

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

Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program

**FINAL
January 31, 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 Public Resources Trailer Bill (AB 211, Ch. 574, Statutes of 2022)

Critical Dates (proposed, subject to change)

Public Comment Period Closes—December 30, 2022

Solicitation Notice and Application released— January 24, 2023

Applications due— March 29, 2023

Awards Announced— June 1, 2023

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 State Water Resources Control Board
- 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 Public Resources Trailer Bill (AB 211, Ch. 574, Stat. of 2022), which appropriated \$40 million to the Department to fund groundwater sustainability projects that reduce groundwater use, repurpose irrigated agricultural land, and provide wildlife habitat.

Grants up to \$8.89 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 \$8.89 million as funding allows.

\$500,000 will be awarded to the statewide support entity to ensure provision of statewide technical assistance to Round 2 grantees and continued facilitation of communication and collaboration necessary to meet the purposes of the program. The Department reserves the right to increase the statewide support entity grant award as funding and the Department's need allows.

Up to \$2.44 million in grants, comprised of \$1.94 million from the current grant solicitation and \$500,000 from the remaining funding from the Budget Act of 2021 (SB 170, Ch. 240, Stat. 2021), 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. The Department reserves the right to increase awards above \$2.5 million as funding allows.

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 Public Resources Trailer Bill of 2022 requires that the Department prioritize the achievement of disadvantaged community benefits when implementing this program. For the purposes of this program, a disadvantaged community is defined as a) a community with a median household income less than 80 percent of the statewide average, or b) a community where the lands are under the control of a federally recognized Tribe. This may include providing access to nature, protection of community air quality, improved drinking water supplies, and creation of recreational spaces and community-agriculture buffer zones.

Section 2: Regional Block Grants

Eligible Applicants

Eligible regional block grant applicants are: (1) Groundwater Sustainability Agencies ("GSAs"), (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 alternative to a groundwater sustainability 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 Collaboration

This grant program requires partnering and collaboration among stakeholders within regions or basins. Proposals should demonstrate multiple, committed partnerships and extensive collaboration with other agencies, organizations, entities, and individuals 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.

Collaboration is defined as working with other organizations, government agencies, groups, and individuals to ensure that all entities work in agreement and are non-duplicative of each other's activities, and to ensure that diverse interests are meaningfully incorporated into the block grant recipient's work. Collaboration 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 alternative to a groundwater sustainability 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 (collectively, eligible groundwater basins). High and medium priority groundwater basins under an emergency

drought declaration will still be considered eligible for funding if that drought declaration is lifted on or after the application deadline. A map of eligible basins is provided in Appendix A.

Regional Block Grant 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, flood resilience, 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.

The majority of each block grant recipient's budget should go toward project implementation. 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 be consistent with the relevant Groundwater Sustainability Plan(s) for the region and prioritize projects that provide meaningful 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, stream flow improvement, or habitat acreage/quantity
- Protection of long-term viability of agricultural economies through support for agricultural systems with flexible water demand and 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 collaborators
- 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
- Identification of adaptive management strategies to avoid adverse impacts on neighboring properties of repurposed lands
- Economic development planning to support regional land-based economies through sustainable groundwater management implementation
- Identification of strategies to address cumulative and economic impacts of land repurposing on farmworker jobs
- 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 disadvantaged communities and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers
- 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
- be consistent with the applicable Groundwater Sustainability Plan
- Include a description of all disadvantaged communities in the region and the extent to which the program will benefit those communities
- Identify a clear process for engaging disadvantaged communities in project development and implementation.

Block grant recipients should ensure that their plan is consistent with the best available state, regional, and local data (water, climate, habitat, etc).

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.

