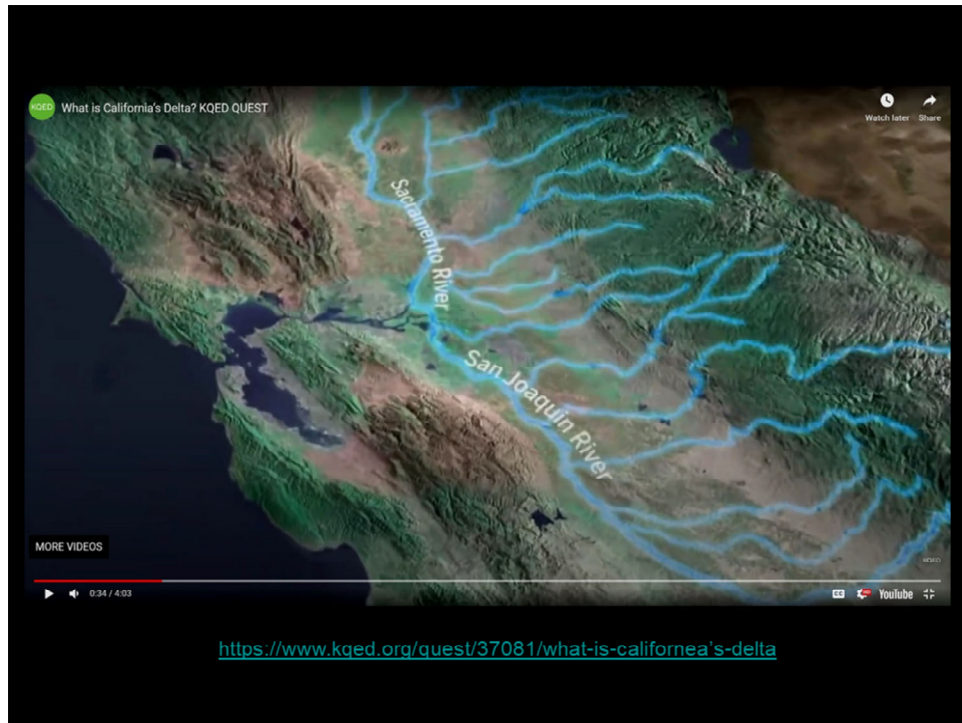
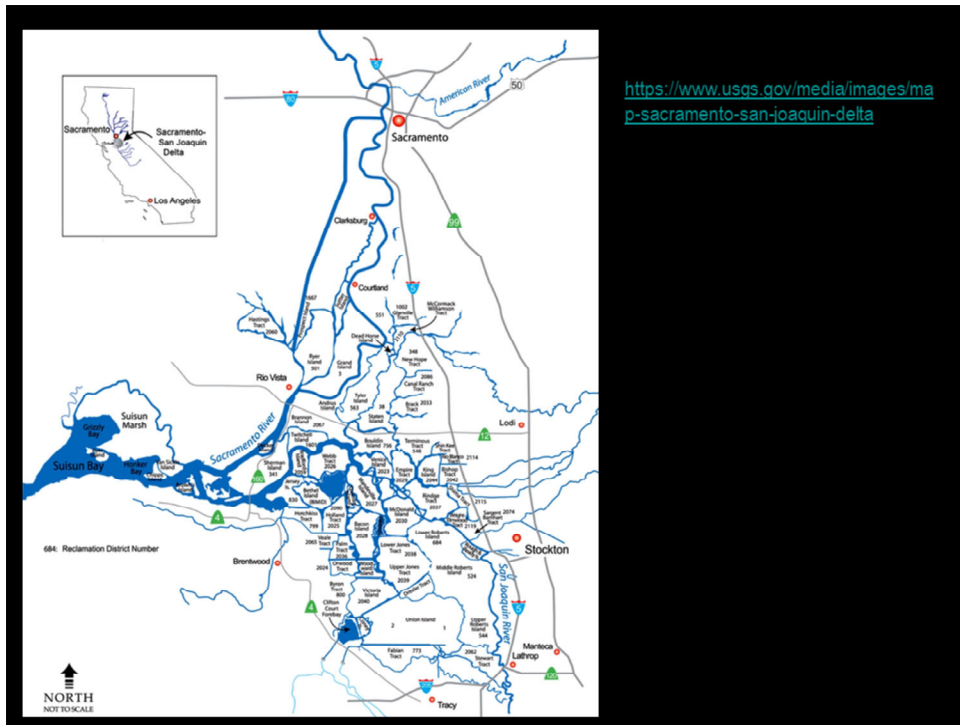


