

**California Department of Conservation
Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program**

PROPOSED PROGRAM SUMMARY

November 17, 2021



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 4, 2022

Applications due— March 21, 2022

Awards Announced—April 15, 2022

Contact for Questions

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Section 1: Introduction and Program Summary

Background

Implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act 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 \$10,000,000 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 to partners and subcontractors to achieve the program deliverables.

\$2,000,000 will be awarded to one statewide partner to facilitate communication and collaboration between block grant recipients and to facilitate block grant recipients' engagement with and provision of benefits to the disadvantaged communities within their borders.

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 with a tribe to plan for, develop, and/or implement multibenefit land repurposing projects.

Goals

The primary goals of the Program are to:

- support coordinated, regional and basin-scale efforts to achieve groundwater sustainability in critically overdrafted basins through integrated land use planning and repurposing agricultural lands to less water intensive uses
- support coordinated, regional and basin-scale efforts to achieve groundwater sustainability in high and medium priority basins where a state emergency drought declaration has been declared through integrated land use planning and repurposing agricultural lands to less water intensive uses
- support regional efforts to sustain land-based economies and the communities that rely on them while achieving groundwater sustainability
- reduce groundwater use
- create or restore wildlife habitat, including seasonal wetland habitat to replenish aquifers
- improve groundwater supply, including through groundwater recharge and improved baseflows in rivers and streams
- 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 at the regional scale to effectively meet this program's goals
- develop scalable, transferable land repurposing models to reduce groundwater reliance
- support farmer, rancher, and farm worker leadership in multibenefit land repurposing strategies and project implementation
- provide flexible and efficient support to grantees so that they can lead expeditious and adaptive programs to meet their needs.

Section 2: Regional Block Grant Applicant Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

Eligible regional block grant applicants are: (1) Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, (2) federally recognized California Native American tribes, (3) non-federally recognized California Native American tribes on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission; (4) public agencies; (5) nonprofit groups with 501(c) status; and (7) Watermasters implementing an approved groundwater sustainability plan or approved alternate plan.

Eligible applicants that are not Groundwater Sustainability Agencies or tribes must partner with at least one Groundwater Sustainability Agency to submit an application. The application must include a resolution or letter from the Groundwater Sustainability Agency(ies) stating their support for the project, and how the Groundwater Sustainability Agency will be involved in the applicant's work.

Eligible applicants must also be either: 1) locally-based, which is defined as an entity that maintains a local office and focuses on issues within or proximal to the region or basin that is the focus of the application; or 2) non-local, where there are strong local partnerships between the applicant, the local GSA(s), and other important stakeholders.

Partnering and Cooperation

This grant program requires partnering and cooperation among stakeholders within regions or basins. Proposals should demonstrate multiple, committed partnerships and extensive cooperation with other agencies, organizations, or entities with interests in their proposal area.

Partnering is defined as commitments by other organizations, government agencies, private citizens or volunteer groups to provide funds or in-kind services. Partners will be eligible to receive program dollars to support their participation in work toward the program deliverables. Partnerships must be initially evidenced by letters of commitment that explain the relationship between the partner and block grant recipient and outline the partner's contributions to the program. As land repurposing projects progress toward implementation, the Department will require partners to enter into memoranda of understanding with the block grant recipients to formalize roles.

Cooperation is defined as working with other organizations, government agencies, or groups to ensure that all entities work in agreement and are non-duplicative of each other's activities. Cooperation may be evidenced by letters of support, signed agreements, board resolutions, or other signed documents.

Eligible Groundwater Basins

Eligible proposals are those that address a project area as defined by the applicant and comprised of one or more SGMA critically overdrafted basins managed under an approved groundwater sustainability plan or alternate plan, one or more high- or medium-priority groundwater basins where a state emergency drought declaration has been declared, or a combination of the two. A map of eligible basins is provided in Appendix A.

Section 3: Regional Block Grant Scope of Work

Deliverables

Regional block grant recipients must include each the following activities in their scope of work:

1. Develop a **Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan** to reduce reliance on groundwater while providing regionally appropriate benefits, including community health, economic wellbeing, water supply, habitat, renewable energy, and climate benefits;
2. Complete **project development and permitting** to generate implementation-ready projects to repurpose agricultural lands for funding consideration;
3. Implement **land repurposing projects** that achieve multiple benefits;
4. Support **capacity needs of partners** to achieve the deliverables of the grant;
5. Conduct **outreach, education, and training** as needed to facilitate and build capacity to implement the above activities; and
6. Conduct **monitoring** to ensure defined conservation outcomes from projects have been achieved and maintained for the agreed upon duration the benefit.

