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California & the West

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Coalition unveils costly water plan

The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — Many of the old ideas that failed to solve California's water wars sound a lot like the new possibilities announced Tuesday by government and water interests.

A coalition has been seeking compromises to improve the health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and San Francisco Bay, while ensuring water for farms, cities and the environment. It unveiled three alternatives that range in cost from about \$4 billion to nearly \$8 billion.

The most ambitious and costly alternative is reminiscent of a plan to build a Peripheral Canal around the delta, an idea rejected by voters in

June 1982.

The new proposal involves what the coalition calls an "isolated conveyance facility" that would be built around the delta to carry water south to farms and cities. It might be a man-made canal or an underground pipeline, according to the coalition.

"The only thing in common (with the Peripheral Canal) is that it would move water in an isolated fashion around the delta," said Lester Snow, executive director of the coalition, called the CalFed Bay-Delta Program.

The major difference, he said, is that the newly considered channel or pipe would carry no more than 15,000 cubic feet per second, which is less

than the 22,000 cfs foreseen for the Peripheral Canal.

The other two alternatives seem familiar as well: improving existing delta channels or improving storage outside the delta. But with both these alternatives, delta fish would still be exposed to hazards as pumps withdraw water to export, according to the coalition.

Even if the farmers, cities, environmentalists and government agencies in the coalition all ultimately agree on one of the three alternatives, it would still need to be funded.

Proposition 204, a \$995 million water bond issue on the November ballot, would only be a downpayment

on needed funds according to the coalition. Representatives said they are uncertain exactly how to raise the rest of the money.

The delta, the state's largest source of fresh water, lies at the heart of the California water system.

River water from the snowy north and east is channeled through the delta's maze of sloughs and pumped into canals to supply farms and cities to the south.

The delta, which drains into San Francisco Bay, supplies drinking water to 20 million people and irrigates more than 4 million acres that produce much of the nation's fruit and vegetables.

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