

# CALIFORNIA County

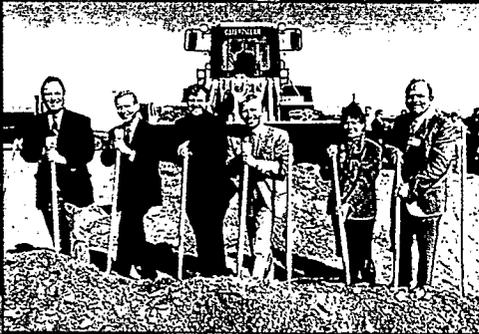
Journal of the California State Association of Counties

March/April 1995



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CALFED takes the next step in its efforts to resolve...

# A Diverting Dilemma

By Lester A. Snow

Since 1994, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's stakeholders have sought alternatives for a complex, and often conflicting, set of demands on California's water resources. Their work culminated in the Dec. 18, 1998, release of the CALFED Revised Phase II Report, the key proposals of which appear in the following article.

**F**or more than three years, a coalition of state and federal agencies, water user representatives and public interest groups have been working on a plan to solve water and ecosystem problems in California's Bay-Delta system. On Dec. 18, 1998, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program released its draft solution plan for public review. This program affects every Californian, either directly or indirectly.

## Bay Delta Realities

The San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the largest estuary on the West Coast, located at the confluence of California's two largest rivers. The Bay-Delta covers more than 738,000 acres in five counties. It is critical to California's economy, supplying drinking water for 22 million people and irrigation water for more than 7 million acres of the most productive agricultural land in the world. The Bay-Delta also is a haven for plants and wildlife, supporting more than 750 plant and animal species.

This fragile ecosystem has been extensively altered by human use for urban development, agriculture and infrastructure. Most significantly, the Bay-Delta is the hub of California's two largest water distribution systems—the Central Valley Project (CVP), operated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the State Water Project (SWP), oper-

ated by the California Department of Water Resources. In addition to these two major projects, more than 7,000 permitted diverters have developed water supplies from the watershed feeding the Bay-Delta estuary. These projects divert about 20 percent to 70 percent of the natural water flow in the system, depending on the amount of runoff available in a given year.

The water diversions, along with the pressure of increased population, introduction of exotic species, water pollution and numerous other factors have had a serious impact on the fish and wildlife resources of the estuary. Although widespread agreement exists on the importance of the Bay-Delta estuary for fish and wildlife habitat and as a reliable source of water, few agree on how to manage and protect this valuable resource.

For decades, the system has struggled to meet the competing demands of the environment and water users, while maintaining good water quality and a levee system that protects local towns and infrastructure from flooding and contaminating the state's water supply. Today, the system is not adequately meeting any of these needs.

## The Bay-Delta Accord

By 1994, after years of drought and increasing state and federal regulation, it was clear to all the major water interests in the state that the Bay-Delta had to be fixed or the system would collapse.

In an unprecedented spirit of consensus, on Dec. 15, 1994, state and federal officials and water stakeholders signed the "Bay-Delta Accord." The accord set interim standards for system operation and established the CALFED Bay-Delta Program to develop a long-term comprehensive plan to restore ecological health and improve water management for beneficial uses of the Bay-Delta system.

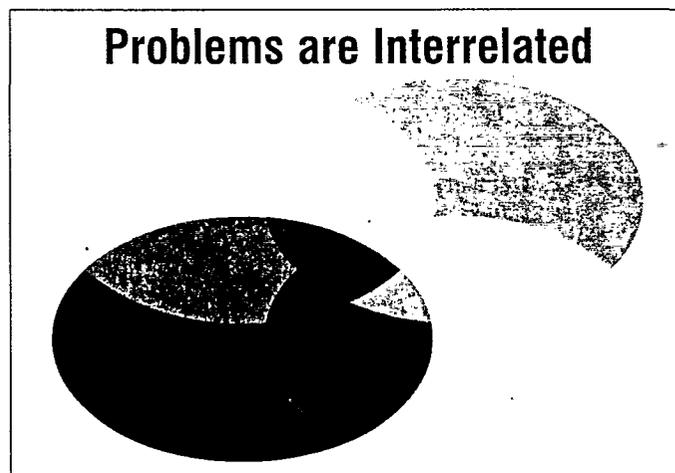
The CALFED Program is a cooperative, interagency effort of the 15 state and federal agencies with management or regulatory responsibilities for the Bay-Delta. The program began its work in 1995 and identified four interrelated problem areas: ecosystem quality, water quality, water supply reliability, and levee and channel integrity.

## Initial Alternatives Proposed

In cooperation with the major interests, CALFED developed potential alternative solutions that were released in a draft programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) in March 1998. The "programmatic" nature of the proposed plans means that actions are described in broad terms.