Block grant recipients may conduct work toward each deliverable in parallel or sequentially as is appropriate for their region and the successful implementation of their grant.

Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plans

Each block grant recipient must use a portion of this funding to develop a Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan that identifies and prioritizes land repurposing strategies and projects to address groundwater sustainability within their region. Plans must incorporate actionable components that provide benefits to disadvantaged communities and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Desired outcomes from the Plan's development and implementation include:

- Identification and prioritization of agricultural land repurposing strategies and projects that can be implemented at scale within their region
- A quantifiable estimate of project benefits, such as reduction in groundwater demand, quantity of recharge, or stream flow improvement
- Protection of long-term viability of agricultural economies through sustainable groundwater management
- Attainment of strong regional support for the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan and identified projects through broad inclusion of stakeholders and partners
- Development and management of a broad collaborative structure and effective networks of partners and stakeholders
- Coordination of agricultural land repurposing efforts across land ownerships
- Resource and habitat connectivity
- Identification of habitat restoration opportunities that are located adjacent to land with high habitat value and provide habitat for endangered plant or animal species

- Economic development planning to support regional land-based economies through sustainable groundwater management implementation
- Durable, long-term benefits that meet the program goals
- Short- and medium-term emergency groundwater demand reduction to address environmental or public health needs caused by drought
- Benefits to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and disadvantaged communities
- Tribes' ownership, co-ownership, co-management of, and access to the land
- Support for local jobs, local communities, small businesses, and local economies.

Desired outcomes from the priority projects identified in each Plan should be consistent with the outcomes listed for Land Repurposing Projects below.

Each Plan must be developed in coordination with the applicable groundwater sustainability agency, farmers and ranchers, local/state/federal agencies, local disadvantaged communities, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and environmental justice organizations and must be consistent with the applicable Groundwater Sustainability Plan. Further, block grant recipients should consider the best available climate data for their area and other applicable and available resources in the development of their Plan in order to ensure that their plan is consistent with the best available state, regional, and local data.

Block grant recipients will lead the development of the Plan for their region, partnering directly with organizations in their region through sub-contracts or other agreements as needed throughout the process.

Block grant recipients and partnering entities will work in coordination with the Department, the Agency Advisory Group, and the Statewide Support entity to ensure that the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan is consistent with the program's goals and desired outcomes for plans.

If a comprehensive multibenefit agricultural land repurposing plan already exists for the region and substantially meets the requirements above, that plan may be used in lieu of development of a new plan, at the discretion of the Department. Block grant recipients may also incorporate relevant portions of existing plans into their Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan as applicable.

Land Repurposing Project Development and Permitting

Block grant recipients must use a portion of this funding to support preliminary project development and permitting activities for the priority projects identified in their Plan or previously contemplated projects that were identified prior to development of the Plan and already have regional support. Developing and completing permitting for these projects should ensure that projects are ready to receive implementation funding from state and non-state programs. These projects should contribute to the desired outcomes identified for land repurposing projects.

Block grant recipients must work in collaboration with their Plan partners to develop and permit projects. Project development and permitting may occur in parallel with the development of the Plan pursuant to consultation with the Department.

Desired outcomes for project development and permitting include:

- Completed project design and permitting
- Established non-state partnerships, support, and funding, as well as broad partnerships with regional stakeholders
- Completed memorandums of understanding with project partners to implement projects
- Developed pipeline of multiple years of implementation-ready projects that meet the goals of the Plan available for funding consideration

Land Repurposing Project Implementation

Block grant recipients must use a portion of their grant to implement multibenefit agricultural land repurposing projects that achieve the goals of the program. Projects must result in benefits lasting at least 10 years, unless they are directly responding to a state emergency drought declaration, in which case, benefits must be reasonably durable. Multibenefit projects are those that provide both groundwater sustainability benefits as well as at least one other community health, economic wellbeing, habitat, renewable energy, or climate benefit.

Block grant recipients should identify regionally appropriate project opportunities throughout the grant period.

The Department will work with block grant recipients to identify performance measures to assess desired outcomes of projects.

