



Highlight: An aerial view of high water conditions at Lake Shasta and the dam in Shasta County, California. The Delta Science Program has coordinated several independent peer reviews on the dam's Water Temperature Modeling Platform (WTMP) which controls water releases from different depths of the reservoir to manage downstream water temperatures.

Delta Science Plan

2026

RESOURCE G

Delta Science Program services for independent scientific review and scientific advice

Background and objectives

The Delta Stewardship Council's (Council) Delta Science Program provides independent scientific review (review) and scientific advice (advice) for processes, programs, plans, and products as part of its mission "to provide the best possible unbiased scientific information to inform water and environmental decision-making in the Delta." (California Water Code § 85280(b)(4)). Independent scientific **review and advice services enhance the scientific rigor, transparency, and credibility of science** underpinning management and policy

decisions in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun Marsh (collectively referred to herein as Delta; California Water Code § 85058), the San Francisco Bay-Delta (Bay-Delta) system, and the broader San Francisco Estuary.

This document describes how the Delta Science Program facilitates scientific review and advice services in the Bay-Delta, providing context for those who may request or participate in Delta Science Program-facilitated reviews. Reviews and advice follow the same general process, but there are distinct differences between the two services. The key difference is that advice evaluates

processes, programs, plans, or products that are in development, while reviews evaluate processes, programs, plans, or products that are complete or nearly complete. Review panels are the most common type of panel organized by the Delta Science Program. For simplicity, the rest of the document will collectively refer to reviews/advice as ‘reviews’ and to reviewers/advisors as ‘reviewers’.

It is important to note that, in addition to the review services described in this document, the Delta Science Program also supports the Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB) (California Water Code § 85280(a)). The Delta ISB is legislatively mandated to deliver independent scientific oversight of the monitoring, research, and programmatic efforts that underpin adaptive management in the Delta (California Water Code § 85280(a)(3)). Unlike the services outlined in this Resource, which are typically project-based, require specialized subject matter expertise, and are requested by an entity, the Delta ISB operates as a board composed of ten scientists representing a range of disciplines. The Delta ISB’s role is not limited to reviewing work upon request; rather, it proactively evaluates scientific activities, identifies emerging issues, and offers recommendations on its own initiative. This ongoing, independent review function by the Delta ISB helps supplement the peer review and advice services provided in this resource. The Delta Science Program can help advise on which process is most appropriate for the task at hand.

Terminology

The Council’s Delta Science Program peer review and advice services use the following terms.

- **Requesting party:** Agency or entity requesting the review to be conducted through the Council’s Delta Science Program on behalf of the agency or entity. The requesting party is responsible for funding the project and for ensuring the review materials are ADA accessible before the start of the review process.

- **Independent scientific reviewers (reviewers):** Subject matter experts tasked with completing the review as individuals or as part of a panel.
- **Delta lead scientist:** The Delta Reform Act established the position of Delta lead scientist (California Water Code § 85280 (2024) (3)). In the context of peer review and advice, the Delta lead scientist is responsible for considering recommendations to and from the Delta Science Program and planning team and for providing independent final science-related recommendations on the Charge and reviewer participation. Working in concert with the Delta Science Program, the Delta lead scientist officially receives review requests and transmits final products to requesting parties.
- **Council’s Delta Science Program project manager:** The Delta Science Program staff member that leads the facilitation of the review effort, coordinates all meetings throughout the process, manages contracts, and acts as the intermediary between the requesting party and the reviewers.
- **Planning Team:** Generally consists of members of the requesting party, authors of the document(s) up for review, and/or interested agency/entity representatives. The Planning Team members may weigh in at various stages of the review process, depending on the level of review sought.
- **Charge:** At a minimum, this includes background information, the questions to guide the reviewers, the review materials, tasks, and a timeline. Sometimes referred to as a charter.
- **Product:** The tangible deliverable required of the reviewers, as outlined in the Charge, for example, memos or reports.

General timeline

The duration of review efforts varies with the complexity and scope of the Charge but generally requires nine to twelve months to complete (see Figure G-1 for a generalized peer review timeline).