To ensure that disadvantaged communities are engaged in and meaningfully benefit from projects developed using this funding, as part of a project's development, block grant recipients must:

- Identify and describe the disadvantaged communities near the proposed project
- Describe to what extent each disadvantaged community near the proposed project will benefit from the project or, if no benefit is provided to a particular disadvantaged community, provide justification why
- Describe the process by which the block grant recipient will engage with the relevant disadvantaged communities in the project's development and implementation
- Engage the relevant disadvantaged communities in the project's development

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
- Integrated benefits to disadvantaged communities and tribes

Land Repurposing Project Implementation

Block grant recipients must use a majority of their grant to implement multibenefit agricultural land repurposing projects that achieve the goals of the program. Projects must result in

multiple 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.

Block grant recipients must prioritize projects that:

- Meaningfully benefit disadvantaged communities
- Are conducted on lands that are least viable for irrigated agriculture
- Contribute to resource connectivity (e.g., connectivity of habitat, agricultural landscapes, renewable energy centers, etc.)

Multibenefit projects are those that provide both groundwater sustainability benefits as well as at least one other community health, economic wellbeing, habitat, flood, renewable energy, or climate benefit.

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

Block grant recipients will work with the statewide support entity 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 must be consistent with the Groundwater Sustainability Plan for the area and may either be identified through the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan or pre-identified, shovel-ready projects that meet program requirements and maximize the project outcomes outlined below.

Examples of strategies and projects that may be funded include:

- Rewilding landscapes, including through creation or restoration of habitat such as pollinator habitat, wetland habitat, upland habitat, and riparian habitat
- Creation of multibenefit recharge areas
- Restoring floodplains
- Transitioning irrigated land to dryland farming or non-irrigated rangeland
- Transitioning to less water intensive crops, including for native seed production
- 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, farmers, and ranchers to implement multibenefit land repurposing projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years
- 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, including conservation easement and flood easement acquisitions, to facilitate land repurposing and protect repurposed land uses

The block grant recipient will work with the Department to develop reasonable incentive payments to landowners, farmers, and ranchers to implement multibenefit land repurposing projects.

Land acquisitions, land transfers, and easement 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
- Transition of land to less water intensive, regenerative 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
- Increased access to nature
- Land use agreements to accomplish prioritized opportunities
- Quantified achievement of multiple benefits of the program
- Incorporated participation from multiple partners, collaborators, 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
- Diversified economic opportunities.

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.

On a case-by-case basis, the Department may approve use of funds to implement projects outside of an eligible groundwater basin if that project can be shown to:

- 1) Reduce groundwater use in an eligible groundwater basin interconnected with surface water,
- 2) Improve groundwater supply in an eligible groundwater basin interconnected with surface water , or
- 3) Improve baseflows in rivers and streams in an eligible groundwater basin.

For the Department to consider such projects for funding, the GSA responsible for the eligible groundwater basin must provide a letter attesting to the benefits the project would provide to the eligible groundwater basin.

The Public Resources Trailer Bill (AB 211, Ch. 574, Stat. of 2022) requires that 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 and Collaborator Capacity Needs

The program requires broad partnerships and collaborations 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 and collaborators to ensure their participation can be sustained and meaningful and to meet program goals. This may include providing payments for services to disadvantaged community members and tribal members for their participation in and contributions to planning, project development, and project implementation efforts, subject to the requirements outlined in the Eligible Costs section.

The Department will work with the block grant recipient and fiscal control entities to determine whether actual expenditures are reimbursable, but examples of partner and collaborator 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
- Trainings to support upward financial mobility and transitions from agricultural work for farmworkers
- Broad regional support for Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan
- A collaborative stakeholder structure that can implement the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan long-term

Monitoring

Regional block grant recipients must monitor projects funded by this program to ensure defined conservation outcomes from projects, including identified benefits to disadvantaged communities, have been achieved and are maintained for the agreed upon duration the benefit. Block grant recipients are not expected to monitor every project; however, they are expected to develop a monitoring plan to be approved by the Department to ensure satisfactory tracking of outcomes across their portfolio of projects. At a minimum, grantees will be required to capture the before and after condition for each project.