Block grant recipients should propose the most effective means to implement projects to meet their goals. This may include subcontracting with conservation partner organizations, paying farmers and ranchers to lead implementation, working with academic institutions, or other options as appropriate.

The program encourages early action on funding-ready implementation projects while supporting thoughtful development of project priorities through the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan. Land repurposing projects funded by this program may be identified through the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan or may be pre-identified, shovel-ready projects that maximize the project outcomes outlined below.

For each land repurposing project funded using dollars from this grant, the block grant recipient must provide at least 50% match funding for the project from state, federal, local, or in-kind sources. Administrative costs related to project implementation and in excess of 20% of the project amount may be used as match. Voluntary land transfers to tribes and incentive payments to landowners are exempt from this requirement.

Examples of strategies and projects that may be funded include:

- Creation or restoration of habitat, including pollinator habitat, wetland habitat, upland habitat, and riparian habitat
- Creation of multibenefit recharge areas
- Conversion of irrigated land to dryland farming or non-irrigated rangeland
- Planting cover crops or conservation cover
- Reestablishment of tribal land uses
- Implementation of tribal cultural practices
- Facilitation of renewable energy projects that have an overall net GHG reduction

- Creation of parks or community recreation areas
- Incentive payments to landowners to implement multibenefit projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years, with priority for small and medium farmers and ranchers
- Land acquisitions to facilitate land repurposing and protect repurposed land uses
- Voluntary land transfers to tribes or qualified public entities to facilitate land repurposing and protect repurposed land uses
- Easement acquisitions to facilitate land repurposing and protect repurposed land uses
- Pumping allocation acquisitions

Land acquisitions, land transfers, and easement acquisitions must include acquisition of the property's water rights as part of the transaction. Land acquisitions, land transfers, and pumping allocation acquisitions must occur in conjunction with at least one non-acquisition land repurposing strategy or project type on the acquired land.

Desired outcomes for land repurposing projects include:

- Reduced groundwater use
- Increased groundwater recharge
- Improved baseflows in rivers and streams
- Conversion of land to less intensive water uses while maintaining natural and working lands
- Creation and/or restoration of wildlife and pollinator habitat and/or migratory resources
- Protection of cultural resources
- Improved water quality
- Land use agreements to accomplish prioritized opportunities
- Quantified achievement of multiple benefits of the program
- Incorporated participation from multiple partners and funding sources
- Replicability and scalability
- Integrated benefits to disadvantaged communities and tribes
- Increased community outreach, involvement, and education
- Increased regional workforce development opportunities and support of local business.

Funding for project implementation will only be released upon Department review of individual projects and confirmation that said projects are consistent with the goals of the program.

As required by statute, any groundwater recharge achieved through these strategies and projects must be subtracted from any calculation by the Groundwater Sustainability Agency from the groundwater available for extraction by water users for the duration of the benefits paid for by the program. Payments for benefits must be linked to the achievement and delivery of the defined conservation outcomes for the project and the duration of those outcomes.

Partner Capacity Needs

The program requires broad partnerships with entities to participate in regional planning, project development, and project implementation, and support broader block grant implementation to achieve the program's goals. Block grant recipients must develop mechanisms to support the critical capacity needs of their partners to ensure their participation can be sustained and meaningful and to meet program goals.

The Department will work with the block grant recipient and fiscal control entities to determine whether actual expenditures are reimbursable, but examples of partner capacity needs that should be considered include:

- financial compensation for program staff time
- minor office materials
- compensation for participation by non-paid members of organizations that bring specific expertise to the grant.

Outreach, Education, and Training

Critical to all the above activities, the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program intends to support outreach to a broad and diverse range of communities within each region to develop a comprehensive understanding of and support for the program. This includes block grant recipients' outreach to and engagement of farmers, ranchers, and disadvantaged communities in the development of Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plans. Further, the program aims to strengthen grantees' skills by developing region-wide peer-to-peer training opportunities. Block grant recipients must use funds from this program to further the above goals.

Desired outcomes of outreach, education, and training efforts associated with each block grant include:

- Community-level engagement and education, including to disadvantaged communities, regarding the need to repurpose land, options for repurposing land, and what happens in a "do-nothing" scenario
- Targeted outreach to and engagement of farmers and ranchers about land repurposing, including education regarding the need to repurpose, options for repurposing, and what happens in a "do-nothing" scenario
- Practitioner-level education and regional coordination
- Regional understanding of the benefits of land repurposing strategies and projects identified in the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan
- Broad regional support for Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan
- A collaborative stakeholder structure that can implement the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan long-term

Optional Activities

In addition to the deliverables outlined above, block grant recipients may use funds to support research and demonstration projects needed to test innovative land repurposing strategies of interest to block grant recipients.