## Who Speaks for the Little Fish and the Ecosystem it Depends On?

- The “little fish” is the “Delta Smelt” whose habitat is the ecosystem of the California Delta.
- While many speak for those who want the water that the “little fish” needs. the question is, Who speaks for the “little fish?”



- For context, the California Delta lies in central California.
- Streams flow off the Sierra Nevada Mountains into two major rivers: the Sacramento in the north and the San Joaquin in the south. Those rivers come together in the Delta, a network of canals and sloughs that carry the water to San Francisco Bay.



<https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/map-sacramento-san-joaquin-delta>

- “The Delta was once a massive tidal marsh, home to millions of birds, fish, and other animals all part of a rich food web. After the Gold Rush, the marshes were diked and drained to create dry land. This created a patchwork of islands.”
- <https://www.kqed.org/quest/37081/what-is-california's-delta>
- This map by the US Geological Survey shows the islands and waterways.



- Today, the islands in the Delta are mostly used for farming.
- Crops such as grapes, berries, pears, and almonds are grown year-round, providing jobs to thousands of local and seasonal workers. Rice is a particularly important crop in the Delta, and it uses a lot of water.



- Today, the original “massive tidal marsh” exists only in isolated locations.
- In fact, ninety-seven percent of the historic marshes have been lost.
- A problem arises because a massive amount of water is pumped from the rivers to provide for human activities.
- Although some of the water is diverted for urban municipal and industrial uses, the majority is used to irrigate agriculture throughout the state, including in the California Delta.
- This leaves inadequate water flow to maintain the Delta ecosystem. Fish counts in the Delta have plummeted as more and more water is extracted.
- Numerous types of fish are affected, including Chinook salmon, trout, and sturgeon. However, it is the “Delta smelt” that has become the face of the ecosystem degradation.



- This small fish is native to the California Delta and is found nowhere else in the world. It is endangered, that is, it is in danger of going extinct.
- The Endangered Species Act requires that water flow be sufficient to maintain habitat for the Delta Smelt. And this sets up a conflict between agriculture and the “little fish.”

*Hannity [from the Fox channel] and other conservative elites outside of California used the delta smelt's small size and uncharismatic appearance to suggest that liberals in faraway cities care more about a 'stupid little fish' than ordinary Americans”.*

<https://redgreenandblue.org/2020/10/16/politics-extinction-californias-water-wars-delta-smelt/>

- *At a March 2016 campaign rally . . . then presidential candidate Trump mocked the environmentalists who were desperate ‘to protect a certain kind of three-inch fish. They have farms here and they don't get water,’ he said, as the crowd, holding up green ‘Farmers for Trump’ signs booed. . . That night, Trump promised the farmers more water. Ever since then, his administration has been making moves to make good on that pledge.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/dec/22/delta-smelt-fish-trump-california-aoe>

- The term “little fish” is used as a derogatory term by the farming interests to belittle and marginalize the water needed to maintain the Delta ecosystem habitat.
- They promote a narrative that the conflict is between agricultural production and the “little fish.”
- Here are the words of Sean Hannity and Donald Trump, words that are representative of the narrative that the agricultural interests use.
- So, there are clearly people who speak for the interests of those who want to divert more and more water from the Delta in order to advance their profits from farming or to expand more and more human activity.

## Who Speaks for the Little Fish and the Ecosystem it Depends On?

- But who speaks for the “little fish” and the ecosystem on which it depends? Who speaks for the many fish populations that have declined because of human activity? Who speaks for the many birds who used to make the Delta their home?