

**CALFED NEWS, AUGUST-OCTOBER 1999
PUBLIC AFFAIRS GROUP MEETING
OCTOBER 27, 1999**

Hearings set to begin on Wednesday, Tracy Press - August 16, by Bob Brownne, staff writer

Public hearings begin Wednesday in Stockton for the CALFED environmental impact report, which outlines a plan for restoring the health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

South Delta farmers, however, say the plan focuses on urban and environmental priorities while ignoring the needs of farmers.

"They're trying to solve California's water problems at the expense of agriculture," said Tracy farmer Jim McLeod, president of the Banta-Carbona Irrigation District board of directors.

"It has no plans for the future water needs for California," McLeod said. "All of the water needs will come from the farming industry. Even to date we've had water taken away from us."

The first of 15 hearings on the CALFED draft programmatic environmental impact report takes place Wednesday in Building Five at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds, Airport and Charter ways, in Stockton. The meeting starts at 6 p.m.

Alex Hildebrand, secretary for the South Delta Water Agency, said he doubts that the program will end up improving circumstances for anyone in the Delta.

"It would be disastrous for South Delta agriculture and the economy in the county," he said.

Hildebrand added that the water quality won't be improved for south Delta farmers if certain proposals go through, such as removal of a tidal flow barrier at Grant Line Canal.

The result would be that fresh water from tributaries can still be pumped into the aqueducts, but it still allows salt water to intrude further into the Delta.

"They don't worry about whether it affects water users who don't use export water," he said.

Meanwhile, solutions that would increase available fresh water supplies, such as reservoir and groundwater storage, have been delayed until later phases in the process.

"No new water is coming into the system," said Michael Wade, executive director of the California Farm Water Coalition.

"It could be seven years before they address storage issues, and that storage is needed today. There has not been a storage option proposed that I've seen that meets the needs of agriculture."

Steve Ritchie, deputy director of the CALFED program, said the purpose of CALFED is to create a master plan for projects that can work together.

"It lays out a broad program for individual projects that will occur over time," he said, adding that creation of the planning document, and suggested projects, is an effort to build as much consensus as possible.

Assemblyman Mike Machado likened the plan to a road map for the next 30 years, adding that anything identified in the plan would still need funding and legislative authorization.

"A lot of those discussions haven't taken place yet," he said. "In the meantime there are issues that have to be fully resolved."

"There's still a lot of apprehension, and I still have a lot of apprehension because south Delta issues haven't been taken care of."

Machado said he worries that federal goals are dominating the CALFED process, even though state goals of improving water quality in the Delta and upstream along the San Joaquin River have already been identified.

Officials from the San Luis and Delta Mendota Water Authority, which delivers Delta water to irrigation districts by way of the federal Delta-Mendota Canal, said they figure the process is open-ended at this point.

Laura King, director of strategic planning for the authority, said CALFED proposals could work either way, but also said the authority's customers are most worried about scenarios that take water away from farmers.

"There are proposals that would reduce the times and amounts of pumping due to environmental requirements," she said.

For example, when protected species such as delta smelt perish in pumps leading to the Delta-Mendota Canal or California Aqueduct, the pumps have to reduce operations.

The result has been delivery of only 65 to 70 percent of the water for farmers in the western San Joaquin Valley, King said. "And this year was an above average year for rainfall."

Meanwhile, urban users and environmental restoration concerns have received deliveries of up to 100 percent.

"A lot of water has been reallocated to environmental concerns, but it's been taken out of our account and put into another," King said.

Ritchie said CALFED is intended to be a guiding influence rather than a policy to be implemented. Implementation, he said, is undertaken by the 15 state and federal agencies involved in CALFED, and by state and federal legislators.

"The fear is that when we get down to specifics, it will target something or someone," he said. "There's a lot of controversy, but there's been a lot of controversy for 20 years."

He said that while projects are identified for the south Delta -such as flow barriers on Grant Line Canal and Old River or fish screens near the Delta and Banks pumping plants - they still need legislative authorization and funding. #

**A lasting Bay/Delta solution is worth waiting for
Commentary by Patrick McCarty, member Delta Protection Commission and Bay/Delta Advisory
Committee, San Joaquin Record - August 17, 1999**

A group of state and federal government agencies working with special interests from throughout California has come forth with a proposed plan which goes a long way toward solving the decades-long environmental and water-management problems of California's Bay/Delta system.

Here in San Joaquin County, residents have done a good job of airing their views on such issues as groundwater overdrafts and land-use planning. It is now time to put that same kind of focus on the Bay/Delta plan.

Because whether we realize it or not, the Bay/Delta system -- a series of channels and tributaries between San Francisco and Stockton/Sacramento where the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers converge -- contributes greatly to this community. More specifically, we depend on the Bay/Delta agriculture for water, recreation and enjoyment of its natural resources.

The San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is an ecologically sensitive and complex maze of interdependent waterways that serves as the hub of California's water system. It provides drinking water to two-thirds of Californians, supports valuable fish and wildlife species and irrigates farmland that produces nearly half of the nation's fruits and vegetables.

However, the complex interdependence and multiple functions that comprise the Bay/Delta system are also its biggest challenge. Over the years, competing interests have fought for their share of the Bay/Delta's limited natural resources. As a result, the Bay/Delta has been depleted, species have become endangered, water quality has degraded and water-supply reliability has suffered. A deteriorating levee system threatens important infrastructure, millions of dollars of private property and water quality in the Delta.

Fixing these problems is as complex as the Bay/Delta estuary itself. Quick-fix attempts over the past few decades to address a single aspect of the problem have consistently run into roadblocks, both political and physical. The result: disagreements, delays, lawsuits and a general climate of mistrust among those competing for water. Meanwhile, the Bay/Delta continues to decline.

The crushing drought from 1987-1992 escalated the problem into a crisis that could no longer be ignored. In 1995, in response to this crisis, the state of California and the Clinton administration entered into a historic cooperative effort called the CALFED Bay/Delta Program.

In the past four years, technical experts, state and federal officials, and stakeholders have been working steadily toward a solution to these problems under the umbrella of CALFED.

As the program has progressed toward a long-term solution, action is being taken to restore health to the ecosystem. Over the past three years, the CALFED Bay/Delta Program has provided \$177 million in funding for ecosystem-restoration projects through-out the state. In 1999, \$85 million more is available for similar projects.

CALFED's latest milestone is the release this month of a report in which a proposed blueprint for a long-term solution is presented. This is no quick fix. It has required compromises and commitments from everyone involved. Building trust among disparate interests has taken time. Thorough consideration has been given to every water management tool that could be a part of the final solution. It is far from perfect and requires your ideas and involvement to make it better.

A revised draft environmental document containing the framework of a Bay/Delta solution was released for public review and comment June 25. It outlines planned actions for the next seven to 10 years that will cost an estimated \$4.4 billion. Who and how will costs be met is one unfinished element in which we could use your guidance.

The proposed plan calls for implementation of the largest ecosystem-restoration project in the nation, commitment to greater levels of conservation and recycling, enlargement of channels in the eastern Delta and other facilities to improve water supplies and protect fish, and actions to assure continuous improvements in water quality for all beneficial uses.

This report represents a significant achievement by the CALFED process and progress on a decision that could mean the success or failure of California's economy and environment in the next century.

The revised draft environmental document represents four years of intense work by some of the state's top water-management and environmental experts. Now it is your turn, Californians, to weigh in on the state's biggest water decision in 30 years.

Public hearings are being held statewide to give citizens a chance to see what this proposed solution looks like and tell CALFED what they think.

With a spirit of problem-solving and a focus on the long-term goals -- and benefits -- of a long-term, feasible, affordable solution, we may at last relegate California's "water wars" to their place in history. That's where they belong. #

Comment sought for CALFED report, San Joaquin Record - August 18, Record Staff

Citizens will get a chance this evening to examine a draft environmental-impact report outlining long-term strategies for improving water quality and restoring the ecological health of the Bay/Delta system.

A public hearing will be held at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds in Stockton -- the first of 15 hearings scheduled on the draft document.