For projects with an easement component, grantees will be required to monitor and report on compliance with the easement terms annually for the duration of the easement.

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.

Eligibility Criteria

Below are the Eligibility Criteria upon which each proposal will be evaluated. Applications must meet all eligibility criteria listed below to be considered for funding under this solicitation:

- Applicant is a (1) Groundwater Sustainability Agency; (2) federally recognized California Native American tribe, or (3) non-federally recognized California Native American tribe on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission **OR** is a public agency; nonprofit group with 501 (c) status; or Watermaster implementing an approved groundwater sustainability plan or approved alternative to a groundwater sustainability plan and is partnering with a GSA to submit an application.
- Applicant is locally based or has strong, well-documented ties to local communities, stakeholders and/or GSA(s).

- Applicant has overall capacity to administer the grant.
- Application is for one or more SGMA critically overdrafted basins managed under an approved groundwater sustainability plan or alternative to a groundwater sustainability 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.
- Application includes the following deliverables in the scope of work and budget:
 - 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;
 - Complete **project development and permitting** to generate implementation-ready projects to repurpose agricultural lands for funding consideration;
 - **Implement land repurposing projects** that achieve multiple benefits;
 - **Support capacity needs of partners and collaborators** to achieve the deliverables of the grant;
 - Conduct **outreach, education, and training** as needed to facilitate and build capacity to implement the above activities; and
 - **Conduct monitoring** to ensure defined conservation outcomes from projects have been achieved and maintained for the agreed upon duration the benefit.
- Application is complete and was received by the deadline.

Selection Criteria

Total selection criteria points available out of 100. Factors to be considered when selecting regional block grant recipients include:

- **Goals** (25 points): The extent to which the applicant's vision for an agricultural land repurposing program in their region aligns with the program's goals.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration** (20 points): The extent to which the applicant has built strong regional partnerships and collaborations to support the grant, and has a plan to expand and enter into new partnerships and collaborations to execute the grant. Partnerships are demonstrated through letters of support outlining the financial and in-kind commitments of partner organizations to the work conducted under the grant. Collaboration is evidenced by demonstrating meaningful incorporation of diverse interests into the block grant recipient's work through letters of support, signed agreements, board resolutions, or other signed documents.
- **Community Engagement** (15 points): The extent to which the applicant demonstrates experience and expertise in conducting effective and inclusive engagement across diverse communities and organizations, as well as the extent to which the applicant plans to engage with and meaningfully include the feedback of: farmers, ranchers, disadvantaged community members, tribes, and other interested practitioners in the development and implementation of their land repurposing work. Applicants who demonstrate experience and expertise engaging with farmers, ranchers, disadvantaged communities, and tribes will receive more points. Applicants who outline clear steps in their work plan for engaging with disadvantaged communities

through planning, project development, and project implementation will receive more points.

- **Disadvantaged Community Benefits** (15 points): The extent to which the proposal is likely to result in projects that provide substantiated benefits to disadvantaged communities. Substantiated benefits to disadvantaged communities may include increased access to nature, improved drinking water supplies, improved air quality, and creation of community-agriculture buffer zones next to disadvantaged communities.
- **Fiscal and Administrative Capacity** (15 points): The extent to which the applicant has the fiscal and administrative control systems to adequately oversee the expenditure of block grant awards.
- **Policy and Project Expertise** (10 points): The extent to which the applicant demonstrates the policy and project implementation expertise necessary to complete the grant deliverables. Applicants may demonstrate this ability in-house or through partnerships and collaborations.

Application Review and Award

Materials and Submission

The application template is provided in Appendix B and is available on the [Department's website](#). Applicants should familiarize themselves with this solicitation prior to completing the application.

Applicants must submit all required application materials via email to mlrp@conservation.ca.gov. Applications must be received digitally by 11:59 p.m. on March 29, 2023.