Program Participation

Block grant recipients must participate in all of the following activities:

- An orientation
- Monthly check-in meetings with the Department
- Monthly block grant recipient webinars with the Statewide Support entity
- Quarterly progress report meetings with the Department and Agency Advisory Group members

Section 4: Statewide Support Funding Eligibility and Scope of Work

Funding will be provided to one Statewide Support entity to support the implementation of the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program statewide. The Statewide Support entity will facilitate communication and collaboration among block grant recipients and facilitate block grant recipients' engagement with and provision of benefits to the disadvantaged communities within their borders.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible statewide support entities are: (1) nonprofit groups with 501(c) status and (2) academic institutions.

Deliverables

The Statewide Support entity must include each of the following activities in their scope of work:

1. Coordinate collaboration between block grant recipients
2. Provide education and training to block grant recipients to help block grant recipients successfully execute the deliverables of their grant
3. Connect block grant recipients to resources needed to successfully execute the deliverables of their grant
4. Coordinate external communications about program work (e.g., reports, stories, press)
5. Provide technical assistance to block grant recipients to engage disadvantaged communities, tribes, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in the development of their Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plans and in the development and implementation of land repurposing projects
6. In regions with gaps in capacity to plan for and/or conduct land repurposing work, work with regional organizations to build capacity to perform such tasks, and to apply for and administer future block grants in their region.

Section 5: Funding for Tribes

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the up to \$5 million in funding available under this Section are: (1) Federally recognized California Native American tribes; (2) non-federally recognized California Native American tribes on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission; (3) members of a Federally recognized or non-federally recognized California Native American tribe; and (4) nonprofit groups with 501 (c) status with connections to or on behalf of eligible tribes.

At its discretion, the Department may also use the funding available under this Section to increase block grant awards where the block grant recipient partners with a tribe to plan for, develop, and/or implement multibenefit land repurposing projects consistent with the project types listed below. In order to receive additional funding under this Section, block grant recipients must provide memoranda of understanding with or letters of support from the tribe(s) they are partnering with detailing the work to be conducted using this funding.

Maximum Grant Award

There is no maximum grant award for projects funded under this Section.

Solicitation Period

Applications submitted under this Section will be accepted on a rolling, non-competitive basis. If funding remains available under this section as of March 1, 2024, the Department, in consultation with the Agency Advisory Group and the California Natural Resources Agency Assistant Secretary of Tribal Affairs or similar position, may elect to distribute the remaining funds to regional block grant recipients.

Project Types

Tribes may apply for funding under this section to plan for, develop, or implement multibenefit agricultural land repurposing projects that address two or more project outcomes identified below. Projects must result in benefits lasting at least 10 years, unless they are directly responding to a state emergency drought declaration, in which case, benefits must be reasonably durable. Multibenefit projects are those that provide both groundwater sustainability benefits as well as at least one other community health, economic wellbeing, habitat, renewable energy, or climate benefit.

Examples of projects that may be funded include:

- Creation or restoration of habitat, including pollinator habitat, wetland habitat, upland habitat, and riparian habitat
- Creation of multibenefit recharge areas
- Conversion of irrigated land to dryland farming or non-irrigated rangeland
- Planting cover crops or conservation cover
- Reestablishment of tribal land uses
- Implementation of tribal cultural practices
- Facilitation of renewable energy projects that have an overall net GHG reduction
- Creation of parks or community recreation areas
- Incentive payments to landowners to implement multibenefit projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years
- Land acquisitions to facilitate land repurposing and protect repurposed land uses

- Easement acquisitions to facilitate land repurposing and protect repurposed land uses
- Pumping allocation acquisitions

Land acquisitions, land transfers, and easement acquisitions must include acquisition of the property's water rights as part of the transaction. Land acquisitions, land transfers, and pumping allocation acquisitions must occur in conjunction with at least one non-acquisition land repurposing strategy or project type on the acquired land.