Each draft alternative consisted of six program elements: ecosystem restoration, water quality, water use efficiency, water transfers, watershed management, and long-term levee protection. The proposals differed in the way water was moved through the system and the

Illustration 1, courtesy of CALFED



levels of possible future storage. Alternatives 1 and 2 proposed using existing Delta channels with increasingly significant modifications. Alternative 3 included a conveyance channel around the Delta—the “isolated facility.”

This channel is often compared to the Peripheral Canal proposal that was defeated in 1982. However, CALFED’s isolated facility is significantly smaller in size and capacity than the Peripheral Canal. Also, the Peripheral Canal was not part of a package that addresses ecosystem restoration, levee system integrity, water quality and water use efficiency, and includes a package of operational assurances.

CALFED received several thousand comments on the draft. In conjunction with extensive additional technical analyses, these comments were used to develop the draft preferred program alternative, which was released in the CALFED Revised Phase II Report by Governor Wilson and Interior Secretary Babbitt on Dec. 18.

### Phase II Interwoven Strategies

The draft preferred program alternative begins with strategies for solving problems in an integrated manner in each of the problem areas: levees, water supply reliability, water quality, and ecosystem restoration (see Illustration 1, page 12). These strategies are interwoven, and each must be viewed in the context of the other strategies. For example, to fully implement the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP), CALFED must also have a successful strategy to provide the improved water quality that is needed by the ecosystem.

Levees are critical to the physical integrity of the Delta and the state’s water system. Levee improvements will incorporate successful techniques for restoring, enhancing or protecting ecosystem values.

CALFED is proposing a water management strategy to ensure water supply reliability to reduce conflicts between uses; decrease drought impacts; provide a means to acquire additional water; improve the ability of the system to respond to unforeseen or unpredictable events; and improve water quality.

The management strategy employs several tools, all now used in California to some degree: water conservation; water recycling; short- and long-term water transfers; ground-water and surface water storage; watershed management; water quality control; and monitoring and real-time diversion management.

A creative new component of this strat-

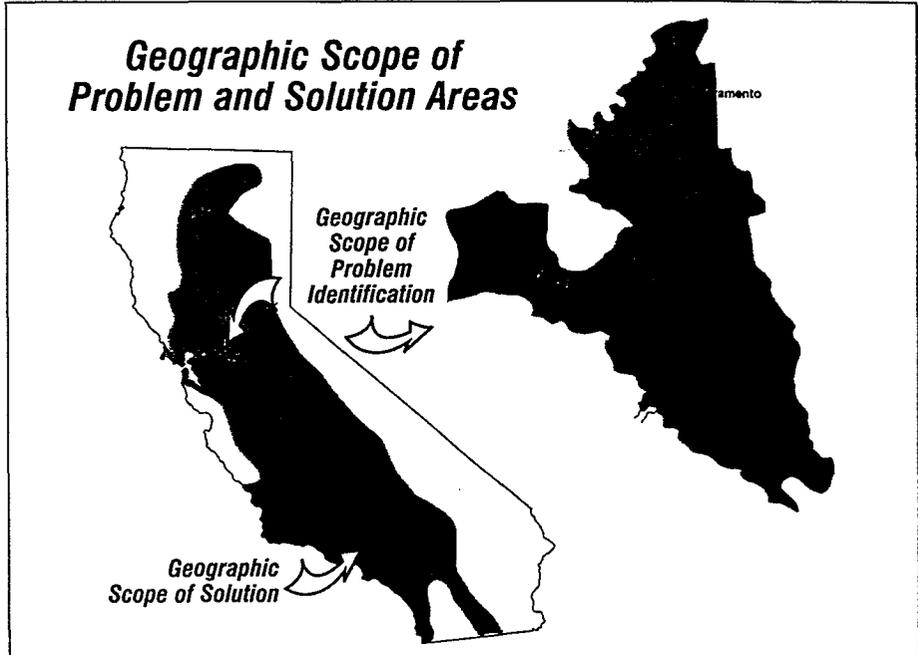


Illustration 2, courtesy of CALFED

egy is an environmental water account. Through the environmental water account, environmental managers could control a package of assets that provides greater flexibility in helping fisheries recover. CALFED intends to implement a pilot program in 1999 to refine the environmental water account concept and its role in the final plan.

CALFED is committed to continuously improving source water quality that allows municipal water suppliers to deliver safe and

affordable drinking water that reliably meets and, where feasible, exceeds applicable drinking water standards. The CALFED program aims to reduce the levels of problem pollutants, such as bromide, organic carbon and pathogens in Delta drinking water sources.

CALFED’s Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) is the largest, most comprehensive, and most inclusive environmental restoration

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**"DILEMMA" - FROM PAGE 13**

program in the United States. It focuses on rehabilitating, protecting or restoring the ecological processes that create and maintain habitats. This strategy emphasizes solid science, adaptive management and local participation: an innovative approach that is becoming a model for similar efforts throughout the nation.

Adaptive management is an essential component of each of these strategies. It is necessary to constantly monitor the system and adapt actions that are taken to restore ecological health and improve water management.