Incomplete applications, applications that don't meet all the eligibility criteria, and applications not received by the deadline will not be evaluated for funding.

Each applicant will receive an acknowledgement upon the Department's receipt of their application.

The schedule for this solicitation is provided in the "[At-A-Glance](#)" section of this solicitation. The schedule is subject to change.

Application Review Process

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

Applications will be evaluated by Department of Conservation and scored by a review panel comprised of representatives from the Department of Conservation and/or Agency Advisory Group, collectively "reviewers." Mean scores and reviewer rankings will be considered when determining funding recommendations.

The reviewers will convene to provide consensus for funding recommendations.

Project Selection

The projects, selection scoring, and reviewer rankings will be presented to the Director of the Department who will consider the comments and recommendations of the reviewers and make the final funding decisions. The Department will notify applicants within 10 days of the Director's determination as to whether their project was approved for funding.

The Director may consider the following when making awards:

- Selection criteria scores
- Reviewer rankings
- Interview responses
- The availability of funds
- The program purposes
- The balance and distribution of funding among program priorities and/or geographic area.

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 3: Statewide Support Funding Eligibility and Scope of Work

\$500,000 will be provided to increase the statewide support entity's existing award to ensure they are able to provide technical assistance services to regional block grant recipients awarded under the current solicitation. The statewide support entity will provide technical assistance and facilitate communication and collaboration necessary to meet the purposes of the program. The statewide support entity may partner and contract with other entities to meet the deliverables outlined below.

Deliverables

The statewide support entity will:

1. Coordinate collaboration between block grant recipients
2. Develop a peer-learning structure through which block grant recipients can receive education and training to 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), including working with the Department to produce an annual report of program outcomes
5. Working with 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. Work to fill gaps in and build capacity to develop and implement land repurposing work, and provide technical assistance to entities interested in applying for land repurposing funding
7. Oversee monitoring efforts and outcomes reporting to ensure consistency and transparency in outcomes monitoring across regions.

Optional Activities

In addition to the deliverables outlined above, the statewide support entity may use funds to support research and demonstration projects needed to test innovative land repurposing strategies.

Section 4: Funding for Tribes

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants 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; and (4) nonprofit groups with 501(c) status with meaningful connections to or on behalf of eligible tribes.

Non-profit applicants must have a Native American-centered mission or have a majority Native American board. If the non-profit applicant does not meet this criterion, they must provide a letter of support from an eligible tribe detailing the nature of the relationship between the non-profit and the tribe, how the tribe will benefit from the project, and the tribe's support for the project.

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 or collaborates 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 or collaborating with detailing the work to be conducted using this funding.

Maximum Grant Award

Up to \$2.44 million in funding is available under this Section. At the Discretion of the Department Director, this amount may be increased if funding allows. Applications may be submitted for up to the total amount of funding available 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, 2026, 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, farmers, and ranchers to implement multibenefit land repurposing 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

Land acquisitions, land transfers, and easement 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
- Tribes' ownership, co-ownership, co-management of, and access to the land
- 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.

Eligibility Criteria

Below are the Eligibility Criteria upon which each proposal will be evaluated. Applications must meet all eligibility criteria listed below to be considered for funding under this solicitation:

- Applicant is a (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.

- The project is located in one or more SGMA critically overdrafted basins managed under an approved groundwater sustainability plan or alternative to a groundwater sustainability 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; or the project is located outside of an eligible groundwater basin but is shown to reduce groundwater use, improve groundwater supply, or improve baseflows in rivers and streams in an eligible groundwater basin interconnected with surface water.
- Application is for an eligible project type.
- Application is complete.
- The proposed project provides groundwater sustainability benefits.
- The proposed project provides benefits in addition to groundwater sustainability benefits. Additional benefits include community health, economic wellbeing, habitat, renewable energy, or climate benefits. Projects that are conducted on lands that are least viable for irrigated agriculture and that contribute to resource connectivity (e.g., connectivity of habitat, agricultural landscapes, renewable energy centers, etc.) will receive priority for funding.
- The benefits provided by the proposed project will last for at least ten years.
- The proposed project meets at least three goals of the program and provides at least one desired outcome for project development or implementation grants, as relevant.
- The applicant has the fiscal and administrative control systems to adequately oversee the expenditure of the grant.
- The funding request is reasonable and commensurate with the work required to complete the project.
- The applicant has and is able to demonstrate access to the site.

