Vista

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Little Egbert Multi-Benefit Project

0 0.3 0.6 1.2 Miles

Base Source: ESRI Topographic; ESRI National Geographic