

**RECLAMATION DISTRICT 2092  
REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS  
San Joaquin Valley Regional Conservation Investment Strategy  
June 6, 2022**

## Introduction

Reclamation District 2092 (RD 2092) is seeking qualifications from environmental consultants and interdisciplinary consulting teams to develop a Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) for a large portion of the San Joaquin Valley. A qualified consultant or team of consultants will have demonstrated and verifiable experience and expertise developing conservation plans for sensitive species and integrating conservation planning into flood management planning, particularly in the Central Valley.

RD 2092 received a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board (Attachment A) to develop an RCIS and has \$600,000 to retain a consultant to manage a steering committee and complete all the steps necessary to finalize an RCIS. RD 2092 will work with River Partners to select a consultant or consultant team and assemble a Steering Committee. RD 2092 expects the consultant to facilitate Steering Committee meetings, consider their recommendations, and complete an RCIS that meets the requirements of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Consultants interested in developing the RCIS for remuneration should follow the submittal instructions described below to submit a Statement of Qualifications (SOQ) and identify times when they can be available for a one-hour interview during time windows identified in the instructions.

## Purpose and Need

The San Joaquin Basin lies between large protected natural areas in the Sierra Nevada and central coast bioregions. Extensive agricultural development in the San Joaquin Valley has dramatically reduced habitat connectivity between these two bioregions and diminished the quantity and quality of habitat within the San Joaquin Basin. Increases in the area planted to perennial crops over the last decade has further limited habitat area and connectivity for many species.

Nearly one hundred species in the San Joaquin Basin (65 animals and 34 plants) now have special status because of population declines and risk of extinction caused by habitat loss and other stressors. **The goal of this proposed RCIS is to develop a broadly supported conservation strategy that increases the quality, acreage, and connectivity of habitat in and across the San Joaquin Basin.**

The San Joaquin region is also facing significant threats from over-drafted groundwater aquifers, more frequent water supply shortages, and increased flood risk. A recent technical study by DWR shows a sharp increase in expected flood magnitudes and damages unless major changes,

such as repaired infrastructure and innovative green infrastructure investments, are made to the flood system. Investments in climate resilience are urgently needed to protect the region, including ecological and human communities, from the worst impacts of climate change.

The San Joaquin Basin has been identified as a critical region for complying with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), protecting Bay-Delta water quality control standards, updating flood management planning, and supporting disadvantaged communities. The Governor's 2020 Water Resilience Portfolio (25.4) specifically calls for California agencies to:

*"Update and refine the regional flood management strategy in the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan to account for the projected impacts of climate change in order to protect vulnerable communities and infrastructure and restore floodplains along the San Joaquin River and its tributaries..."*

**An RCIS is needed to ensure that future investments in flood and water management in the San Joaquin can be designed to advance habitat and ecosystem objectives rather than thwart them.** Through this grant, RD 2092 will work with water and flood managers to integrate local and regional water management actions with defined conservation priorities.

## Project Description

RD 2092 seeks to engage a broad range of stakeholders in the development of and RCIS for the San Joaquin Valley. RD 2092 previously solicited input on the boundary of the RCIS for the purposes of scoping the planning effort. Based on this input, we currently plan to focus the RCIS on the floodplains of the San Joaquin Valley from Fresno County north to portions of the legal Delta (figure 1), but RD 2092 will remain open to input regarding the exact boundary of the RCIS.

The RCIS planning process will bring together flood and water managers, land use authorities, agricultural representatives, and conservation groups to prioritize natural resource protection and restoration. This RCIS will be the first plan in the San Joaquin region to evaluate habitat connectivity needs across the Central Valley and into the foothills. It will focus on developing habitat conservation strategies that help reduce flood risk, improve water quality, conserve surface water, and recharge groundwater resources. This RCIS plan will ultimately envision a future for the San Joaquin Basin where species and human communities coexist, and multiple benefits are maximized through each project implemented on the landscape.

The San Joaquin Basin RCIS will focus on prioritizing projects on public and private lands that improve the flood system performance, restore habitat for native species, increase climate resilience, and create community benefits. The RCIS will be driven by three primary ecological values: 1) enhancing biodiversity, 2) improving climate resilience, and 3) increasing habitat connectivity across and beyond the region.