Application Review and Project Selection

Materials and Submission

The application template is provided in Appendix D and is available on the [Department's website](#). Applicants should familiarize themselves with this solicitation prior to completing the application.

Applications will be reviewed as they are received.

Incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant for revision. Applications that don't meet all the eligibility criteria will not be awarded funding.

Each applicant will receive an acknowledgement upon the Department's receipt of their application.

Application Review Process

Applicants 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 for consistency with the program's goals and requirements. Projects that meet

the program's eligibility criteria will be awarded funding on a first come, first served basis as funding allows. The final funding decisions will be made by the Director of the Department.

Limited Waivers of Sovereign Immunity

Limited waivers of sovereign immunity may be necessary to ensure the enforceability of agreements. The Department will consult with tribes as needed in the formation of grant agreements.

Section 5: Eligible Costs

Only eligible costs incurred during the grant agreement term that are related to the project will be reimbursed. All eligible costs must also be reasonable and supported by appropriate documentation to be reimbursed. All eligible costs must, to the satisfaction of the Department, support the work plan and be directly related to, and in support of, the program deliverables.

Reasonable

For an eligible cost to be considered reasonable, the cost, in its nature and amount, must not exceed that which would be incurred by a prudent person under the circumstances prevailing at the time the decision was made to incur the cost. In determining reasonableness of a given cost, consideration must be given to:

- Whether the cost is of a type generally recognized as ordinary and necessary for the operation of the entity or the proper and efficient performance of project.
- The restraints or requirements imposed by such factors as: sound business practices; arm's-length bargaining; federal, state, local, tribal, and other laws and regulations; and terms and conditions of this project.
- Market prices for comparable goods or services for the geographic area.
- Whether the individuals concerned acted with prudence in the circumstances considering their responsibilities to its employees, the public at large, and the state.
- Whether the cost significantly deviates from the acquiring entity's established practices and policies regarding the incurrence of costs.

Direct Costs

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

- Block grant recipient, statewide support entity, tribal set-aside recipient, subgrantee, and their contractors' staff costs, including salary at the fully burdened rate. Indirect costs should not be included in the staff rate or salary. Indirect 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, farmers, and ranchers to implement multibenefit land repurposing projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years.
- Travel. Eligible travel costs can only be used for in-state travel for the watershed coordinator as necessary to complete coordination work. Mileage for watershed coordinator activities is reimbursable if included in the proposed budget and work plan. In addition to mileage for watershed coordinator activities, costs must meet the requirements outlined below and in the Grant Agreement:
 - Accommodation-related travel costs: maximum reimbursement rates based on county as shown at: <https://hrmanual.calhr.ca.gov/Home/ManualItem/1/2203>, with no option for approval of an "excess lodging rate."

- Rental car costs or personal vehicle mileage for travel directly related to the grant activities will be reimbursed at the relevant rental car or Reimbursement Rate Per Mile for Personal Vehicle as shown here:
<https://www.calhr.ca.gov/employees/Pages/travel-reimbursements.aspx>
- Rental car, personal vehicle, ride share, train, or airfare costs will only be reimbursed for travel directly related to execution of the work plan, and then only if it is the typical method used to get from one location to the other. Grantees should choose the least expensive mode of transportation feasible given their travel needs.
- No other travel-related costs will be reimbursed through this grant program.

