

## Consensus appears near on Calif. bay-delta rules

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — In the waning days of 1994, it appeared that after nearly a decade of conflict, California's agriculture, urban, and environmental interests were on the verge of reaching an agreement on new water quality standards for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary. With U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials facing a Dec. 15 deadline to adopt final standards for what commonly is referred to as "the bay-delta," meetings were being held here almost daily in an effort to hammer out differences of opinion that have become entrenched over the years.

"We have an emerging consensus among agricultural and urban water users and are working hard to broaden that consensus," stated Greg Gartrell, principal engineer for the Contra Costa Water District. While water managers appeared ready to accept new water quality standards that would increase freshwater outflow of the bay-delta, observed Sue McClurg of the Water Education Foundation in Sacramento, "their support hinges on implementation of a broader estuary management program *in addition* to increasing outflow."

According to an official of California Urban Water Agencies, the "one last big remaining issue to resolve" in the bay-delta conflict is the federal Endangered Species Act. Water managers were seeking guarantees that any new standards would be in compliance with possible future mandates of the Endangered Species Act.

At the intersection of California's economy and environment and a fo-

cal point of the state's water policy, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta drains nearly half the state and is the source for at least part of the drinking water for some 20 million Californians. The California Water Plan Update estimates that it will take an additional 1 million acre feet to 3 million acre feet of water to meet new environmental demands. Most of this supply will be needed in the bay-delta. The overall effect of protective measures for such endangered species as the Delta smelt and Chinook salmon has been to reduce the amount of water available for export from the delta by 700,000 to 800,000 acre feet a year, more than is consumed by the city of Los Angeles.

In 1987, EPA officials notified the California State Water Resources Control Board that the water quality standards the board had adopted in 1978 were inadequate to protect the bay-delta. Last year, a coalition of environmental groups sued EPA over its failure to develop delta standards under the federal Clean Water Act. After the state board conducted a series of public workshops on the bay-delta controversy earlier this year, Gov. Pete Wilson's Water Policy Council reached a "framework agreement" with federal officials in June to coordinate federal and state efforts in the delta. Final water quality standards, due for release in March 1995, will be submitted to the EPA for federal approval.

As part of the interim agreement, state and federal officials pledged to work together to develop a long-term solution to the bay-delta situation. The current negotiations are a direct result of that pact.

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