The proposed RCIS area generally corresponds with the 500-year floodplain for the San Joaquin River and its tributaries in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Fresno, and Madera counties (Figure 1) The region (1,229 mi<sup>2</sup>, 786,411 acres) includes land and water resources managed by

an array of flood, infrastructure, and resource management agencies, all of which would benefit from the coordinated planning that the RCIS would bring to the region. The proposed area also aligns with the Lower, Mid, and Upper San Joaquin River Conservation Planning Areas (CPAs) of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR)'s Central Valley Flood Protection Plan (CVFPP). The CVFPP and its Conservation Strategy outline strategies for reducing flood risk and restoring habitat through multi-benefit projects. The San Joaquin Basin RCIS will build upon the CVFPP Conservation Strategy, which already has many of the attributes of an RCIS, to identify and advance opportunities to coordinate ecosystem restoration activities with the CVFPP. Although the RCIS will focus on the floodplains and riparian areas on the floor of the San Joaquin Valley, it will also identify and may include lands necessary to protect or restore wildlife corridors across the Central Valley to improve habitat connectivity between the Coast Range and the Sierra Nevada.

The San Joaquin Basin RCIS will include focal species aligned with the target species of the Conservation Strategy of the CVFPP, as those species represent the special-status species closely associated with the San Joaquin Valley's riverine and floodplain ecosystems. These species also have the greatest potential to benefit from dedicated conservation actions. This RCIS may also include additional species, including the monarch butterfly and potentially other upland species that use floodplain, riparian, or riverine habitat. The final focal species list will be developed by the Steering Committee. Table 1 lists potential focal species for the San Joaquin Basin RCIS.

*Table 1. Species Under Consideration for Focal Species Designation in the San Joaquin Basin RCIS*

<b>Species Common Name</b>	<b>CA Listing Status<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Habitat Type</b>
<b>California black rail</b>	T, FP	Marsh
<b>Greater sandhill crane</b>	T, FP	Grasslands, floodplain agriculture, open wetlands
<b>Least Bell's vireo</b>	E	Riparian
<b>Swainson's hawk</b>	T	Riparian forest, larger trees (nesting); grasslands, croplands (foraging)
<b>California Central Valley steelhead DPS</b>	-	Riverine, estuarine, oceanic waters; SRA cover, floodplain
<b>Chinook salmon (Central Valley fall-/late fall-run ESU)</b>	CSSC/ T	Riverine, estuarine, oceanic waters, floodplain
<b>Green sturgeon – southern DPS</b>	CSSC	Riverine, estuarine, oceanic waters, floodplain
<b>Valley elderberry longhorn beetle</b>	-	Elderberry shrubs in riparian habitat
<b>Monarch Butterfly</b>	-	Grasslands, riparian
<b>Riparian brush rabbit</b>	E	Riparian
<b>Riparian woodrat</b>	CSSC	Riparian
<b>Giant garter snake</b>	T	Freshwater emergent wetlands, floodplain agriculture
<b>Delta button-celery</b>	E	Riparian, floodplain
<b>Slough thistle</b>	-	Riparian, marsh, floodplain

<sup>a</sup> Threatened (T), Fully Protected (FP), Endangered (E), California Species of Special Concern (CSSC)

## Services Requested

RD 2092 seeks a consultant or team of consultants to facilitate and coordinate a Steering Committee, iteratively develop and draft a RCIS based on input from RD 2092 and the Steering Committee, and navigate the full process necessary to obtain CDFW approval of a final plan. This includes submitting drafts to CDFW for both completeness and adequacy review and collecting stakeholder feedback along the way. This process will entail the following key actions:

1. **Formation and management of a Steering Committee** to ensure regional priorities and needs are incorporated into the RCIS. The Steering Committee will be made up of a regional experts, managers, and advocates who will contribute important, diverse perspectives. Reclamation District 2092 and River Partners will play a large role in recruitment of the Steering Committee Members but will expect the RCIS consultant to facilitate regular Steering Committee meetings to incorporate input and build a broad base of support for the RCIS.
2. **Compiling existing conservation plans and regional priorities** to ensure that the RCIS aligns with the goals of the Conservation Strategy, other regional plans such as the San Joaquin County Multispecies Open Space Plan, and other planning efforts.
3. **Facilitating a public meeting(s)**, as required by AB 2087, to ensure broad understanding by local stakeholders and interested citizens. It will be critical to underscore that this RCIS is voluntary and does not change any established land use authority.
4. **Drafting a full RCIS**, to review with the Steering Committee, that meets all CDFW and legislative requirements. Consultant (TBD) will lead development of the RCIS, compiling data and incorporating Steering Committee comments.
5. **Identifying RCIS implementation strategies** by engaging potential conservation funders, infrastructure developers interested in advanced mitigation credits and other mitigation buyers and creating a pipeline of opportunities for interested conservation project proponents.
6. **Submitting Draft RCIS to CDFW for Completeness Review.**
7. **Submitting Revised Draft RCIS to CDFW for Adequacy Review.**
8. **Addressing all CDFW & Public Comments** and finalizing the RCIS for final approval.

## Evaluation and Selection Process

A consultant selection committee comprised of RD 2092 officers and River Partners staff will review, evaluate and score each proposal based on the selection criteria and scoring rubric delineated in the table below. All proposals received will be evaluated to determine the extent to which they comply with solicitation document requirements.

If a proposal fails to meet a material solicitation document requirement, the proposal may be rejected. A deviation is material to the extent that a response is not in substantial accord with the submittal instructions. Immaterial deviations may cause a proposal to be rejected if not corrected upon request.

During the evaluation process, the selection committee may interview applicants and require them to answer questions regarding their proposal. Failure of applicant to demonstrate that the claims made in its proposal are in fact true may be sufficient cause for deeming a proposal non-responsive. Applicant should closely follow instructions to identify their availability for an interview, but the option for an interview is not a guarantee that any or all applicants will receive an interview. The decision to grant interviews is at the sole discretion of RD 2092.

	SELECTION CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS
1.	Professional experience of the firm and the collective professional experience of its team in performing services of similar nature and scope – conservation planning, development of RCIS and mitigation crediting agreements, integrating conservation and flood management, the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan Conservation Strategy, conservation of focal species in the San Joaquin Valley.	25
2.	Professional experience facilitating stakeholder groups (steering committee) and meeting the needs of key agencies particularly in the San Joaquin Valley.	15
3.	Effectiveness and efficiency of approach for successfully completing the RCIS and laying the groundwork for realizing an advanced mitigation credit agreement.	15
4.	Quality and relevance of recently completed or ongoing work and associated references.	15
5.	Cost Effectiveness of Proposal	15
6.	Qualifications, education, and experience of key project staff	15
	<b>Total Possible Points</b>	<b>100</b>

## Submittal Instructions

Please prepare a Statement of Qualifications (not to exceed 20 pages all inclusive) including the following items:

1. Organizational background for prime consultant and any proposed sub-consultants
2. Key Personnel: one-page resume for each key personnel, organizational chart for the proposed team, estimate of percent FTE allotted to the project from each key personal.
3. Project Approach: in addition to describing how your team will complete the Services Requested outlined above, please provide a brief (no more than 3 pages) description of key considerations in your team’s project approach that will assist RD 2092 and key stakeholders in accomplishing the goals of developing a RCIS and laying the groundwork for Advanced Mitigation Crediting Agreements.