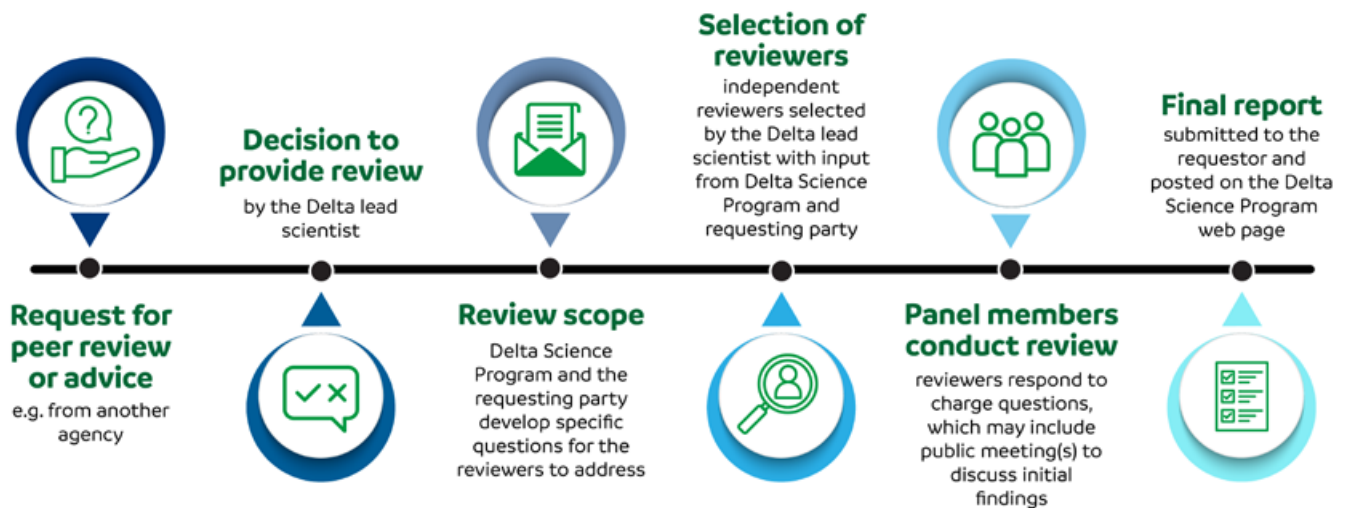


Figure G-1 | Peer review timeline.

The process includes the following steps:

- Request for review
- Decision to provide review
- Development of Charge for review
- Selection of and contracting with subject matter experts
- Experts conduct a review
- Release of final products

Details of these steps are explained in depth throughout this Resource.

Request and decision to provide review

Independent scientific review or advice may be requested by one or more entities, submitted via a request letter to the Delta lead scientist, and will focus on one or more written documents. The **requesting party** is financially responsible for

the review services and, in most cases, requires a receivable agreement to be established with the Council.

The Delta Science Program's decision to provide review depends on capacity and how the request's goals and objectives align with those of the Council's mission. Moreover, the Delta Science Program will only agree to provide a review/advice panel if:

- There is sufficient funding available for the services (**services paid for by the requesting party**)
- There is sufficient time available to complete the review work and deliver the written product(s)
- Review materials provided by the requesting party are complete and ADA-compliant before starting the review

The final decision to provide a review rests with the Council, pursuant to consultation with the Delta lead scientist.

Planning meetings

Planning meetings are critical to ensure the review process stays on track and will occur at key decision points. Participants in the planning meetings include the Delta lead scientist, Delta Science Program project manager and staff, and members of the Planning Team.

Members of the Planning Team **may**:

- Communicate their expectations for the review
- Provide input on the Charge to the reviewers
- Inform the review schedule, public input format, and agenda, when applicable
- Identify desired expertise
- Recommend subject-matter experts to serve as reviewers, when appropriate
- Provide pertinent background documents or other materials to review – **only through the Council’s Delta Science Program**

Members of the Planning Team **may not**:

- Speak directly to the reviewers (Council Delta Science Program staff will facilitate all communication between reviewers and the Planning Team)

Considering the input from the requesting party and planning team, the Delta lead scientist makes final decisions about the Charge and selection of subject matter experts.