An informal question-and-answer session will run from 6 to 7:30 p.m., followed by a formal public hearing beginning at 7:30 p.m. in Building 5 at the fairgrounds at Airport and Charter ways.

Four years in the making, the report, also known as the draft preferred program alternative, outlines a series of solutions that have been proposed to fix the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento San Joaquin Delta system -- an intricate web of waterways created at the junction of the Bay and the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and the watershed that feeds them.

In 1995, the state of California and the Clinton administration joined forces and created the CALFED Bay/Delta Program to address environmental and water-management problems in the region.

Since then, experts from state and federal agencies, agricultural, environmental and urban interests have been working on a series of proposals under the auspices of CALFED.

Farmers and water users in the South Delta are concerned about the plan, however, saying it places urban and ecological needs above those of agriculture.

Officials with the Delta Protection Commission say CALFED's proposed policies, which would include retiring thousands of acres of farmland for habitat restoration in the Delta, would have a serious impact on agricultural land uses, exacerbate salinity intrusion and have secondary impacts on agriculture-related businesses in the region.

CALFED officials said public comment is critical to the formulation of an "equitable and feasible solution" to the Bay/Delta's problems.

Comments received tonight and at subsequent hearings will be processed and refinements made to the draft plan. A final plan and environmental-impact report are expected to be ready by June 2000, when implementation is scheduled to get underway. The plan is expected to take 30 years and more than \$10 billion to implement. #

Gov. Davis, Interior Secretary Babbitt Call for Action on Key Water Issues

News release - August 18, 1999

Governor Gray Davis and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt met today to discuss two key elements of California's water future: the Colorado River Agreement and the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. Davis and Babbitt pledged their personal commitment to move forward on these issues.

*** Colorado River Agreement**

Governor Davis and Secretary Babbitt reiterated their strong support for the framework agreed to in the Colorado River negotiations, reached last week among major southern California water districts. Davis and Babbitt directed negotiators for the state and federal agencies to resolve the remaining issues in order to finalize a detailed accord facilitating transfers of conserved Colorado River water.

"The Colorado River Agreement is critical to California's overall water strategy. This agreement is a vital step toward enabling California to provide a solid foundation for the CALFED program," said Governor Davis. Davis' Director of State Water Resources, Tom Hannigan, is leading negotiations on behalf of California.

"Negotiators must develop a working arrangement for water transfers to make the most efficient, versatile uses of Colorado River water," said Secretary Babbitt, whose Deputy Secretary, David Hayes, is assisting in the negotiations process. "In their ongoing discussions to develop detailed agreement language, they are building on a framework agreement reached earlier this month."

* CALFED Bay-Delta Program

Governor Davis and Secretary Babbitt pledged to accelerate progress on the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, and move forward on key elements. Davis and Babbitt directed CALFED agencies to work with stakeholders to achieve a series of milestones to assure completion of the CALFED Final Plan by next spring.

"CALFED offers the best hope in decades to move beyond California's historic water wars and resolve issues through collaboration," continued Davis. "But success will require a new, unprecedented level of effort by participants and stakeholders. The legacy of a lasting water peace is worth the hard work it takes to get there."

"CALFED is critically important to the Clinton Administration and all Californians," said Babbitt. "I am committed to doing whatever it takes to meet CALFED's schedule to develop long-term solutions to Delta water and ecosystem challenges."

The governor and secretary stressed the importance of CALFED developing innovative approaches to meet the challenges of restoring the health of the estuary while providing more reliable supplies of clean water for cities, farms, and fish. These include:

-- An Environmental Water Account (EWA), which will provide more flexible water project operations to restore fisheries and meet competing demands for water from the Delta.

-- An Integrated Storage Investigation (ISI), which will evaluate the role of surface and groundwater storage in providing more reliable supplies.

They directed CALFED and agency staff to develop a framework for the EWA and the ISI by the end of the year.

The Secretary and Governor also discussed progress on key elements of the CALFED program including ecosystem restoration, water use efficiency, water marketing and transfers, drinking water quality, watershed and floodplain management, and South Delta water management improvements.

They also discussed the importance of a coordinated approach to managing flows for fisheries under the federal Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA). Interior will continue to consult with state agencies in crafting the final decision on implementing the CVPIA "(b)(2)" provision calling for the dedication of 800,000 acre feet of water for fishery purposes. They agreed that regardless of the outcome of ongoing litigation, state and federal agencies will work through CALFED to assure that the impacts of Interior's decision are considered in developing CALFED's final plan.

Finally, they agreed that a continued strong commitment to state and federal funding is vital to the success of the CALFED Program. They agreed that the federal Bay-Delta Environmental Enhancement and Water Security Act of 1996 should be reauthorized, and that sufficient federal and state funds must be made available for all CALFED Program elements to assure balanced implementation. The governor added that he will urge the state Legislature to enact a water bond measure to provide continued state funding for the Program.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program is a cooperative effort among state and federal agencies, stakeholders, and the public. The CALFED Bay-Delta Program's mission is to develop a long-term comprehensive plan that will restore ecological health and improve water management in the Bay-Delta system. The Program issued a draft plan in June, and public hearings on the plan are being held throughout the State in August and September. The final CALFED plan is scheduled to be completed in the Spring of 2000#

Bone-Dry River Comes Alive; San Joaquin flows again after an agreement on pilot release program, San Francisco Chronicle - August 19, by Glen Martin, Staff Writer

If rivers were movies, the San Joaquin would be "The Mummy": Something dead and desiccated comes back to life after remaining buried in the sand for a long, long time.

For the past 55 years, the San Joaquin has not really been a river at all, not in its middle reaches. It has been a memory of a river, a ghost of a river -- an empty, sandy channel carved in the expansive croplands of the San Joaquin Valley. For all that time, the water has been wholly diverted for agriculture.

Things used to be different. From its headwaters in the Sierra Nevada to its confluence with the Sacramento River, the San Joaquin was once one of California's mightiest rivers, second only to the Sacramento in terms of annual outflow and the number of salmon it supported.

One hundred years of intensive farming in the San Joaquin Valley and a spate of dam-building along the river and its major tributaries changed all that. The river basically disappeared for a 50-mile stretch upstream of its confluence with the Merced River, and the fish, waterfowl and tule elk disappeared with it.

But now a miraculous thing has happened. The San Joaquin lives again -- however tenuously.

Clear, clean water is flowing through a 15-mile portion that has been bone dry for more than five decades, save for brief winter storms and spasmodic releases to relieve flood pressure on upstream reservoirs.

This water from Millerton Reservoir, released for the benefit of fish and wildlife, is part of a preliminary agreement between a coalition of environmentalists on one hand and agricultural water users and government regulators on the other.

The deal grew out of a lawsuit filed in 1988 by the environmentalists against the Friant Water Users Authority and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation over the dire ecological health of the San Joaquin. The Friant agency supplies water to 15,000 farms in the San Joaquin Valley.

While the suit technically remains in effect, both sides are negotiating earnestly, casting about for a long-term resolution that everyone can at least tolerate. The alternative -- additional years of expensive litigation -- is a prospect neither side finds particularly palatable.

The project's biological bottom line is pretty simple -- more water flowing down the river. Environmentalists hope eventually to establish a year-round flow from the river's headwaters to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta east of San Francisco Bay.

The renascent river, it is hoped, will have lush riparian forests of cottonwood and willow, abundant wildlife and robust runs of spawning salmon.

The releases began in early July and are likely to continue through October as part of a pilot project to stimulate cottonwood and willow growth along the San Joaquin's middle reaches.

About 35,000 acre-feet of water will be released under the program, less than 5 percent of the water that is going to Friant Water Users this year. An acre-foot -- one acre covered by a foot of water -- is enough to supply two households for about a year.

"We won't have the same (river) system that existed before European contact," said David Behar, a consultant with the Natural Resources Defense Council, the lead plaintiff in the suit against Friant and the Reclamation Bureau.