Indirect Costs

Indirect 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 indirect cost rate must be submitted with the application. Indirect 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. Indirect 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 4 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
- Contracting grow-outs or initial payments to growers or nurseries to support the sourcing and production of regionally adapted native plant materials to be used in block grantees' land repurposing projects

Project Implementation Costs

Block grant funding and funding provided under Section 4 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

The following costs associated with outreach, education, and training activities directly related to the execution of program deliverables are considered eligible, in keeping with the program's goal of ensuring that the program provides benefits to disadvantaged communities, and recognizing that public participation in community engagement activities is a benefit to the program and public:

- Meeting space
- Meeting materials
- Facilitation services
- Technical assistance to landowners, farmers, or ranchers to apply for program funds
- Translation and interpretation for meetings and written materials
- Participant compensation that is an exchange of payment for services rendered in the development of community work products, and appropriately documented with deliverables such as sign in sheets or written surveys.
- Provision of transportation services for community residents, such as a vanpool.
- Provision of childcare services for community residents.
- Food and refreshments, excluding alcoholic beverages of any kind, that are determined to be an integral part of the event. Examples of activities where it would be appropriate to approve food purchase would include a design charrette held in the evening, where the meal is consumed as part of the event and replaces a meal otherwise missed by attending the event.

Monitoring

Block grant funding and funding provided under Section 4 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.

Ineligible Costs

Ineligible costs are:

- Costs that are not related to the Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program
- Costs that occur outside of the Grant Agreement term
- Meals, incidentals, tips, per diems, or refreshments for travel not allowed above
- Out-of-state travel and activities

Section 6: 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.

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; support the capacity needs of partners; provide outreach, education, and training; and monitor land repurposing projects all 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 to ensure any groundwater recharge achieved through these strategies and projects is 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, farmers, and ranchers to implement multibenefit land repurposing projects that create a public benefit for at least ten years, including reasonable incentives to support a farmer or rancher's ability to transition land use. 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

Payments

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. Advance payments may require additional statutory authority and are 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.

Loss of Funding

Actions of the grantee that may lead to suspension or cancellation of the grant agreement include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to execute an agreement within six months of receiving an official funding notification,
- Withdrawal from the grant program prior to completion of the work plan,
- Failure to submit required documentation within the time periods specified in the grant agreement,
- Change in project scope, schedule, or budget without prior approval,
- Failure to complete the deliverables within the grant agreement term,
- Failure to demonstrate sufficient progress toward deliverables, and

- Failure to comply with applicable laws or grant requirements.

State Audits

Projects are subject to audit by the state annually and for three (3) years following the final payment of grant funds. If the project is selected for audit, the grantee will be contacted in advance of the audit. The audit will include all books, papers, accounts, documents, or other records of grantee, as they relate to the project. All project expenditure documentation should be available for an audit, whether paid with grant funds or other funds.

The grantee must have project records, including source documents and evidence of payment, readily available and must provide an employee with knowledge of the project to assist the auditor. The grantee must provide a copy of any document, paper, record, or other such material requested by the auditor.

Accounting Requirements

Grantees must maintain an accounting system that:

- Accurately reflects fiscal transactions, in accordance with standard accounting principles,
- Provides a good audit trail, including original source documents such as purchase orders, receipts, progress payments, invoices, employee paystubs and timecards, evidence of payment, etc.,
- Provides accounting data so the total cost of each individual project can be readily determined, and,
- Maintains records for a period of three (3) years after final reimbursement is made by the state. Grantee must retain all project records at least one (1) year following an audit

Section 7: General Requirements

Confidentiality

Once the application has been submitted, any privacy rights, as well as other confidentiality protections afforded by law with respect to the application package may be waived. All applications, communications, or other documentation received by Department are subject to the Public Records Act (Government Code § 6250, et seq.).

