

# Daily Bulletin

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## Inland Valley gets chance to have say on state water policy

### Guest Columnist

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Foley**

Over the next few months, Californians will be asked to decide their water future. And for most people, the centerpiece of that decision – California's Bay-Delta system – means virtually nothing. Many people have never heard of the Bay-Delta, despite the fact that it provides drinking water for two-thirds of the state, irrigation for California's \$24 billion agricultural sector and is home to plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth.

Southern California residents have done a good job of voicing their views on such issues as air quality and education. It is now time to put that same kind of focus on the Bay-Delta. A public hearing – the first of 17 to be held throughout the state – will take place at 7 p.m. April 21 at the Ontario Holiday Inn, 3400 Shelby Street (with an informal question-and-answer session to precede at 6 p.m.). This will be your opportunity to voice your opinion and help craft a solution to critical problems facing the Bay-Delta.

Whether we realize it or not, the Bay-Delta system – a series of channels and tributaries between San Francisco and Sacramento where the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers converge – contributes greatly to this community. We depend on the Bay-Delta for a significant portion of our drinking water.

As a result of a decades-long struggle among various competing interests, today the Bay-Delta system is on the brink of failure. There are four major problems affecting the Bay-Delta. Some of the Delta levees, which protect local towns and farms, are vulnerable to failure from flooding and earthquakes. If there were a major breach, not only would local homes and farms be destroyed, but water quality could be tainted by pesticides and minerals. A levee failure could also cause salt water from the San Francisco Bay to flow into the Delta, further contaminating fresh water supplies.

A second problem is the decline in habitats throughout the Bay-Delta system. Some species are now considered endangered. This situation is not only a threat to our environment, but also can cause water deliveries to be halted during certain times of the year.

Land uses throughout the watershed have also contributed to an overall decline in water quality. As more and more water is taken from the system,

the concentrations of certain compounds in the water rise. This has a negative impact on fish and wildlife, drives up water treatment costs for those downstream users who depend on the Bay-Delta system for their water supply, and can negatively impact agriculture.

Finally, water supply reliability, which is impacted by all of these factors, has also suffered. For California's trillion-dollar economy, water supply reliability could not be more important.

In 1995, Gov. Pete Wilson and the Clinton administration entered into a historic cooperative effort called the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

Since then, technical experts, along with a federally chartered public advisory committee representing the Bay-Delta's diverse interests, have established the foundation for a Bay-Delta solution. This foundation calls for all the Bay-Delta interests to develop an equitable, durable and affordable solution that reduces conflicts in the system. The CALFED program principles also prohibit a solution that would improve one part of the problem by worsening another.

Public input throughout the program has come in various forms. However, the real need for public input is about to begin.

On March 16, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program released a draft report

identifying three potential Bay-Delta solutions. The alternatives differ primarily in how they would move and store water in the system.

Alternative 1, the Existing System Conveyance, would consider storage and make small improvements to the channel configurations of the Delta. Alternative 2, the Modified Through Delta Conveyance, includes additional storage and would make significant improvements to the channels in the Delta. Alternative 3, the Dual Delta Conveyance, is similar to Alternative 2 and adds a new channel around the east side of the Delta. The solutions range in cost from \$9 billion to \$10.5 billion. All of them propose an increase in water storage.

Finding the best solution is not an easy task, but it is imperative. The first step is to ensure that the people this decision will impact are aware of the alternatives and let their views be known. If you drink water, eat fruits and vegetables, care about the environment or depend on a strong California economy, then you depend on the Bay-Delta. You have an opportunity to get involved. Don't let it pass you by.

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