"It won't be as expansive or as rich, because it will be limited by the agricultural realities that exist in the valley," Behar said, "but it will be a significant restoration. It will have an assemblage of historic species and a hydrological regime similar to the one that existed before the dams."

Changes were already evident during a recent canoe trip along the "rewatered" 15-mile stretch upstream from Mendota Dam.

Seedling cottonwoods and willows are sprouting on the sandbars. Small schools of bass, bluegill and carp fin in the channels. Green herons and egrets forage in the shallows, and there is the spoor of raccoons, skunks and opossum along the sandy banks.

True, most nature lovers would still find the river channel plug ugly. There are few mature trees, and the water flows sluggishly over broad, featureless sandbars.

But Behar -- who canoed the stretch with hydrologist Peter Vorster, of San Rafael's Bay Institute, and Dan Fults, the special projects officer for the Friant Water Users Authority -- thought the scene lovely.

"It stuns me to look at it," he said as a hot sun beat down and a couple of buzzards soared languidly overhead. "The river is normally completely dry this time of year. As far as we know, this trip is a first descent for this part of the San Joaquin. The idea that there is even enough water to float a canoe is very exciting."

Vorster said the goal of the project is to develop a deep, narrow river channel shaded by cottonwood and willow forests -- something that will occur naturally with high volume winter storm runoff coupled with year-round maintenance flows.

The trees will cool the water in the summer and fall, said Vorster, allowing fish such as salmon and steelhead trout to survive.

Vorster took the river's temperature with a thermometer as he talked.

"Obviously, we have a long way to go," he said. "Water temperature will be our biggest problem, because this is a river located in a warm part of the state, and Millerton Reservoir is shallow and fairly warm. Salmon like cold water."

Vorster's thermometer registered 74 degrees.

"That's way too warm for salmon eggs and fry, which need about 56-degree water to survive," he said. "But even if we don't get it that low, smolts (young fish) should be able to use the area as a transition zone as they migrate to the sea from cooler spawning areas upstream."

The San Joaquin once supported two healthy populations of chinook salmon -- one that made its annual upstream migration in the fall and another that migrated in the spring. Both populations have disappeared upstream of its confluence with the Merced.

Fults said water managers could find that some salmon may be more responsive to a restoration plan than others.

"There are still small runs of both fall-run and spring-run chinook salmon on San Joaquin tributaries," he said. "Generally speaking, the spring-run fish need greater year-round flows than the fall-run fish. Fall-run salmon can handle manipulated water releases better."

Behar acknowledged that fall-run chinooks might be easier to establish, but he emphasized that the finicky spring-run fish also have a place in the river. "We'd like to bring them both back," he said. Forging a successful San Joaquin restoration is like walking a tightrope, Fults observed.

"It isn't easy keeping everyone happy. But we want to get the job done -- to restore a living river. We don't want to go back to a war footing, fighting each other over every little thing. That's a treadmill that doesn't go anywhere."

Behar concurred with Fults and said he is increasingly optimistic about the San Joaquin's future.

"We've been suing each other for 10 years, but attitudes are very different now that we're working toward a settlement," he said. "The fact that Dan and I are on the same trip says a lot. Everyone wants a solution -- we just have to make sure it's a solution that works." #

CALFED plan draws ire of many at hearing

San Joaquin Record - August 19, By Abbie Dutcher, Record Staff Writer

State and federal government officials came to Stockton on Wednesday to get local input on a sweeping and controversial water plan designed to solve long-standing water-quality and management problems in the ecologically sensitive Bay/Delta system.

What they got was an earful.

About 400 people showed up for a public hearing at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds to air their concerns about the draft environmental plan developed by a coalition of government agencies and private interests under the CALFED Bay/Delta Program.

Most in the audience were critical of the proposal, which provides a framework for addressing such issues as water quality, groundwater overdrafting, water and land-use planning and water exports from the region.

"CALFED has the potential for doing a lot of good," said Alex Hildebrand, a farmer, engineer and director of the South Delta Water Agency. "Unfortunately, the current plan doesn't live up to that potential."

Formed more than four years ago, CALFED has been working on a comprehensive plan to deal with complex water issues in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary.

Proposals include recommendations for ecosystem restoration, long-term levee protection, water quality, water transfers, storage and conveyance.

Critics -- and there were numerous in the crowd -- said Wednesday that the document places too much emphasis on urban and environmental priorities and shortchanges or ignores the needs of agriculture, particularly in the south Delta.

"Their overall strategies are good, but they don't go far enough and they ignore the Delta, particularly the south Delta," said Bob Cabral, chairman of the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors.

A key point of contention has been the plan's recommendations for dealing with water quality in the San Joaquin River and the use of pumps and barriers to shunt water at the San Joaquin Old River to deal with fish and water-quality issues.

Hildebrand and others said CALFED's strategies for reducing dissolved oxygen in the lower San Joaquin River and salt intrusion in the Delta won't work without the installation of a series of permanent operable barriers, including one at Grant Line Canal.

Without those barriers, farmers and water officials said, fresh water from the river's tributaries could still be pumped into aqueducts while saltwater would still be able to flow into and circulate in the Delta, negating efforts to reduce salinity or upgrade quality.

Residents and farmers feel as if their concerns have been ignored and the perceived and real threats to their livelihoods not taken into account in the plan, Assemblyman Michael Machado, D-Linden, said.

Instead of smoothing over conflicts, the plan promotes them, Tracy farmer Bill Koster said.

"CALFED is pitting farmer against farmer. It's the north against the south all over again," said Koster, who raises almonds, beans and other crops on the westside of San Joaquin County.

Wednesday's hearing was the first of 15 planned throughout the state on the environmental plan. The public-comment period is scheduled to end Sept. 23 with a final plan and environmental report due by June. #

Delta restoration raises eyebrows; The proposed water project is laid out for Southland officials and farmers, who greet it with skepticism.

Riverside Press-Enterprise - August 20, By Imran Ghori, staff writer

An ambitious plan to restore the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta while assuring a reliable water supply to the state's cities, agriculture and wildlife drew skepticism from area water districts and farmers Thursday night.

Several Southern California water agencies, including those from San Bernardino and Riverside counties, questioned whether the plan did enough to guard the area's future water supply as population and water needs grow.

"Our rate payers and taxpayers have agreed to pay the cost of the State Water Project," said Randy Van Elder of the San Bernardino Valley Municipal District. "We believe it's the state and federal government's obligation to see those commitments are met."

The proposal from CalFed, a federal-state agency, was unveiled in June, the result of a four-year effort to find a solution to California's water wars.

CalFed is holding a series of meetings up and down the state to hear from those affected by the plan. A final version is expected to be adopted next year.

The San Francisco Bay-Delta system is a web of waterways at the junction of San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. It is the drinking-water source for two-thirds of the state's population, including much of Southern California, and a major irrigation source for the state's farmers.

It is also part of an ecosystem that supports more than 750 species of fish, animals and birds in the West Coast's largest estuary.

The struggle among cities, farmers and environmentalists has been to provide enough water to restore endangered fisheries and wildlife without reducing supplies for agriculture and residential use.

Elements of the plan include improving levees, reducing water pollution, improving species habitat, encouraging water recycling, promoting local watershed management and exploring the creation of new ground-water storage facilities.

The plan will be implemented over 30 years at an expected cost of \$10 billion.

But the plan includes no assurances for increased water flow to the different interests and shelves, for now, further study of above-ground reservoirs. The latter draws the majority of the criticism from area water agencies and farmers.

"Without a commitment to future storage, this plan is fatally flawed," said Bob Perkins, executive director of the Riverside County Farm Bureau.

Water-agency representatives argued that reservoirs can be built without damming streams. Farmers accused the plan of taking water away from people and giving it to fish and wildlife.

Some criticized CalFed for being too vague.

Rick Breitenbach, assistant director of CalFed, said the agency hasn't come to a final answer yet, and issues like increased storage may still be included in the plan.

"All of these are being looked at closely," he said. #

Questions, doubts inundate CalFed water hearing, Oakland Tribune - August 27, staff reports

Conservationists, water district officials, fishing interests and farmers flooded a state and federal consortium Thursday with questions and doubts about a comprehensive draft plan to divide the state's water supply.