Reviewers

Potential reviewers are identified through recommendations from Council’s Delta Science Program staff, the Delta lead scientist, and members of the Planning Team. The Council’s Delta Science Program is committed to improving and integrating diversity and inclusion in independent science reviews, and when selecting reviewers, aims to consider a variety of perspectives, including:

- An individual’s standing in the scientific community
- Expertise in disciplinary areas
- Technical skills relevant to the documents and issues subject to review
- Absence of a demonstrated conflict of interest (see Resource E: Conflict of interest considerations for reviewers, advisors, and applicants)

Reviewers are expected to possess the necessary knowledge to complete the review and may hold some familiarity with the geographic region, physical processes, policy issues, ecosystems, and species-specific aspects for which scientific review is sought. The Delta lead scientist has the final recommendation for the selection of reviewers.

Reviewers can be contracted through the organization they’re affiliated with, including public agencies, academic institutions, corporations, or sole proprietorships. Reviewers should verify the **California state requirements necessary to conduct business with the state**¹.

Reviewers may work independently or collectively as a panel to provide a scientific review. The panel type is discussed with the Planning Team and determined by the Delta lead scientist. Panels generally consist of no fewer than three members and include a “Panel Chair,” who represents the panel, coordinates meetings, and organizes the panel’s work, and a “Lead Author,” who leads the report writing. These roles typically require extra hours and additional compensation. For individual letter reviews, reviewers contribute single-authored reports but are encouraged to discuss materials or findings with one another.

1. <https://www.dgs.ca.gov/PD/Resources/Page-Content/Procurement-Division-Resources-List-Folder/How-to-do-business-with-the-state-of-California>

Charge to the reviewers

The Charge specifies the purpose and background of the review and presents Charge questions. Charge questions guide how reviewers evaluate the documents at the focus of the review and help ensure the requesting party receives useful recommendations from the review.

Charge questions should be crafted to draw on applicable technical guidance, but not to solicit policy recommendations or prescriptions (e.g., specific numerical changes to a regulatory threshold). However, it is recognized that responses and other information in a review final report may be used in future decision-making by resource managers and policymakers because all final reports are publicly available online.

The scope of the Charge to the reviewers will include:

- Background information (including the legal, regulatory, and management background necessary to set the full policy context)
- Charge questions for the reviewers
- A description of the role of the reviewers and rules for its deliberations (if a panel)
- The form and scope of the final product
- Additional required or recommended reading materials (i.e., supplemental materials)
- A schedule of deliverables

The Delta lead scientist has the final authority for the language in the Charge to the reviewers.

Peer review public input process

The review and advice process shall be open and transparent to the extent possible and may include public-derived input, when necessary. Though maintaining the independence of a review panel is critical, public input may be essential to a review process. Government agencies exist to serve

the public, whose collaborative participation in regulatory and programmatic efforts strengthens decision-making, improves outcomes, and builds trust among groups with a diverse set of perspectives.

DECISION TO INCLUDE PUBLIC INPUT

If a party requesting peer review also requests public input as part of the process, the Delta lead scientist determines whether to include public input as part of the review/advice effort based on the following factors:

- The scope of the review is relevant to multiple entities (e.g., [Water Temperature Model Platform Review²](#))
- The scale of the review is significant and the project impacts multiple entities (e.g., [Biological Goals Advisory Panel³](#))
- If there is sufficient time to receive public input

TYPES OF PUBLIC INPUT

Once the decision has been made to include public input in the review, two options (hybrid public meeting or written public input) for the format of public input are available. The means of public input will depend on whether there is adequate time, the Council's Delta Science Program capacity, and/or funding.

- **Hybrid public meeting (default)** – a hybrid public meeting occurs roughly halfway through the review process; panel members present their initial findings and receive presentations from the requesting party and/or other interested groups and hear public comment. Information from the meeting may inform the panel's final report at the panel's discretion.

2. <https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/delta-science-program/water-temperature-model-development-independent-advisory-panel>

3. <https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/delta-science-program/biological-goals-advisory-panel>

- **Written public input** – in lieu of a public meeting, written public input (not to exceed two written pages) can be submitted roughly halfway through the review process. Written public input is solicited via an email announcement to the Council’s email list subscribers and posted on the review webpage. Submitted input is received via email (as PDF), U.S. mail, or in person. Input is screened for relevance to the Charge by the Delta Science Program staff and the Delta lead scientist, and (if relevant) provided to the panel as Additional Review Material and posted on the Council’s Delta Science Program peer review web page. Written public input may inform the panel’s final report at the panel’s discretion.

Suggested citation

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