**Key Program Elements**

The following eight program elements will be used to carry out these strategies. The selected preferred alternative will be implemented in stages over the next 30 years.

1. The Long-term Levee Protection Plan will provide base-level funding to reconstruct all Delta levees to a particular standard, and additional funding for special habitat improvement and levee stabilization projects. The program will also implement best management practices (BMPs) to control subsidence on levees; assess overall risk to the levee system and develop recommendations to manage the risk; and establish an emergency management plan.

2. Improving water quality for all beneficial users is one of the CALFED Program's basic objectives. Some actions to achieve improvement can begin immediately; others will rely on comprehensive monitoring, pilot studies and research. The Water Quality Program will focus on improving drinking water quality and reducing impacts from urban and agricultural pesticide use, trace metals, mercury, selenium, bromide, salinity, turbidity and sedimentation, low dissolved oxygen, and toxicity of unknown origin.

3. The Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) is the principal mechanism that CALFED will use to restore the health of the Bay-Delta ecosystem to support its diverse and vital habitats of the multiple plant and animal species. To do so, the ERP identifies more than 700 programmatic restoration actions, including restoring, protecting and managing diverse habitat types representative of the system; restoring critical flows; improving Delta outflow during key springtime periods; developing prevention and control programs for invasive species; and modifying or eliminating fish passage barriers.

4. Water conservation is a concept broadly supported by Californians. The Water Use Efficiency Program includes water conservation measures for agricultural, urban and wildlife refuge uses, and water recycling actions. The program relies on appropriate conservation measures and government assistance to help users comply with the programs. Existing state and federal programs will be expanded to provide increased levels of funding and technical assistance at the local level.

5. Water transfers are currently an important water management tool and have the potential to play a more significant role. The Water Transfer Program proposes a framework of actions, policies and processes that will facilitate water transfers and further develop a statewide water transfer market that can move water between users, including the environment, on a voluntary and compensated basis.

Key components of this program are establishing a California Water Transfers Information Clearinghouse to provide complete and accurate information and facilitate assessment of potential third-party impacts; coordinating among agencies to formulate policy and standardized procedures; and developing a process to identify

transferable water, reservoir refill and carriage water criteria and costs for transporting water through state and federal conveyance facilities.

6. The Watershed Program will provide financial and technical assistance to local watershed programs, and aid in the coordination and integration of these programs with CALFED. Watershed management and protection activities can make improvements in each of the four CALFED problem areas—ecosystem quality, water quality, water supply reliability, and levee and channel integrity.

7. Storage will be necessary to achieve water supply reliability goals. The appropriate mix between surface and groundwater storage will be determined during Stage 1 of program implementation. (Stage 1 is expected to be the first seven years of program implementation.) Target volume for groundwater banking is 500,000 acre-feet of storage.

CALFED will focus on off-stream reservoir sites for new surface storage, but will consider expanding existing on-stream reservoirs. CALFED has identified 14 potential surface storage sites for further study; the list will be further narrowed to three to five by the time of program certification. Should new surface storage be considered necessary to meet CALFED goals, site selection would take place in years four and five of program implementation.

8. Conveyance—CALFED's strategy is to use the existing Delta system with some modifications, evaluate its effectiveness, and add additional conveyance and/or other water management actions if necessary to achieve CALFED goals and objectives. These actions will be continually monitored, analyzed and improved as necessary to meet CALFED goals.

A decision to proceed with additional Delta facilities, such as an isolated facility, could be made if, at the conclusion of Stage 1, CALFED's goals for water quality and fishery recovery are not met.

**What Does CALFED Mean to Counties?**

While the geographic scope of the problems in the Bay-Delta system is limited to the legal Delta, the geographic scope of the solutions covers a much broader area (see Illustration 2, page 13). Solving the problems in the Bay-Delta is critical to the state's economy. A healthy ecosystem will contribute to water supply reliability and water quality improvements.

Many are concerned about the effects of ecosystem restoration on agricultural lands. CALFED will first use already publicly owned lands as much as possible. The program will then pursue partnerships with landowners, including easements. Acquisition of fee title to land will be from willing sellers only, and only when neither government land nor partnerships are appropriate or cost-effective.

**What's Next**

Over the next several months, CALFED will continue to refine the draft preferred alternative. In late spring, the CALFED program plans to release a revised draft programmatic EIS/EIR. Public hearings will be held in several communities around the state. A final EIS/EIR and program certification is expected at the end of 1999.

Thoughtful public input is critical to the success of the CALFED Program. While no one interest will get everything it wants, we believe the program will benefit all Californians, now and in the future.

The Revised Phase II Report is available by calling 1-800/700-5752 and on the CALFED Web site: <http://calfed.ca.gov>. ■

*Lester A. Snow is executive director of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. Prior to joining CALFED in 1995, he was general manager of the San Diego County Water Authority for seven years.*