CalFed, a partnership created in 1995 to plan the future of the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, released the report in June. Thursday night's meeting in Preservation Park was the fifth of 15 planned public hearings around the state during the 90-day public comment period.

More than 100 people packed Nile Hall, to comment on the plan, which is charged with balancing the ecological concerns of the Bay-Delta with the drinking needs of a growing California population. The Delta provides two-thirds of the state's drinking-water supply.

Leasa Cleland, a planning manager with the Alameda County Water District, which serves some 300,000 residents and gleans more than half its water supply from the Delta, cited water quality and supply reliability as the district's top concerns.

"It's unclear whether the CalFed solution will result in adequate improvements in Delta drinking water quality," Cleland told a panel of six CalFed officials.

Whether a version of the hotly contested Peripheral Canal will materialize under the plan remained a critical issue for the public and for area elected officials.

State Sen. Barbara Boxer, Rep. George Miller (D-Martinez) and Oakland City Councilmember Nancy Nadel (West Oakland-Downtown) were no-shows at the hearing, but they each submitted statements criticizing the possible creation of a concrete-lined ditch that would divert water from the North Delta, much like the proposed canal defeated by voters during the water wars of 1982.

"CalFed is wading into very dangerous waters here, promoting a highly divisive approach that has been rejected by state voters and threatens the integrity of the stakeholder process," Miller said in a statement. "I want thorough answers without delay, and so do the people of California."

Citing a need for "environmental justice" for minorities, Henry Clark, director of Richmond-based West County Toxics Coalition, said CalFed is ignoring the water supplied to inner-city neighborhoods.

"I understand you're not considering the urban areas such as Richmond, Oakland and further down the Delta," Clark said. "This affects my neighborhood, too ... I think you need to start explaining because you're leaving out communities of color."

Public hearings will continue statewide through Sept. 23, including a Sept. 8 hearing in Antioch at 6 p.m. at Rodriguez Community Center Theater.

The draft plan is expected to be revised by April 2000 and set into motion by the end of next year. #

Editorial: Rough water ahead: Will Davis and Babbitt provide Delta leadership?

Sacramento Bee - September 5, 1999

Advancing water policy in California, to borrow a phrase from veteran state Sen. Jim Costa, is a game of singles and bunts. Given the entrenched and powerful interests all vying for the state's precious water supply -- farmers, cities, environmental needs -- progress comes incrementally, if it comes at all.

Somehow, expectations were different for CalFed, the landmark effort of state and federal agencies seeking a better way to provide reliable, clean water for humans and a healthier Delta for fish. Reality,

however, is setting in as the CalFed process matures and CalFed proposes a steady stream of incremental steps. Why is anyone surprised?

Bashing CalFed has become fashionable these days within the tiny community of water activists who shape policies for the rest of us. An example of the grousing, for instance, is over the touchy issue of whether to expand existing reservoirs or build new ones off-stream. Environmentalists prefer focusing less on storage and more on redistributing today's supplies through markets; farmers, precisely the opposite.

CalFed rightly has made neither side happy, taking instead a study-now, decide-later approach. Admittedly, it is frustrating that five years into this process, CalFed hasn't yet identified the best places to store more water, how much new storage would cost, who would get this new water and who would pay. The data are due some time this winter. Until then, CalFed has wisely reserved judgment.

A similar feud rages over CalFed's approach to improving the quality of Delta water that heads to Southern California. Some south of the Tehachapi wrongly assumed that CalFed was that long-elusive Trojan horse that would deliver the peripheral canal, California's most controversial piece of proposed plumbing. CalFed -- surprise -- plans to exhaust less controversial options to improve water quality for Southern California, where many water interests now feel betrayed, before contemplating a canal. Bay Area environmentalists (never mind that they drink water from two peripheral canals that send Sierra snowmelt around the Delta), meanwhile, are equally suspicious about CalFed. Talk of the canal still exists deep in CalFed documents. Realistically, CalFed's staunchly neutral position on the canal remains the only pragmatic course.

Farmers (or at least some of their leaders) are mistakenly outraged about CalFed's plan to buy some farmland near rivers on strictly a voluntary basis to restore fish habitat. Willing buyers exchanging with willing sellers should be an approach embraced, not loathed, by farmers dependent on free and fair trade.

To survive, CalFed desperately needs the personal involvement of Gov. Gray Davis and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt in the coming months. It will take political leadership for CalFed to make some tough decisions (particularly on storage) and to begin isolating the many extremists and empowering the moderates. With leadership, CalFed promises to keep hitting those bunts and singles. Without it, CalFed is a sure strikeout.#

East Bay comments sought on Delta plan; CalFed's complex \$10 billion plan to preserve the region's waterways has drawn questions from farmers, among others

Contra Costa Times - September 5, by Sarah Rohrs, staff writer

The white egrets and anglers at Little Franks Tract on Bethel Island can be a pretty sight for some, but not for anyone familiar with the Delta's levee system.

Last repaired in 1981, the berm around the 330-acre area on Bethel Island's north end is so badly broken it creates waves of problems for those trying to keep the nearby island's levee shored up.

The CalFed/Bay-Delta Program would make the tract more accessible by using dredged materials to create tidal wetlands and islands for birds. The berm wouldn't be repaired.

Part of a thousand-mile maze of Delta sloughs and waterways, Little Franks Tract is just one of many areas CalFed would like to repair as part of its proposed \$10 billion, 30-year restoration plan.

Wednesday night in Antioch, East Bay residents are invited to offer their opinions of CalFed's draft environmental impact report. The hearing will start at 6 p.m. at the Rodriguez Community Center, 213 F St., Antioch, with an informal question-and-answer session. The public hearing will follow at 7 p.m.

Written and oral comments on the massive document will be taken until Sept. 23. After that, CalFed staff will review comments and issue a response in May.

The \$4 billion first phase is set to get under way in July if six agencies approve the document and the money is secured, said Daniel McCarroll, CalFed legislative coordinator.

The Contra Costa County slice of the Delta is home to marinas, restaurants and fishing facilities that could be affected by CalFed's plans to address the fragile ecosystem.

"There's a lot of recreation in Contra Costa County, and a lot of businesses that provide recreational services," said Margit Aramburu, Delta Protection Commission executive director.

Four years in the making, CalFed's goal is to achieve what some say is an impossible balancing act: Restore the Delta's fragile ecosystem, improve and increase water supplies, repair levees and support the commercial boating and fishing industry.

One proposal that would affect East County is a plan to enlarge the Contra Costa Water District's Los Vaqueros reservoir south of Brentwood to increase storage and improve the Delta's water quality upstream. CalFed is considering numerous proposals to enlarge facilities and increase water supplies.

Farmers are some of the more worried Delta users; they're nervous that CalFed's plans to take thousands of acres out of production for wildlife restoration will harm their way of life and hurt agriculture.

"One of our concerns is loss of agriculture and that there's no mitigation posed for that," Aramburu said. A decline in agriculture also would result in loss of taxes and jobs for several Delta communities, particularly those bordering Solano County.

A sizable amount of the CalFed money in the program's first phase would be spent on studies, including several in East County. They include studying the possibility of restoring Suisun Marsh and considering ways to improve the quality of the water agricultural users discharge at Veale Tract and in Reclamation District 800 east of Byron.

The Antioch CalFed public hearing is one of several that are being staged throughout the state. More will be held in Santa Rosa, Visalia, Chico, Redding and Sacramento.#

Valley gets to speak on delta plan

San Jose Mercury News - September 4, by Frank Sweeney, staff writer

Silicon Valley residents -- as well as industries that have a huge stake in the outcome -- will get a chance Tuesday to sound off on a controversial state-federal plan to restore the ecological health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The delta, through which most of California's rivers run before flowing into San Francisco Bay, is the source of two-thirds of California's drinking water. In normal years, it provides half of what Santa Clara County consumes, a supply that is critical to Silicon Valley manufacturing processes.

