

Task force revives plan for Peripheral Canal

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A multi-agency task force announced three alternatives on Monday for a long-term fix for California's chronic water problems and also revived the specter of the Peripheral Canal.

The concepts are the result of three years of study by CalFed, a federal-state partnership, which included urban, agricultural and environmental stakeholders in the process.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the West Coast's largest estuary and also the source of

drinking and irrigation water for 22 million Californians and the \$24 billion agricultural industry.

Heavy demands on the Delta have resulted in degradation of water quality and a seemingly unending political struggle known as California's water wars.

The alternatives address the Delta's ecosystem degradation, water supply reliability, water quality and the integrity of the levee system.

One alternative would simply tinker with the existing system, a second would widen existing channels and build a short canal. Both would speed the movement of wa-

ter through the Delta.

Alternative No. 3 is the construction of a canal on the eastern edge of the Delta, drawing water directly from the Sacramento River and sending it to the State Water Project pumps.

In 1982, the California electorate decisively rejected the Peripheral Canal, which proposed to do exactly the same thing as Alternative No. 3, although the canal proposed in 1982 was bigger.

Even as Calfed released its alternatives, environmentalists indicated that the canal alternative won't fly.

"Calfed hasn't given water con-

servation a fair shake," said Ann Notthoff of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a member of the Bay-Delta Advisory Committee. "They haven't made the case for more concrete."

Calfed said the comparison between Alternative 3 and the Peripheral Canal is superficial. Under the alternative, the maximum amount of water conveyed would be 15,000 cubic feet per second, compared to the 23,000 cubic feet per second that the Peripheral Canal would have carried.

The public will be able to comment on the plan until June 1 at a series of hearings around the state.