

B4 Editorial Page editor
Dianne Hardisty / 395-7414
e-mail: opinion@bakersfield.com

Monday September 27, 1999

The Bakersfield Californian

Editorials

'Water war' needs leadership

Between now and June, there will seem to be the calm before the storm brewing over potential solutions to the state's water wars. But it will be a deceptive calm. The period may be the most important in nearly five years of effort to bring order to a century of chaotic state water allocation.

Federal and state leadership in Calfed negotiations has been at a low level this year. While there have been glimmers of rejuvenation in political leaders resuming their involvement in the process, the public must demand more. The negotiations can succeed only with the highest level of commitment.

The Calfed process involves studies and negotiations by more than 20 state and federal agencies, and agricultural, urban and environmental groups to determine how to allocate water among competing and sometimes hostile users

• Urban water districts must have higher levels of water quality and quantity over the long term as urban populations expand. The salts that dissolve in water as it flushes the Delta for environmental purposes make treatment to potable standards difficult and sometimes impossible.

• Environmental groups want more water for fish and wildlife. They oppose most new infrastructures, such as dams and reservoirs, even if they might help increase the supply of water that other users need.

Between now and June possible solutions to meet these competing needs will be analyzed and a recommendation made.

That will end the period of calm as water users engage the Legislature, Congress, and federal and state agencies on policy decisions. Debate also will rage over budgets needed to implement whatever emerges as the final plan.

Delta waterways & California Aqueduct



KENT KUEHL / THE CALIFORNIAN

↓
to page 2

↓
to page 2

PAGE 2

The Bakersfield Californian Editoria
September 27 1999

'Water War' needs leadership

The economic and political stakes in the CalFed negotiations are extremely high — water being the single most critical ingredient in human, animal and plant life, as well as economic and industrial development.

The organization has just concluded a series of hearings throughout the state regarding the environmental consequences. The report outlines several possible courses of action. They range from relatively minor levee improvements in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to a variation of the old Peripheral Canal proposal to help increase the supply and quality of water.

The proposals attempt to meet the competing and sometimes conflicting needs of three major water users:

- Agriculture needs more reliable water deliveries at a predictable cost and in greater volume. More dams and reservoirs may be required.

That is where top leaders must assert themselves. Water users have defined their needs and made their cases.

CalFed began at the behest of former Gov. Pete Wilson, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt.

Gov. Gray Davis has not been as engaged in the process as his predecessor. Feinstein, who has been largely silent recently, has promised to work more closely with Davis as CalFed enters this critical phase. She also will be important in resurrecting Babbitt's earlier level of involvement in the process. He has been hip-deep in a dispute involving Colorado River water allocations and an independent counsel investigation, both of which are nearing conclusion.

Only the combination of their political skills and the powers of their offices can keep the process from unraveling if a viable option emerges.