"We need high-quality water, and we also need a reliable water supply," said Chris Elias, environmental programs director for the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group, which represents the biggest high-tech companies in the county. "It is integral to maintaining a healthy economy and to protect the quality of life." For high-tech industries, the water it receives isn't clean enough for manufacturing purposes. But the cleaner it is to start with, the less they have to treat it.

In addition to fixing the struggling bay and delta environment, the \$5.2 billion plan is supposed to guarantee a sufficient water supply to the state's burgeoning population. Ultimately, the cost could exceed \$10 billion over the next 30 years.

The hearing in San Jose is one of a series held around the state to get public comment on the plan, developed after more than four years of study. Several environmental groups, as well as business representatives, will be among those expected to testify.

Although it has been hailed by supporters as a solution to end decades of California water wars, the reaction so far indicates the dispute has not been resolved.

Urban water agencies say it won't provide enough high-quality water for their growing populations and industries. Central Valley farmers charge that it will push farmland out of production and farmers out of business. Environmentalists, while happy that the plan does not include building a peripheral canal around the delta, say it doesn't do enough to offset the decline of endangered salmon and other fish species.

The delta spreads out over 738,000 acres of sloughs, islands, marshes and reclaimed farmland at the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. Huge diversions of water -- drawn out through pumps near Tracy and moved south in aqueducts of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project -- have reduced drinking water quality and put two fish species, the winter-run Chinook salmon and delta smelt, on the endangered list.

The delta studies are scheduled to be completed in June, with the projects to begin as financing is secured.

Construction of a 44-mile concrete canal around the eastern edge of the delta to make it easier to ship higher-quality water south -- to Santa Clara County as well as Southern California -- was pretty much ruled out by officials in the CalFed task force in June when the so-called "preferred alternative" was disclosed.

Still, embedded deep within the plan is a short north delta diversion canal that looks like the first leg of a peripheral canal.

Proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown in 1982, the Peripheral Canal was rejected by voters in a bitter north-south political water war. But smaller versions of such a canal, euphemistically called an "isolated conveyance facility," have been considered by water planners since.

"The peripheral canal issue demonstrates how the water establishment won't let a bad idea die," said Jackie McCort of the Sierra Club. "They keep turning back to the idea that dams and canals will solve their problems."

The answer is more water conservation, McCort said, citing Santa Clara County as an example. The county uses roughly what it consumed a decade ago, despite enormous population and industrial growth, she said.

However, the Santa Clara Valley Water District supports continuing study of a canal, saying that otherwise the district ultimately may not be able to meet stricter drinking water standards that go into effect in 2002. Canal supporters say it would provide cleaner water by detouring it around the delta's brackish marshes to the state and federal water project pumps in the south delta.

Elias, of the manufacturing group, agreed that conservation should be a critical element of any plan, but added that a canal around the delta should not be ruled out without further study. "We don't want to close that door," he said.

While the plan does not call for immediate construction of new dams or reservoirs, it would provide for studies at 12 sites around the state.

To increase water supply, the plan calls for dredging parts of the south delta to speed water flow, to encourage more water recycling and conservation, and to establish "environmental water accounts" to buy water from farmers and cities that would remain in the delta for fish and wildlife.

The plan would reduce pollution by clamping down on pesticide runoff from farms and oil and other contaminant runoff from cities.

The CalFed task force, a coalition of 15 federal and state agencies, was formed by the Wilson and Clinton administrations in 1994. The agreement forged a truce in hope of finding a common solution to the delta's problems after decades of lawsuits by farmers, environmentalists and cities over who gets how much water.

The CalFed public hearing will be Tuesday in the San Jose Unified School District board room, 855 Lenzen Ave., between Stockton Avenue and The Alameda in San Jose. It will begin with an informal question and answer session at 6 p.m. with the formal public hearing beginning at 7 p.m. Further information may be obtained at the CalFed information telephone line at (800) 900-3587, or on CalFed's <http://calfed.ca.gov> Web site. #

Editorial: Wary farmers Cast a vigilant eye toward water policies

Vacaville Reporter - September 7, 1999

The first of four public forums on the fate of agriculture in the next century in Solano County points up few, if any, new threats to our region's heritage industry.

With the exception of foreign competition, the issues are much the same today as they were two decades - or more - before. There is the challenge of new technology, the pressure of population growth and the steady campaign from Southern California interests to ship the water supply southward.

A slate of four community meetings kicked off last week in Rio Vista. Its focus is raising public awareness about, and creating a public discourse in, how to preserve the \$1 billion industry that bolsters the local economy. It was clear that the most present danger is the water policy of the state of California.

Yes, there will be pressure from cities eager to distend their boundaries to accommodate the inevitable migration of new residents.

Yes, the foreign markets are becoming more competitive and problematic.

Yes, the new technology is challenging to manage. Maintaining pace with it is difficult.

The specter of the Cal Fed water project, however, overshadows all of that. Combined with a wetlands conversion project now under way to the east, there is trouble on the horizon for farmers.

Cal Fed could change the irrigation landscape of the delta and the county, Rio Vista participants were warned. And the wetlands project could eventually put 25,000 to 40,000 acres of farmland north of Rio Vista under water.

Growth's drift onto prime agricultural soil is nothing to ignore, but the most serious peril comes on the water front. #

Politicians, residents must stand up for Valley water

Fresno Bee - September 9, Commentary by Kole M. Upton, chairman of the Friant Water Users Authority

Without significant local outrage in the next several months, the future of this Valley will be decided by federal and state bureaucrats who are ambivalent, at best, to this area and its people.

The CalFed hearing process is winding down with a hearing at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Convention Center in Visalia. The hearing is for comments on the CalFed draft plan that panders to the view of the radical environmentalists that no new storage is currently needed in California. The view is that California's water future needs can be met by increased conservation in agriculture. The translation is that we in the Valley are expendable.

The second attack comes from the Interior Department with its demand that all Central Valley Project (CVP) contracts be renegotiated and signed before the departure of the Clinton administration. Apparently, there was a realization by the political appointees that their time to permanently reallocate the

Central Valley's water supply was almost up. In the opening briefing, I thought the government was dictating our terms of surrender rather than their negotiating position.

We have been informed of two of the provisions in these new 25-year contracts. One is that they may not be renewable. In other words, the surface water that is currently used conjunctively with the underground may not be available after these contracts. This will make this area totally dependent on the underground, which is already severely overdrafted.

The second provision is a draconian measure called "tiered water pricing" that makes federal surface water so expensive that farmers will be forced to use the underground even in the wet years instead of saving it for drought years.

There are two groups causing this upcoming disaster. Foremost, are the radical enviros from San Francisco and Washington, D.C., (some within the government) demanding that their view prevail despite science and common sense to the contrary. Their priority is to inflict their political view on California's citizens regardless of the consequences.

Sadly, the second group of culprits are our own elected representatives. They have been unable or unwilling to effectively take on the radical enviros on any water issue.

In the Calfed process, all interests, other than the radical enviros, including urban, business, agriculture and unions have endorsed the need for new storage. Thus, it is baffling why our legislators cannot put together a coalition to bring common sense to this issue and ensure California's reasonable transition to the next century.

What have the water people been doing? Should we not have been demanding assistance from our elected representatives? Let me tell our sad story.

On the U.S. Senate side, one senator is not well versed about water issues in the Valley. The other one understands the issue and can be helpful if you can get past her chief of staff who has shown little sympathy for Valley water concerns.

In the House, we have four pleasant fellows, two Democrats and two Republicans. Unfortunately, they have apparently little influence with their colleagues. We have been told there can be no change to water law because no one in Congress has the political courage to stand up to the radical environmentalists.

We in the Valley have established effective relationships among all local water interests including business, urban, environmental fishermen and agriculture. We have even managed to establish harmonious relationships with some Bay Area environmental groups and Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles. Why cannot our legislators build on these positive working relationships?

Those of us directors in districts receiving federal water will shortly be facing a tough choice. We can sign the contract and allow this area to suffer the inevitable consequences. Or, we can refuse to sign unless the contract is written to ensure this area an adequate and affordable water supply for the future. According to one Bureau of Reclamation official, this option will result in the water being offered to another area.

