

# Water accord will serve families, farmers, fish

"Peace has broken out in the water wars," Gov. Pete Wilson announced last Thursday.

"We've signed a cease-fire in the water wars that have for too long plagued California."

The proposed solution will cost cities and agriculture more water — about 450,000 acre-feet or 1 percent of the current water supply in average years — but it provides more certainty in meeting water needs, officials said.

In dry years the cost is 1.1 million acre-feet, and, if it's not enough, the federal government will buy more water.

"We have an agreement that meets the needs of the family, the farmers and the fish," Wilson said.

Cooperation hardly describes the federal-state relationship on delta issues in the

past. After the Environmental Protection Agency released tough draft standards in December 1993, Wilson said there was no need to continue state hearings on the Delta, because the federal Endangered Species Act controlled the Delta's management.

In June the four Club Fed agencies and their state counterparts finally resolved to coordinate their actions. The release of new salinity standards for Delta water was required in the settlement of an environmental lawsuit.

State water planners hope to revive the fish populations with increased outflows to the bay, additional Sacramento and San Joaquin River flows, measures such as closing cross channel gates in spring and installing screens to keep salmon from being killed by the Tracy pumps, which send

water to Westside farms and Southern California homes.

The agreement reached last week is based on a plan developed by a coalition of urban water agencies and agriculture interests. Legislation passed in 1993 enraged farmers by dedicating 800,000 acre-feet of federal water to the environment.

Some farmers served by the Delta-Mendota Canal lost half their federal allocations, but should expect a 60 to 70 percent supply from the new deal in normal years, said Dan Nelson, executive director of the San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Users Authority.

In July, the state board will begin crucial hearings on water rights permits deciding exactly how much water agencies and districts will contribute to the solution.