

**California Department of Conservation
Solicitation Notice and Application for:**

Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program

**FINAL
February 22, 2022**



California
**Department of
Conservation**

At A Glance

Program

The Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program seeks to increase regional capacity to repurpose agricultural land to reduce reliance on groundwater while providing community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits.

Funding Source

This program is funded by the Budget Act of 2021 (SB 170, Ch. 240, Stat. 2021)

Critical Dates (proposed, subject to change)

Public Comment Period Closes—January 31, 2022

Solicitation Notice and Application released— February 22, 2022

Applications due— April 1, 2022

Awards Announced—May16, 2022

Contact for Questions

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Background

Implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act ("SGMA") necessitates coordinated management of landscapes to minimize economic, social, and environmental impacts from the transition of agricultural lands in areas of groundwater overdraft to less water intensive land uses while providing benefits to local and regional communities. The Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program seeks to increase regional capacity to repurpose agricultural land to reduce reliance on groundwater while providing community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, renewable energy, and climate benefits.

Multi-Agency Implementation

The Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program will be led by the Department of Conservation ("Department") and implemented in close partnership with multiple state and federal agencies. This partnership will help the Department structure the program so that it can efficiently respond to specific regional needs related to SGMA implementation and land repurposing, as well as provide support to grantees throughout program implementation.

An Agency Advisory Group comprised of representatives from state and federal agencies will provide ongoing guidance to the program and coordinate the alignment of technical and other grant program resources to support the goals of the program. While the Advisory Group will have an adaptive membership model, the initial participants include:

- CA Department of Conservation
- CA Department of Water Resources
- CA Department of Food and Agriculture
- CA Department of Fish and Wildlife
- CA Wildlife Conservation Board
- Governor's Office of Business Development
- CA Strategic Growth Council
- US Natural Resources Conservation Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Agency Advisory Group will directly consult with non-member agencies, including regulatory agencies, on an as-needed basis to inform the program.

Vision

This program is part of a suite of complementary programs administered by the Department of Conservation Division of Land Resource Protection's Conservation Unit. These programs protect, restore, and enhance natural and working lands through capacity building, land-use and project planning, and implementation funding. The programs operated by the Conservation Unit include:

- Agricultural Land Mitigation Program
- California Farmland Conservancy Program
- Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program
- Working Lands and Riparian Corridors Program

These programs address the land element of the Department of Conservation's mission, which is to balance today's needs with tomorrow's obligations by fostering the wise use and conservation of energy, land, and mineral resources.

Program Authorization and Funding

This program is funded by the Budget Act of 2021 (SB 170, Ch. 240, Stat. 2021), which appropriated \$50 million to the Department to fund groundwater sustainability projects that reduce groundwater use, repurpose irrigated agricultural land, and provide wildlife habitat. The appropriation provides three years (June 30, 2024) to encumber and two years (June 30, 2026) to fully liquidate program funds.

Grants up to \$10 million each will be awarded as block grants to regional or basin-scale organizations to develop and implement land repurposing programs. Block grant recipients will then award subgrants and contract to achieve the program deliverables. The Department reserves the right to increase grant awards above \$10 million as funding allows.

\$2 million will be awarded to one entity to provide statewide technical assistance and facilitate communication and collaboration necessary to meet the purposes of the program.

Up to \$5 million in grants will be awarded to federally recognized and non-federally recognized California Native American tribes on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission to plan for, develop, and implement multibenefit land repurposing projects within the eligible groundwater basins identified in Section 2. This funding may also be used to increase regional block grant awards where the block grant recipient partners or collaborates with a tribe to plan for, develop, and/or implement multibenefit land repurposing projects.

Up to 5% of the funds available under this program may be used by Department of Conservation to administer the program.

Goals

The primary goals of the Program are to:

- Support coordinated, regional and basin-scale efforts to achieve groundwater sustainability in critically overdrafted basins and in high and medium priority basins where a state emergency drought declaration has been declared
- Support long-term repurposing of lands least viable for agriculture and multibenefit opportunities that convert land to less intensive water uses while maintaining natural and working lands
- Provide short- and medium-term drought relief
- Support regional efforts to sustain land-based economies that are impacted by groundwater sustainability measures
- Reduce groundwater use
- Create or restore wildlife habitat and wildlife connectivity, including seasonal wetland habitat to replenish aquifers
- Improve groundwater supply, including through groundwater recharge, improved baseflows in rivers and streams, and groundwater supply improvement for fish and wildlife habitat
- Support nature-based solutions to reduce the impacts of hazards on lives, property, and the economy from overdrafted groundwater basins

- Provide benefits to disadvantaged communities and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers
- Foster partnerships and collaboration among diverse entities to enable regional scale leadership to meet this program's goals
- Develop scalable, transferable land repurposing models
- Support farmer, rancher, and farm worker leadership in multibenefit land repurposing strategies and project implementation
- Provide flexible and efficient program administration so that grantees can lead expeditious and adaptive programs to meet their needs.

Disadvantaged Communities

The Budget Act of 2021 requires that the Department of Conservation prioritize the achievement of disadvantaged community benefits when implementing this program. For the purposes of this program, a disadvantaged community is defined as a community with a median household income less than 80 percent of the statewide average. This may include protection of community air quality, improved drinking water supplies, and creation of recreational spaces and community-agriculture buffer zones