Citizens of the Valley can affect this decision. If enough of us demanded fairness for this area in federal and state water policy, it would make a difference. For this farmer, the time for civility and politeness has almost run out. It is time for our elected representatives to do the jobs for which they were elected. #

Assembly Passes Water Measure; After compromises are made, legislators approve plan to put \$1.9-million bond issue on March ballot, Los Angeles Times - September 11, by Virginia Ellis, staff writer

After hours of rancorous debate and behind-the-scenes deal-making, the state Assembly passed a \$1.9-billion water bond issue Friday, minutes before adjourning for the year.

The measure, sent to Gov. Gray Davis for his expected signature, would increase water supplies in Southern California and provide flood control for northern areas of the state.

Swayed by promises from Davis that at least \$40 million would be spent on Republican projects, 15 GOP lawmakers switched their votes to give Democrats the two-thirds majority required to OK the measure for the March 2000 ballot.

"This has been a two-year ordeal to put a water bond on the ballot," said a jubilant Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa (D-Los Angeles). "This was big."

In the end, it was the personal intervention of Davis, who strongly supported the bond proposal, that persuaded Republicans to give up their opposition and take his offer to channel more money to projects they supported.

"He just charmed them," one Democratic staffer said.

The Republicans demanded--and Davis agreed--to put the promises in writing: \$20 million in next year's budget to finish paying for a study of the state's water needs and another \$20 million from the bond issue that would be used for projects in GOP districts.

Scott Baugh (R-Huntington Beach), leader of the Assembly's minority Republicans, said Davis also gave them a commitment that he would implement the results of the study even if it called for the construction of additional reservoirs to store water.

"That [reservoirs] has never been part of our debate with the liberals," he said.

The bond issue had cleared the Senate on Thursday night but bogged down Friday in the Assembly, when angry Republicans complained that Democrats had sidestepped a critical future need--the construction of more reservoirs so that vast amounts of water could be stored in wet years for use in dry years.

"We have condemned the next generation to desperate measures," said Assemblyman Bill Leonard (R-San Bernardino).

It later passed 65-11.

Calling the bond issue a "beautiful hodgepodge of political pork," Assemblyman Tom McClintock (R-Northridge) said the proposal earmarked funds for dozens of lawmakers' pet projects but ignored the state's desperate need for more reservoir storage.

His remarks drew the ire of Assemblywoman Helen Thomson (D-Davis), a Northern California lawmaker who had lived through several floods. "You call this political. You call it full of pork. I think you are full of something else," she said angrily.

After the first vote when Republican opposition prevented Democrats from getting a two-thirds majority, the proposal seemed destined for defeat.

It was the second time in a week that Assembly Republicans, outnumbered and powerless on most issues, had used the two-thirds requirement to block a Democrat-backed proposal. Earlier, they had killed a proposed constitutional amendment by Senate President Pro Tem John Burton (D-San Francisco) that would have provided millions of dollars for transportation.

Even after Davis stepped in, a few Republicans, including Baugh, voted against the measure, saying they objected to a decision to move it from the November 2000 ballot to the March ballot. The decision to make it March came after polling showed that it would have overwhelming support.

Assemblyman Mike Machado (D-Linden), one of the architects of the bond issue, said it was carefully designed to provide something for all the water factions in the state--farmers and environmentalists, Northern California and Southern California.

To attract support in Southern California, the proposal funneled millions of dollars into projects that would expand underground storage, boost recycling and encourage water conservation. It earmarked \$235 million for flood protection and watershed improvements along the Santa Ana River.

For flood-prone Northern California, it set aside money to improve levees and finance flood control projects.

Other funds were provided to restore wildlife habitat and protect salmon. Agricultural interests were given funds to help control pollution from farm runoff.

Several projects were added to the proposal in an attempt to win support from individual Republican lawmakers. They included funds for pollution control at Huntington Beach, financing for a Kern River Parkway Project, and money for the establishment of a San Joaquin Valley Water Institute and a Delta Science Center. #

\$2 billion water bond passed by Legislature
San Diego Union-Tribune - September 11, By Michael Gardner, Copley News Service

A nearly \$2 billion statewide water bond that includes millions for projects in San Diego County was approved by the Legislature late last night.

Democratic Gov. Gray Davis worked into the night to rescue the measure, meeting behind closed doors to persuade hesitant Republicans to support the bond.

He promised to back new reservoirs, against the wishes of environmentalists, if studies now under way conclude they are needed. He also pledged to spend an additional \$20 million on those studies.

"No matter where you go, this bond will affect almost every community in the state," said Michael Bustamante, the governor's press secretary.

The late-night meeting culminated hours of negotiations on the bond, which had been stalled three votes short of the necessary two-thirds majority for placing the measure on the March ballot. While Democrats hold 47 of the Assembly's 80 seats, they need at least seven GOP votes to pass bonds.

The bond ultimately was approved by the Assembly on a lopsided 65-11 vote. The Senate late Thursday approved the bond 29-6.

Only a simple majority of voters is needed to approve the bond in March.

As usual with water issues, the bond battle was rife with politics.

The bitter feud between the San Diego County Water Authority and the Los Angeles-based Metropolitan Water District over Colorado River supplies threatened the measure throughout intense negotiations Thursday in the state Senate. And the ongoing dispute between advocates of new reservoirs and those opposed to damming rivers and flooding valleys kept the Assembly from reaching agreement for hours yesterday.

Under the bond, the San Diego County Water Authority would receive \$3 million to study a new aqueduct to deliver water from the Colorado River.

Millions more would be set aside for pollution cleanup, conservation and sea-water intrusion control programs -- all important to the San Diego region.

An additional \$5 million is included for a flood-control project needed to widen state Route 52 in Santee. The road has been plagued by a traffic bottleneck.

San Diego County government would receive \$325,000 to pay off a debt from fighting floods.

A bloc of six Southern California counties, including San Diego, automatically would receive priority for 60 cents out of every \$1 set aside for many of the programs.

Statewide, the programs would produce 1 million more acre-feet of water for a growing, thirsty state desperate for new supplies, backers claimed. That could double the amount of water faster than any costly new reservoir would, they said.

Defeat for the water bond was just a few votes away at any time, despite a rare alliance among some of the more influential interests in California, including some environmentalists, the building industry, business and labor.

The initial skirmish was fought in the Senate, where San Diego-area lawmakers had placed in the bond a provision aimed at its nemesis, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

While virtually unenforceable, the provision would require warring factions in the negotiations over sharing Colorado River water to reach an agreement by Oct. 15. That's five months before the bond goes before voters.

If a deal is not reached by that date, Davis would have the right to unilaterally set his own terms for dividing up California's share of the river water. But there are legal issues, such as whether that provision would circumvent federal water rights.

The stalled Colorado River settlement talks have threatened a transfer of 200,000 acre-feet of water annually from the Imperial Valley to the San Diego County Water Authority.

The bond provision was mostly symbolic, conceded Sen. David Kelley, R-Idyllwild, who represents portions of north and east San Diego County. "It is a statement made out of frustration," he said.

Symbolism aside, San Diego representatives were able to add an additional \$3 million to subsidize environmental reports and feasibility analyses for a new aqueduct.

The water authority already has launched a review to explore whether it could build an aqueduct from the Colorado River to San Diego. The water agency then could buy water from Mexico or other Western states with rights to some of the river water.

Once the bond cleared the Senate, it faced rough sailing in the Assembly, where many Republicans balked. In what amounted to an almost carbon copy of the debate last year, when a similar bond was defeated, GOP lawmakers blasted deal-makers for providing cash to expand studies of new reservoirs.

"It's time for them to get real about water supply," Assemblyman Keith Olberg, R-Victorville, said yesterday.

Democrats and a handful of GOP lawmakers countered that the state already has \$40 million budgeted for water storage studies and stressed the positives from the proposed water bond: cleaner water, conservation and flood protection.

Tempers soon flared as the debate heated.