Desired outcomes for land repurposing projects include:

- Reduced groundwater use
- Increased groundwater recharge
- Improved baseflows in rivers and streams
- Conversion of land to less intensive water uses while maintaining natural and working lands
- Creation and/or restoration of wildlife and pollinator habitat and/or migratory resources
- Protection of cultural resources
- Improved water quality
- Land use agreements to accomplish prioritized opportunities
- Quantified achievement of multiple benefits of the program
- Incorporated participation from multiple partners and funding sources
- Replicability and scalability
- Integrated benefits to disadvantaged communities and tribes
- Increased community outreach, involvement, and education
- Increased regional workforce development opportunities and support of local business.

As required by statute, any groundwater recharge achieved through these strategies and projects must be subtracted from any calculation by the Groundwater Sustainability Agency from the groundwater available for extraction by water users for the duration of the benefits paid for by the program. Payments for benefits must be linked to the achievement and delivery of the defined conservation outcomes for the project and the duration of those outcomes.

Tribes must work with the relevant Groundwater Sustainability Agency to quantify the groundwater recharge achieved by funded projects.

Additional Information

Refer to Section 6 for information on eligible costs funded by the program, Section 7 for information on application review and selection, and Section 8 on grant implementation for funded projects.

Section 6: Eligible Costs

Direct Costs

Funding may be used for the following direct costs incurred to meet the program deliverables:

- Block grant recipient, Statewide Support entity, subgrantee, and their contractors' staff costs, including salary at the fully burdened rate. Administrative costs should not be included in the staff rate or salary. Administrative costs should be budgeted separately and must comply with the requirements outlined below.
- Payments to tribes or members of tribes for expertise provided in the development of plans; the development, permitting, and implementation of projects, and in the development and implementation of educational, training, and monitoring activities.
- Incentive payments to landowners to implement multibenefit projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years on lands that would contribute to bringing the groundwater basin to sustainable levels.
- Travel.

Administrative costs

Administrative costs may account for no more than twenty percent (20%) of the total funding award. This limit may be exceeded if the block grant recipient or statewide support entity has a federally approved administrative cost rate that is greater than 20%. Proof of the federally approved administrative cost rate must be submitted with the application. Administrative costs may include those costs incurred by a block grant recipient to administer their grant, or administrative costs by subgrantees necessary to fulfill the deliverables outlined in these guidelines. Administrative costs include:

- Office space
- Supplies and equipment
- Legal or management oversight
- Prorated general liability, Workers' Compensation (may be included in payroll), and automotive insurance

Project development costs and permitting fees

Block grant funding and funding provided under Section 5 may be used for project development costs, including:

- Preparing project plans, specifications, and cost estimates that will result in a specific project
- Acquiring permits for specific, future on-the-ground projects
- Analysis required to support and complete CEQA and or NEPA documentation for specific projects
- Performing necessary cultural resources, biological, botanical, aquatic, soil, hydrologic, wildlife, timber, or other studies/surveys and/or developing necessary project designs related to a specific site or physical project

Project implementation costs

Block grant funding and funding provided under Section 5 may be used for project implementation costs, including:

- Preparation of bid packages and contractor documents
- Performance costs within the scope of the project, including materials and supplies
- Labor and other costs necessary for the physical implementation of the project

Outreach, Education, and Training

Block grant funding and funding provided to the Statewide support entity may be used for Outreach, Education, and Training activities, including:

- Meeting space
- Materials
- Facilitation
- Technical assistance to landowners to apply for program funds
- Payments for expertise provided by representatives of disadvantaged communities, tribes, or disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Monitoring

Block grant funding and funding provided under Section 5 may be used for pre- and post-project monitoring and adaptive management, including preparation of long-term management plans associated with projects.

Research

Block grant funding may be used for research and demonstration projects needed to test innovative land repurposing strategies of interest to block grant recipients.

Section 7: Application Review and Selection

Application Review Process

Applicants for regional block grants and the statewide support funding will be required to submit an application for funding and participate in a virtual interview with reviewers to discuss the project prior to funding decisions being made.

Applicants for funding under Section 5 will be required to submit an application for funding and participate in a site visit prior to a funding decision being made. Applications will be evaluated by Department of Conservation and scored by a review panel comprised of representatives from the Agency Advisory Group, collectively "reviewers." Mean scores will be calculated and ranked.

The reviewers will convene to provide consensus for funding recommendations. The final funding decisions will be made by the Director of the Department.

