

? to small group by 5/4/99

Comments : COB Thursday.

-DRAFT- 4/26/99

Manan Moe

to be added to description of Pref. Prog. alternative

2.3 ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The Preferred Program Alternative is also the environmentally preferable alternative, as that term is used in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) terminology, it is called the environmentally superior alternative. The Preferred Program Alternative adopts a set of actions designed to achieve the objectives for improvement in each of the four CALFED problem areas—ecosystem restoration, water quality, water supply reliability, and levee system integrity—while establishing a process for evaluating the effectiveness of the actions taken and assessing what additional actions or modifications are needed to improve CALFED’s ability to meet its goals and objectives.

The goals and objectives of the CALFED Program involve a complex set of interrelated ecological, biological, and hydrologic systems. The relationships between these systems are not fully understood, and what will happen as conditions change over time is uncertain. This is particularly true because of the number of different actions in the CALFED Program, the length of time of implementation, and the complexity of the problems and solutions involved. Additional information is needed to predict the outcome of many of these actions more accurately, and to delimit a more refined range of environmental impacts. Consequently, the Preferred Program Alternative provides for implementation of the Program in a staged decision-making process within the framework of the proposed set of basic actions, and establishes focused mechanisms to obtain the necessary additional information to guide the next stage of decision making.

Because of the nature of many of the Program actions, particularly ecosystem restoration actions, it is anticipated that it will be many years before the results of the Preferred Program Alternative actions will realized and can be evaluated. Consequently, it is not yet known whether additional actions will need to be added to the Preferred Program Alternative to fully satisfy the Program’s purposes. At the same time, this alternative establishes a framework which limits additional adverse environmental impacts and significant financial investments associated with Alternatives 2 and 3 until new, more reliable information is available to determine which, if any, additional actions will be necessary to continue to move toward achievement of CALFED goals and objectives. The Preferred Program Alternative better achieves the Program’s goals and objectives than Alternative 1, by providing additional water quality benefits through the inclusion of an evaluation and pilot diversion structure, if necessary, between the Sacramento River and the lower Mokelumne River system, together with modifications of operations at the existing Delta Cross Channel.

This alternative is consequently the environmentally preferable alternative, because it best achieves the Program's goals and objectives, as well as the Solution Principles, by maximizing the effectiveness of actions that will provide multiple benefits based on the best information currently available; establishing a focused research, data gathering, and evaluation process designed to inform decision makers for decisions on future stages; and avoiding the creation of additional adverse environmental impacts and commitment of significant additional financial resources until that new information is available.

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