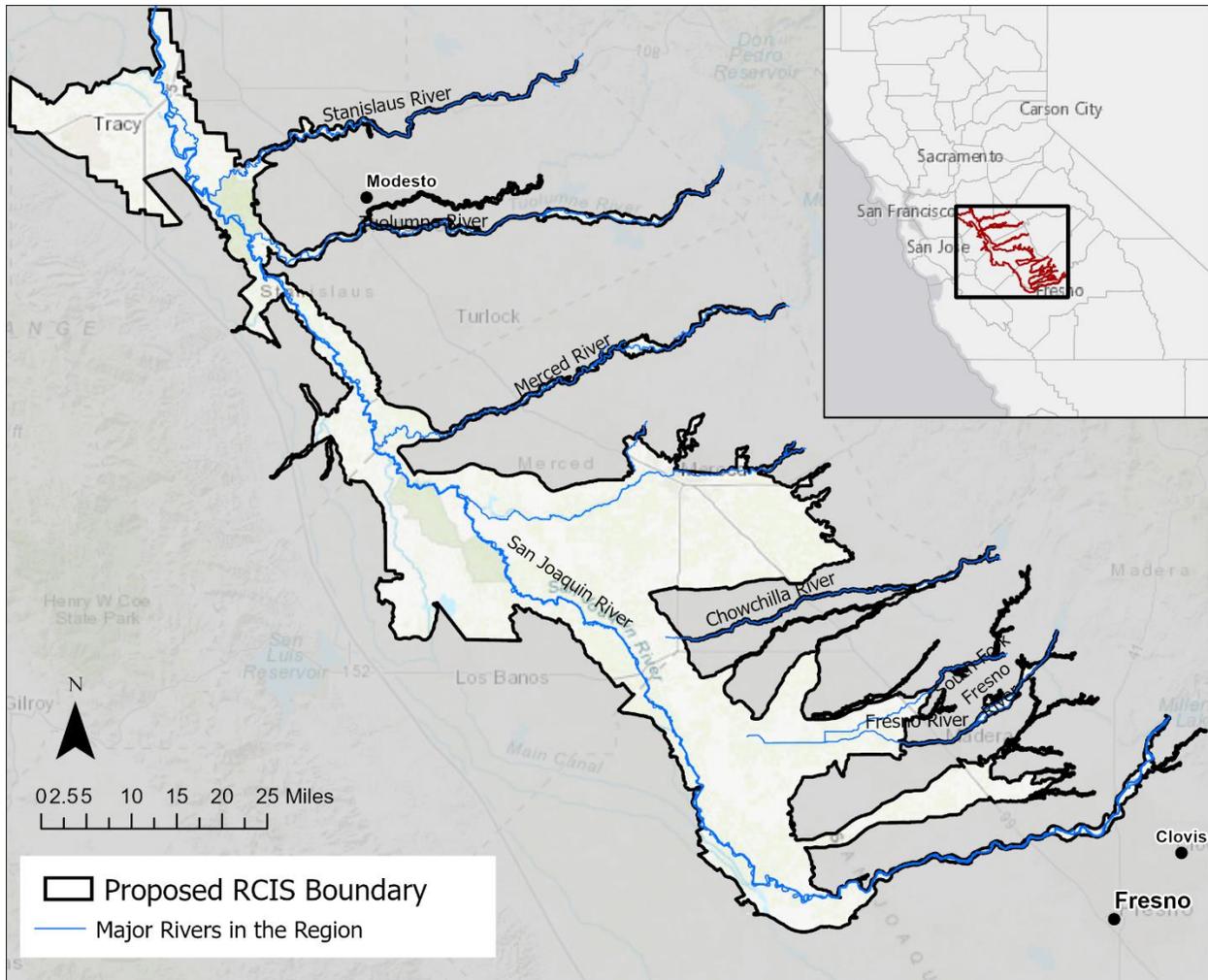
4. Example Projects: provide project summaries for 3 example projects that illustrate your team's abilities to complete the project as described, and your team's familiarity with the regional geography, flood management, the CVFPP Conservation Strategy, water supply and environmental quality concerns. Include client contact information, total project budget, key collaborators, and pertinent outcomes.
5. Rate Schedule: Please include a rate schedule for all staff and consultants that will bill to the project:
6. Availability for Interview: Please provide at least two one-hour time slots when you are available during the following periods: Tuesday June 21, from 11:00 to 2:00 AM; Wednesday June 22 from 11:30 to 3:00; Tuesday June 28 from 10:30 to 2:00.

Please submit the full SOQ in one electronic file via email by **12 pm, Friday, June 17, 2022**. Include "Mid SJ RFMP SOQ" in the subject header of your email.

Submit to:

Maggie Blankinship, Secretary RD 2092, [maggieblankinship@gmail.com](mailto:maggieblankinship@gmail.com)

Figure 1: Proposed boundary of the San Joaquin Basin RCIS, which is largely conterminous with the 500-year flood plain except in the Delta. Boundary subject to change based on Steering Committee input.



Map created using data sourced from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) National Hydrography Dataset via the Department of Water Resources.

<https://data.cnra.ca.gov/dataset/national-hydrography-dataset-nhd> Accessed August 10, 2021.

## Exhibit A: Grant Agreement funding RCIS

Note: Notwithstanding budget information in Grant Agreement, RD 2092 has approximately \$600,000 to retain consultant to perform tasks described in the RFQ.