"You call it full of political pork. I think you're full of something else," said a shaking Assemblywoman Helen Thomson, D-Davis, as she waved a report on flooding damage and deaths two years ago north of Sacramento.

California's voters last approved a water bond -- for a total of \$1 billion -- in 1996.

Among the major provisions in the new proposal are:

- * \$630 million to improve water reliability through ground-water recharging, improving the Sacramento Delta supply and helping water districts with tools like pumps to speed deliveries.
- * \$468 million to protect watersheds from pollution and erosion.
- * \$355 million for clean water programs, farm and city water conservation and sea-water intrusion control.
- * \$292 million for flood protection, including shoring up levees. #

Meeting to tap ideas of state's water future

Bakersfield Californian - September 12, by Wendy Owen, staff writer

Water is the essential ingredient needed for all life - without it, we perish.

Yet, the general public appears carefree over potential water problems on the horizon. California could be in trouble in 20 years as the population grows by more than 15 million people. The water demand for drinking, showers, landscaping or just flushing the toilet puts a strain on supplies to other areas such as agriculture, industry and endangered fish.

"People assume if it's coming out of the faucets, it's OK. I think what will really get people's attention will be another drought," said Mary Lou Cotton, Kern County Water Agency planner.

The state and federal governments aren't waiting for the next drought.

Through a joint effort called CalFed, the two governments have spent 4 1-2 years developing a plan to meet California's future water needs. One of its last public hearings is Tuesday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Visalia Convention Center San Joaquin Room, 303 E. Acequia Ave., in Visalia.

In June, a final plan will be released that will determine the state's future water distribution from the Bay-Delta through the California Aqueduct to Southern California. Implementation will take place in stages over 25 to 30 years.

The Bay-Delta is the largest estuary on the West Coast providing habitat for hundreds of unique species. Water from the Delta is pumped into the aqueduct, a concrete artery of water that cuts a path from the San Francisco area through western Kern County to north of San Diego. It quenches the thirst of 22 million Californians, more than 7 million acres of farmland and ensures a healthy economy.

In Kern County, the concern centers on agriculture. Farmers look to the Delta.

The aqueduct supplies water to more than 600,000 acres in Kern County, which generates more than \$3 billion in economic activity and 60,000 jobs annually, according to the Kern County Water Agency.

Local farmers have seen the impact of a water shortage, Cotton said. In the 1980s and early 1990s, California suffered a six-year drought and water was cut to Kern County farmers, causing several to leave land fallow. A few went out of business as a result.

Farmers are always among the crowd at CalFed hearings and a Kern County contingent is likely at the Visalia meeting to ensure agriculture interests are included in the final plan.

So far, they and their water supplier, the Kern County Water Agency, have raised several questions regarding the proposal - particularly, their perception that it is weighted toward environmental interests.

Environmentalists have pushed to leave as much water in the Delta as possible and promote conservation of existing supplies rather than building more reservoirs or boosting groundwater storage.

The plan stresses water conservation such as recycling farmland runoff, low-flow showers and wildlife refuge water management for the next seven years without considering water storage, Cotton said.

"That's just not acceptable," she said.

"If you think at the end of seven years you might not have achieved enough conservation, we need to know now in order to figure out where we would build these (water storage facilities)," Cotton said.

CalFed public affairs director Valerie Holcomb said the plan is not weighted toward conservation and storage will be included. CalFed is investigating potential storage areas and will identify them in the first few years of the program.

But Holcomb said state regulations limit water storage as an initial option.

"We cannot get new storage approved unless we show that we're using the existing water supply efficiently," she said.

In addition to conservation, the plan will improve existing channels and systems that move water through the Delta and create operable fish barriers to protect endangered species from the pumps in the Delta, among other structural improvements, Holcomb said.

"The purpose of the program is not to increase the water supply but to improve water management of our water supply so it is more reliable," she said.#

**Water storage looked at to solve shortage problem
Oroville Mercury-Register - September 13, By Nick Ellena, special to Mercury-Register**

Surface water storage will not be overlooked as a possible component for solving the Bay-Delta problem according to the latest CALFED Program newsletter.

Additional water storage is viewed by many as an essential need in meeting shortages expected from escalating demands on current water resources.

Environmental concerns, however, have placed the construction of new dams on hold.

The lead item in the August issue of the CALFED Bay-Delta program News states that "an important work effort" over the next few months will be an Integrated Storage Investigation (ISI) to evaluate storage options and operations.

One of the stated strategies being considered by the CALFED Program to achieve its goals in fixing the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento Delta, is water management that seeks to achieve a reliable supply for all beneficial uses of water.

"This strategy relies on an assortment of tools to fulfill its goals, including storage," the bulletin states, adding:

"Through the ISI, CALFED is evaluating various types of storage, the appropriate mix of storage options, and operational strategies. Types of storage being evaluated are surface storage, groundwater storage, conjunctive use programs and power facilities re-operation. The ISI will also evaluate the potential to remove fish migration barriers."

New reservoirs as a surface storage option have been the focal point of major controversy.

The Butte County Board of Supervisors, and water agencies including the Butte Basin Water Users Association and the Butte County Water Commission, plus water districts, have been hammering on the need for more reservoirs.

The ISI is expected to continue into the implementation phase of the CALFED Program to provide integration between project-specific feasibility studies and environmental documentation processes.

A major issue in Butte County is the possible tapping of groundwater in Butte Basin as a potential storage facility.

The fear is that the capacity of the aquifer would be overestimated, resulting in mandated drawdown of a magnitude that would not leave enough to meet current needs, especially agriculture, or to serve expected population growth.

The bulletin states that an important milestone of the ISI will be reached by April 2000 when the final CALFED Program Environmental Report will be released.

"By that time, conclusions will be drawn from the ongoing ISI studies to better define the role of storage," the bulletin stated.

The CALFED bulletin states that participation and comments from stakeholders and the general public are key elements of the ISI. #

**Water Commission pens letter to CALFED
Oroville Mercury-Register - September 13, By Nick Ellena, special to Mercury-Register**

The Butte County Water Commission has some pointed criticism for the proposed CALFED fix for the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento Delta as being potentially injurious to Butte and other northern counties.

Commissioners this week voted to recommend to the Board of Supervisors a letter be sent to Lester Snow, executive director of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, stating their concerns in emphatic terms.

The letter would constitute the county's contribution to the comment period on a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on solutions to the Delta problem being proposed by CALFED.

The EIR was released for public review on June 23. The deadline for public comment is September 23.

Concerns expressed include the fear the counties of origin such as Butte, could lose their water rights, face having water taken away they may need for their own future, and the lack of explicit protection against being saddled with another crippling unfunded state mandate.

The letter was prepared by Vickie Newlin, administrative analyst for the county's new Department of Water and Resource Conservation, who submitted it to the commission for possible amendments. There were none.

"We want them to understand that they should think about the north state as something else than just a place to get the water," Newlin said.

Initiated in 1995 by Governor Pete Wilson, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program is a cooperative effort 15 state and federal regulatory agencies to restore the ecosystem to health and enhance beneficial usage.

The Bay-Delta, a maze of tributaries, sloughs and islands, covers more than 738,000 acres in five counties. It provides drinking water for two-thirds of the state's population, irrigates more than seven million acres of highly productive agricultural land, supports more than 750 plant and animal species and is the largest estuary on the country's West Coast.

The draft EIR is to be followed by a revised report reflecting the choice of a preferred alternative that would be slated for implementation.

The letter endorsed by the commission will be placed on the agenda for the Board of Supervisors' September 14 meeting, Newlin said. It addressed four areas of concern.

Storage

It strongly endorsed new water storage facilities to provide new water supplies instead of merely reallocating existing supplies from one area to another.

It would make for greater control of stream flows to improve fisheries, enhance flood protection and save lives and property.

"Although CALFED claims that their program is not charged with addressing flood control, additional storage for flood control needs to be a component of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program," the letter stated.

Another benefit listed would be greater protection of groundwater supplies targeted for transfer from one area to another.

