

To: Ecosystem Roundtable

From: Cindy Darling

Re: Madera Ranch

Summary

The US Bureau of Reclamation would like the Ecosystem Roundtable to consider whether it is appropriate to use \$14.5 million in federal Bay-Delta Act funds currently approved as part of the water acquisition program to assist with the purchase of Madera Ranch, which they propose to develop as a conjunctive use project. If the Ecosystem Roundtable considers that it is appropriate, then they should also recommend conditions or contingencies that should be added to ensure that the project is satisfactory. The Integration Panel identified several concerns with the proposal discussed below.

Detailed Discussion

The USBR has been working to develop a groundwater banking project at Madera Ranch. Further information on the project is contained in the attached memo from Roger Patterson to Lester Snow. The project would involve land acquisition, development of operational criteria, and development of facilities. Water for storage would come from flood flows in the San Joaquin basin and from diversions from the Delta.

As part of the development of the project, USBR has been negotiating with the local landowner over acquisition of the property. They are interested in identifying funding to complete the land acquisition in the very near future (30 to 60 days) because of the possibility that the landowner may be unwilling to wait longer and the deal may fall through.

The CALFED Policy Team requested that CALFED staff take this project to the Ecosystem Roundtable at the September 21st meeting, then back to the Management Team on October 1 and to Policy Group on October 15.

The Integration Panel considered the proposal in August and did not come to consensus on it. There was a diversity of opinion, ranging from some who felt this was not an environmental restoration program to others who felt that this was a good way to develop environmental water. The Integration Panel also felt they did not have the expertise or time to fully evaluate the information on groundwater hydrology, yield, and other aspects of the project.

The major concerns identified by the Integration Panel were:

1. Proceeding with acquisition before on-site impacts are evaluated and the project found to be feasible could result in use of federal Bay-Delta Act funds for a project, acquisition of upland habitat, that does not match the priorities.

2. Storage is important in meeting CALFED goals related to water supply reliability. Conjunctive use is likely the best approach to providing storage from an environmental perspective. However, the concern was expressed that conjunctive use was more to meet water supply reliability goals, not environmental restoration goals.
3. Little information was available on alternative sites for conjunctive use. Some Integration Panel members wanted more information on the relative costs, yield, impacts, and benefits of this site compared to others.
4. The operation of any storage project is the key to realizing environmental benefits or to causing environmental impacts so to assess the project, you would need to know when and where the water would be diverted to storage, when and how much water would be available for environmental use, and who controlled the decisions on these issues. Assurances would also need to be provided that water would be available for the environment at times when it was supposed to be available.
5. The relationship of Madera Ranch to CVPIA B(2) water was not clear. If environmental water from the project was going in whole or in part to B(2), then you would need to carefully consider whether CALFED contributing to B(2) is appropriate.

While the Ecosystem Roundtable did not have time to discuss this proposal in any detail at their last meeting, several members have been very clear that they have strong reservations about whether this project is appropriate for funding from the federal Bay-Delta Act. Other members have identified the local opposition as an important issue that needs to be carefully addressed.