Selection Criteria

Factors to be considered when selecting regional block grant recipients include:

- Applicant's vision for an agricultural land repurposing program in their region
- Demonstrated ability to coordinate with entities across their region to meet program goals
- Existing strong regional partnerships and support and capacity to expand these partnerships
- Experience and expertise in conducting effective and inclusive outreach across diverse communities
- Experience and expertise partnering with Native American tribes
- Demonstrated ability to conduct regional planning and project implementation efforts
- Fiscal and administrative control systems to adequately oversee the expenditure of block grant awards
- Policy and program expertise relevant to meeting program goals

Factors to be considered when selecting the statewide support entity recipient include:

- Experience and expertise in groundwater sustainability planning statewide
- Experience and expertise in land repurposing strategies
- Experience and expertise in conducting effective and inclusive outreach across diverse communities
- Experience and expertise partnering with Native American tribes
- Experience and expertise in developing peer-to-peer and inter-regional sharing of project implementation strategies and skills
- Strong relationships with primary actors in groundwater sustainability planning statewide
- Fiscal and administrative control systems to adequately oversee the expenditure of block grant awards
- Policy and program expertise relevant to meeting program goals

Factors to be considered when selecting projects for funding under Section 5 include:

- The extent to which the proposed project provides groundwater sustainability benefits
- The extent to which the proposed project provides multiple benefits
- The extent to which the proposed project achieves the desired outcomes for project implementation grants
- The durability of the benefits provided

Section 8: Grant Implementation

Grant Agreements

All grantees will be required to enter into a grant agreement with the Department. Grantees will work with an assigned grant manager to develop their grant agreement. Grant agreements will not be executed until authorized by the Department and will be effective upon execution by the Department's authorized signatory. The Department may require modifications to the project in the grant agreement. All contents of the grant recipient's application will be included in the grant agreement.

Each grant agreement with the Department will terminate on March 30, 2026.

Responsibility of the Block Grant Recipient

The block grant recipient will be responsible for carrying out the project and for managing finances, including: invoicing; payments to contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers; accounting and financial auditing; and other project management duties such as monitoring and reporting requirements.

Block grant recipients shall:

- Distribute necessary funds through subgrants and/or contracts to create regional multibenefit agricultural land repurposing plans, develop and permit land repurposing projects, implement land repurposing projects, and monitor land repurposing projects consistent with these guidelines and the applicable Groundwater Sustainability Plan
- Ensure execution of all project deliverables and requirements outlined in Section 2 within the grant term
- Coordinate and integrate management of agricultural land repurposing efforts within their region or basin
- Coordinate activities with the relevant Groundwater Sustainability Agency to ensure activities are consistent with the goals of the applicable Groundwater Sustainability Plan and any groundwater recharge achieved through these strategies and projects must be subtracted from any calculation by the Groundwater Sustainability Agency from the groundwater available for extraction by water users for the duration of the benefits paid for by the program.

Distribution of Block Grant Funds to Third Parties

As the fiscal administrators of the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program, block grant recipients will award subgrants of Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program funding or enter into contracts to fulfill the scope of work of this program. Subgrantees may be selected to engage in completion of all the deliverables or for discrete tasks. Block grant recipients may award subgrants via competitive or non-competitive processes and may engage subgrantees and contractors to fulfill individual deliverables or multiple deliverables, at their discretion.

Eligible subgrantees include federal, state, and local government agencies; federally and non-federally recognized California Native American tribes; resource conservation districts;

special districts; universities, colleges, and research institutions; and California 501c3 non-profit organizations.

Contracts may be entered in to with qualified entities in accordance with block grant recipients' internal contracting policies and procedures.

Block grant recipients may also provide incentive payments directly to landowners for implementation of multibenefit projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years. In order to distribute funds to landowners, block grant recipients must establish guidelines for funding projects based on the conservation outcomes achieved and delivered, and the duration of the outcomes provided. Block grant recipients must verify that the defined conservation outcomes of the project have been achieved and delivered for the duration identified in order to distribute incentive payments and must report this information to the Department quarterly.

