

Delta: Workshop on proposals set Feb. 26

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 rigate more than 7,000 acres of farmland, those pumps suck away millions of eggs and young fish, confuse migrating salmon and take fresh water that otherwise would flow to Suisun Marsh.

The list of solutions to be released today was drafted by a team of employees from seven state and federal wildlife and water agencies. The team, called the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, was created after competing water interests signed a historic agreement in December 1994 that governs the amount and timing of Delta diversions.

"With that agreement and CALFED's work, many experts say, California is poised to make the Delta a healthier estuary and more reliable source of water.

"Anyone who has watched water policy development in the

state for a long time will conclude that we have never been so well-prepared to solve our long-term problems as we are now," said Douglas Wheeler, secretary of the state Resources Agency.

Lester Snow, who heads the CALFED Bay-Delta effort, said that after more public workshops, eight to 12 of the alternatives will be refined. By May, three will be the focus of extensive environmental studies, he said.

The goal is to come up with a plan that urban and farm users, as well as environmentalists, all support, so they can then try to persuade voters to fund the work.

Snow stressed that the 20 ideas, to be discussed at a public workshop Feb. 26 in Sacramento, are "works in progress" that demand much more debate.

Some themes run through all the ideas. Every one, for example, includes restoration of wildlife habitat, such as along riverbanks where fish like to spawn. Also common to the alternatives is a rapid response program to deal with exotic species introduced to the Bay and Delta, screening of open diversions, low-interest loans for water conservation projects and promotion of transfers that allow buyers and sellers to shift water.

Many of the 20 alternatives also involve some kind of canal to tap

the Sacramento River above the Delta and carry water more directly to the pumps near Tracy.

But these ideas include no Peripheral Canal such as in the proposal killed by voters in a nasty 1982 election that split California north and south, Snow said.

He and many other experts, including some biologists, agree that a canal in or around the Delta can help both fish and water users. But persuading Californians who remember the 1982 fight to consider smaller, different canals may not be easy, he said.

Gary Bobker of the Sausalito environmental group Bay Institute has watched CALFED closely. He said he is "guardedly optimistic" about the proposals.

"They're giving weight to environmental concerns that normally aren't elevated so high," he said, "and that's encouraging."

Cost worries the CALFED participants. Some of their ideas are multibillion-dollar proposals.

A bill by state Sen. Jim Costa, D-Hanford, is expected to help finance whichever proposal CALFED ultimately picks. The bill would put a bond measure before voters in November 1996 to pay for CALFED's work and other water projects. The bill passed the Senate on a 28-3 vote and is now waiting assignment to an Assembly committee.

While the bill's dollar amount is blank now, Costa has estimated the need at \$500 million, at least.

"The leadership of the Legislature is saying, 'Look, we need to support this,'" said Tom Clark, general manager of the Kern County Water Agency. "If we have any hope of resolving Delta issues, CALFED is going to be the way it's done."

Some of CALFED's ideas:

- Convert Delta islands into a "chain of lakes" that leads to the Tracy pumps. Pipes would connect the islands, which would be flooded through screened diversions on the Sacramento River and elsewhere in the Delta. Operators would use the diversion that causes the least harm to fish at the moment.

- Divert flood flows from the Sacramento River at Red Bluff into a new reservoir, bigger than Folsom Lake, to be built at an undetermined spot on the west side of the Sacramento Valley.

- Use conservation, transfers, reclamation and retirement of farmland to cut water use so that less water has to be taken in the critical fish-migration months of February through June.

- Divert water from the Sacramento River near Hood and expand the capacity of some existing Delta channels to get the water to the Tracy pumps.

SETTING IT STRAIGHT

"The Postman (Il Postino)," the Italian film that received an Academy Award nomination for best picture, will reopen Friday at the Century and UA Sunrise. The reopening date was listed incorrectly in Wednesday's Scene.

Balance for Delta's water, fish studied

Group set to release 20 possible solutions

By Nancy Vogel
 Bee Staff Writer

A joint federal-state group that some call California's best shot yet at fixing its worst water problem is set to release today a list of 20 ideas for striking a balance between people and fish in the Delta.

The ideas range from storing water behind island levees in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where California's two biggest rivers meet, to building a reservoir on the west side of the Sacramento Valley. Some ideas are more dramatic, such as digging a new canal from Butte County's Lake

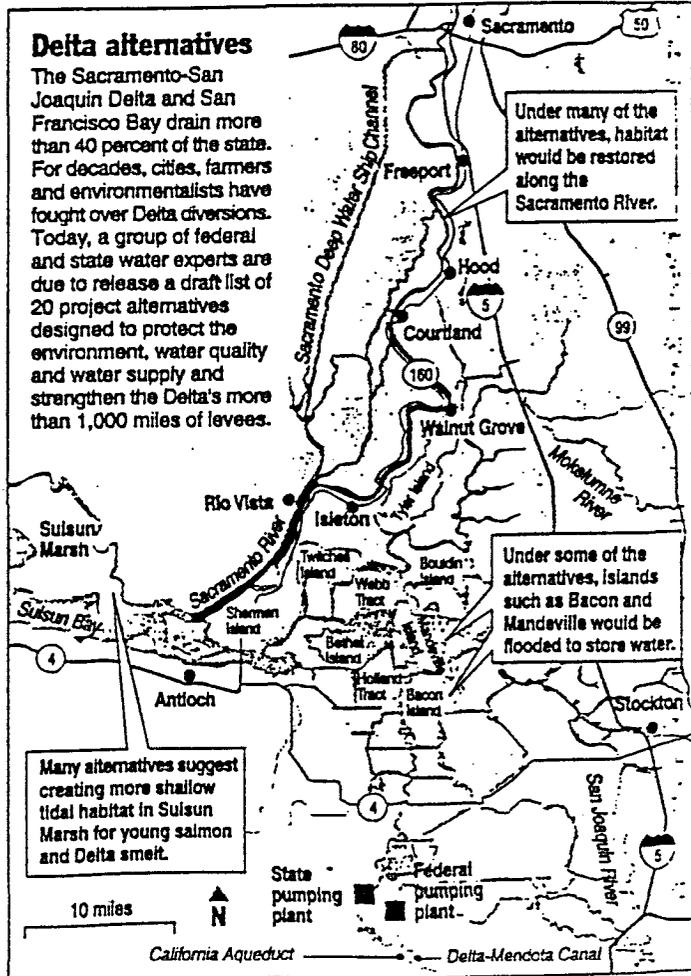
Oroville to Kern County. All are designed to do four things: Keep more Delta fish off the endangered-species list, and maybe get some taken off it; improve supplies for the 20 million Californians who drink Delta water; maintain water quality; and strengthen levees along the Delta's web of sloughs.

Once a vast marshland, the Delta was reclaimed by farmers and became the heart of the state's water system when the federal and state governments built huge pumps on its southwestern edge near Tracy. Besides helping to ir-

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Delta alternatives

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and San Francisco Bay drain more than 40 percent of the state. For decades, cities, farmers and environmentalists have fought over Delta diversions. Today, a group of federal and state water experts are due to release a draft list of 20 project alternatives designed to protect the environment, water quality and water supply and strengthen the Delta's more than 1,000 miles of levees.



Under many of the alternatives, habitat would be restored along the Sacramento River.

Under some of the alternatives, islands such as Bacon and Mandeville would be flooded to store water.

Many alternatives suggest creating more shallow tidal habitat in Suisun Marsh for young salmon and Delta smelt.