Conflict of Interest

All applicants and individuals who participate in the review of submitted applications are subject to applicable conflict of interest laws. Any individual who has participated in planning or setting priorities for a specific solicitation or who will participate in any part of the grant development and negotiation process on behalf of the public is ineligible to receive funds or personally benefit from funds awarded through this solicitation. Applicants should also be aware that certain local agencies may submit applications that will compete for funding. Failure to comply with the conflict of interest laws, including business and financial disclosure provisions, will result in rejection of the application and any subsequent grant agreement being declared void. Other legal actions may also be taken.

This paragraph is not intended to enlarge the scope of existing restrictions under applicable conflict of interest laws, including the Political Reform Act (Government Code, § 81000, et seq.) and provisions regarding financial interests in public contracts (Government Code, § 1090, et seq.). Those laws, including their relevant statutory exceptions, apply to this solicitation and any ensuing grants and contracts.

Compliance with Laws

Activities funded under this solicitation must be in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and applications may include in their budgets the funding necessary for compliance-related activities. As part of a grantee's project development work, grantees must identify expected required permits, state whether they have received the required permits or describe the process through which the permits will be obtained, and indicate which permits could significantly delay project implementation.

Environmental Compliance

Grants awarded consistent with this solicitation may be subject to prevailing wage provisions of the California Labor Code commencing with section 1720. Any questions of interpretation regarding the California Labor Code should be directed to the Director of the Department of Industrial Relations, the state department having jurisdiction in these matters. For more details, please refer to the Department of Industrial Relations website.

The Department, as a government agency that will be taking a discretionary action to provide funding for projects, must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Each proposed project must follow the California Environmental Quality Act, Division 13 (commencing with Public Resources Code section 21000) and California Code of Regulations Title 14 section 15000 et seq. ["CEQA"].

For applications submitted by government entities, it is expected that the resolution adopted to submit the application will address CEQA and that the Department will act as a responsible agency. For applications submitted by non-profits or California Native American

tribes, the Department will act either as a lead or responsible agency depending on what other CEQA documents have been completed for the proposed activities.

Projects implemented using program funding must meet all environmental compliance requirements prior to disbursement of funding.

Therefore, for the Department to review a project proposed for implementation, one of the following must be submitted:

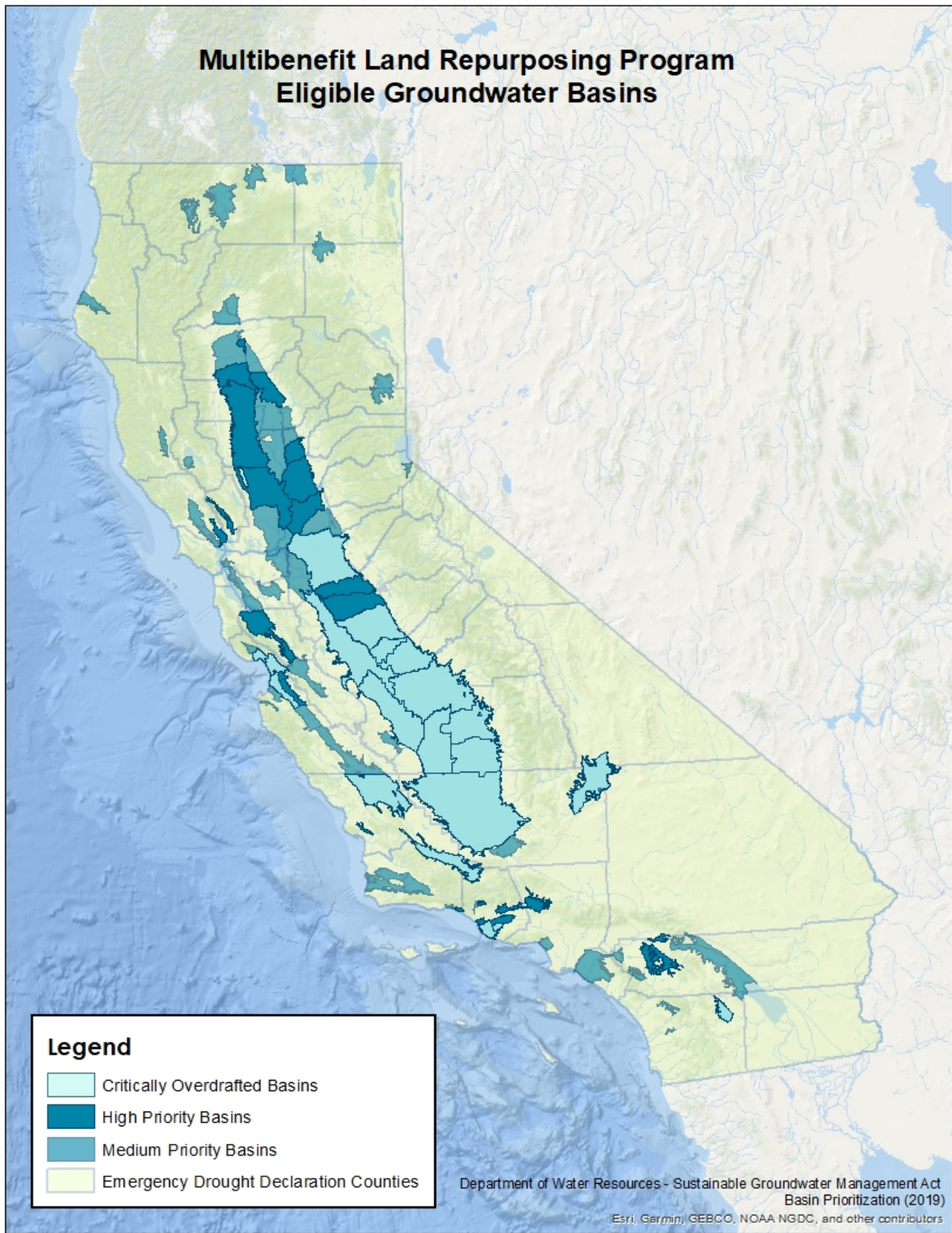
- a. A Finding or similar determination that the proposed project is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act, with an explanation as to why it is not a project, with the appropriate sections of the Public Resources Code and California Code of Regulations cited.
- b. The Notice of Exemption filed with the County Clerk and State Clearinghouse (as applicable) if the proposed project is categorically or statutorily exempt, with the appropriate Public Resources Code section citation to the exemption(s) being relied upon by the lead agency.
- c. The Negative Declaration or Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted by the lead agency and Initial Study, including a copy of the Environmental Checklist Form located in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and the Notice of Determination filed with the County and with the State Clearinghouse. If the lead agency has adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration, the applicant must also provide the adopted mitigation monitoring and reporting program.
- d. The Final Environmental Impact Report certified and adopted by the lead agency with Initial Study, including a copy of the Environmental Checklist Form located in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the adopted mitigation monitoring and reporting program, and the Notice of Determination filed with the County and the State Clearinghouse. Please include any State Clearinghouse responses received by the applicant.

*For b and c, include documentation the State of California Department of Fish and Wildlife CEQA fee was paid or is not applicable.

- e. Projects that tier from a Programmatic, Master, or other Environmental Impact Report shall include a copy of any subsequent Initial Study for the proposed project together with a copy of any supplementary environmental documentation adopted by the lead agency, including, if applicable, any required findings pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21157.1, subdivision (c), and the Notice of Determination, filed with the County Clerk and with the State Clearinghouse, as applicable.

Pursuant to section 75102 of the Public Resources Code, before the adoption of a Negative Declaration or Environmental Impact Report, the lead agency shall notify the proposed action to a California Native American tribe, which is on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission, if that tribe has traditional lands located within the area of the proposed project.

Appendix A: Map of SGMA Priority Basins



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