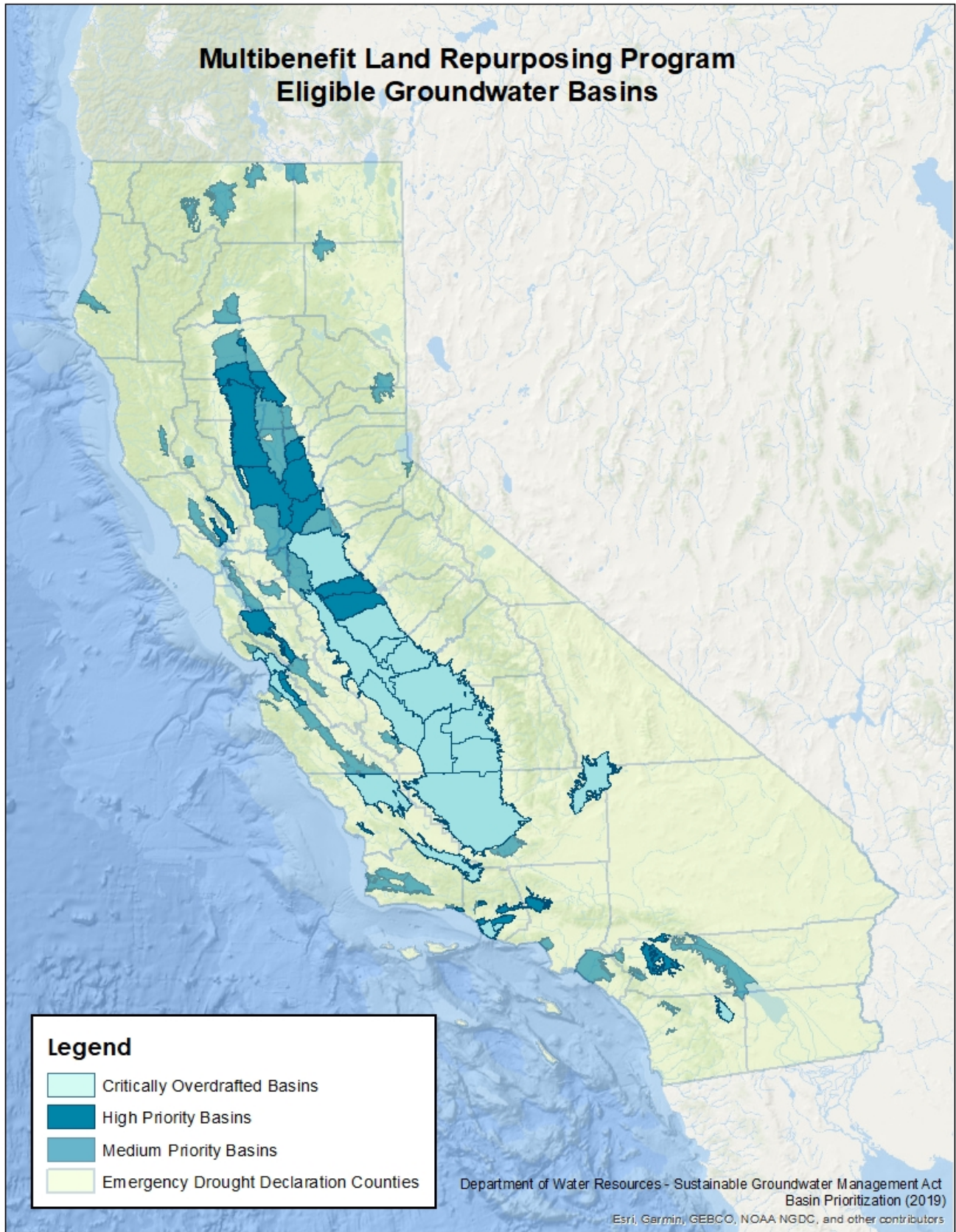
Invoicing and Reporting

Grant agreements will generally be structured to provide reimbursement in arrears for work performed. Invoices for reimbursement may be submitted quarterly or monthly.

Advance payment terms will be considered and negotiated on a case-by-case basis. Subject to future approval from the Department and its control agencies, advance payment terms may allow up to 25% of the original grant amount to be paid in advance at a time. Funding for project implementation will only be released upon Department review of individual projects and confirmation that said projects are consistent with the goals of the program.

Block grant recipients receiving advanced funds must provide a fiscal report detailing how those funds have been expended on a quarterly basis and along with each subsequent request for an advance. Block grant recipients that receive funding on a reimbursement basis must provide a fiscal report detailing how funds have been expended along with each invoice.

Appendix A: Map of SGMA Priority Basins



As of October 19, 2021, the Emergency Drought Declaration covers all 58 counties.