"It is imperative that CALFED not rely solely on the groundwater supplies of the Sacramento Valley to address the water shortages of the entire state. This practice would adversely impact the economic viability of those local communities reliant on the existing groundwater supplies," it stated.

It declared the needs of the Sacramento Valley communities must be considered first to protect their area of origin rights.

"The concept of transferring water outside of Butte County without increasing the yield through additional storage is unacceptable," it read.

It stated that CALFED must provide assurances that construction of storage north of the Delta will begin as soon as possible and that it has to be made a required component of the program.

Ecosystem Restoration

CALFED must not confuse working with watershed conservancies as to mean obtaining local government and landowner cooperation. The conservancies may represent only a very small portion of the population; other stakeholders need to be sought and consulted.

Also, local government, as the representative of the people, needs a place at the table.

"Unlike many watershed conservancies, elected officials represent and are accountable to, all the citizens of the county," the letter read.

To be successful, CALFED ultimately will have to involve local government in watershed management and restoration decisions because it is the land use authority.

There are concerns over the proposed creation of a river meander corridor. It could use up to 15,000 acres of agricultural land from Chico landing to Red Bluff. A meander corridor would change cropping patterns from orchards to low production crops. This would be an "unacceptable loss" of prime agricultural land and a revenue loss to the county that would impair its ability to provide services including health, safety and welfare programs.

In addition it would face the county with increased services during floods.

"Increasing our tasks while decreasing our tax base is unacceptable," the letter stated.

Opposition also was stated to the concept of eliminating bank protection, bridge piers, bridge abutments, fish screens and other structures from meander corridors. Removal of these "hard points" has the potential of costing the county millions of dollars in modifying its infrastructures, the letter claimed.

"The restoration program "could be devastating to rural counties like the county of Butte," it stated.

Area of Origin Water Rights

It expressed concern that these are not being considered, despite Area of Origin protection statutes.

Any groundwater banking program developed by CALFED must contain a formal agreement between local, state and federal agencies to ensure that local supplies are not diminished.

Financing

All financing strategies should be for the life of the program. The letter asks how CALFED proposes to maintain the various watershed management and ecosystem programs without continued financial support?

The fear is that when restoration has taken place and public funds run out, local government will be held responsible for maintenance and upkeep.

This would constitute what local officials call an unfunded mandated program, such as those that the Board of Supervisors claim have been bleeding Butte and other counties for years and causing an erosion of local services.

"The CALFED Program needs to clarify their financing plan and specify their sources of funding for the duration of the program," the latter said. "To proceed with a program of this magnitude without secured funding would be remiss." #

Valley growers call CalFed water plan unbalanced Fresno Bee - September 14, By Robert Rodriguez, staff writer

Dozens of central San Joaquin Valley farmers blasted the massive water-improvement effort known as CalFed Monday, saying it's not the balanced approach they need.

The farmers were among more than 75 people who attended a public hearing Monday on the CalFed program - a federal and state effort to restore the San Joaquin-Sacramento River Delta's ecosystem, shore up delta levees, curb water pollution, and recycle and conserve water.

Although CalFed is designed to break the gridlock over how water is managed, farmers Monday told a panel of agency officials they felt left out.

Farmers say CalFed is not addressing water-supply reliability with the same kind of attention it gives water quality and environmental issues.

An official with Westlands Water District - which provides irrigation water to more than 600 family farmers in Fresno and Kings counties - asked CalFed officials whether their true intent is to wipe out west-side agriculture.

"If that is what you want, let's put it on the table right now," said Al Dingle, president of the Westlands board of directors. "If that is what you want, you can continue down the same path you are headed."

Dingle and others said they had placed high hopes on the CalFed program as a way to fix delta problems and restore water-supply reliability.

"But those hopes are gone," he said. "CalFed hasn't implemented any fixes. The system is as broken and out-of-balance today as it was four years ago."

Westlands receives its water from the environmentally sensitive delta and has been heavily involved in the CalFed process.

Mike Wade, executive director of California Water Coalition, dismissed the idea suggested by some of trying to conserve water by eliminating crops such as cotton.

Cotton is a major commodity in the San Joaquin Valley.

"California cotton is valued as some of the best in the world," Wade said. "In the Westlands Water District, cotton uses approximately 2 1/2 acre-feet of water per acre, per year, a figure that is equal to some crops, less than some others."

Other farmers said they have been wrongly accused of selfishly seeking additional above-ground water storage.

Modesto farmer Paul Wenger said farmers - some who have already lost 30% of their supply - want a dependable water source.

The new demand for water is coming from cities and the environment, not agriculture, Wenger said. Farmers are growing more crops with less water.

"CalFed should not sacrifice farmers and farmworkers for the needs of wildlife," Wenger said.

CalFed was started four years ago and represents the efforts of 16 state and federal agencies.

In June, the agency released a 4,000-page draft report that lays out a 30-year, \$10 billion plan to address restoration of the Delta, water quality, levee protection and water supplies.

As part of the effort, CalFed officials are holding public hearings statewide to collect comments.

The next area public hearing is at 6 p.m. today in Visalia at the Convention Center, San Joaquin Room, 303 E. Acequia. #

Farmers condemn CalFed, Modesto Bee - September 14, By Patrick Giblin, staff writer

For more than two hours Monday night, speaker after speaker told a panel from the CalFed Bay-Delta Program what they thought of the current proposal to solve California's water problems:

"You have a disaster in the making and it will only take one dry year to prove it," said Jean Sagouspe, representing the Delta-Mendota Water Authority.

Sagouspe was one of 41 people representing farmers, agricultural industries, and water districts in the San Joaquin Valley who said the CalFed plan does not have enough water storage to meet everyone's needs. Nearly 200 people attended the public hearing, which was held at the Los Banos fairgrounds.

CalFed was formed in 1994 between state and federal agencies to solve the water problems that have plagued California for more than a century. The goal of the program is to improve the quality of the state's water supply, ecosystem and the integrity of the hundreds of miles of levees along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers.

The 4,000-page draft report, released in June, calls for more groundwater storage and says that more reservoir storage may also be needed. The report also identifies a dozen sites in the state for new reservoir storage and says the issue will be studied further.

Most of the people at the meeting were upset that new reservoir storage will be discussed for at least seven more years -- the first phase of the 30-year long project.

They said new reservoir storage should be the No. 1 priority of CalFed before anything else is attempted. Otherwise, they fear, agriculture will be expected to sacrifice its water to meet the increased needs of the environment and cities as spelled out in CalFed.

Several speakers pointed to the loss of 500,000 acres of irrigation water this year when the Tracy pumps in the delta were shut down to save fish. The shutdown hurt dozens of farms in California and resulted in higher food and cotton prices.

"CalFed should not sacrifice this area for the needs of other areas in the state," said Paul Wenger of Modesto. "CalFed should not take away jobs for wildlife."

The meeting was only one of three public hearings held in Central California on the report. The other was held in Stockton last month. The third meeting will be held today in Visalia.

The board will hold several more public hearings in California until early October. A revised environmental impact report is expected to be released in April followed by a 30-day public comment period. The final plan for CalFed is scheduled to be certified in June 2000.

More information about CalFed can be found on the Internet at <http://calfed.ca.gov> or by calling (800) 700-5752. #

County irked over CalFed proposal
Redding Record Searchlight - September 13, By Tim Hearnden, staff writer

A proposal to overhaul California's water system would significantly change land-use practices in Shasta County and hurt the north state's economy, Shasta County and a regional agency believe.

In comments set to be approved by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, the county also contends the CALFED Bay-Delta Plan would raise the cost of water during times of scarcity and may take too much water from the north state to use elsewhere.

The county believes land-use implications from CALFED would affect such things as transportation, because development would move to areas with easier access to water, explained Pat Minturn, the county's assistant public works director.

The county's comments and remarks from the seven-county Northern Sacramento Valley CALFED Advisory Group will be considered by supervisors during their 9 a.m. meeting Tuesday in the Shasta County Courthouse, 1500 Court St., Room 203, Redding.

"I feel there will be significant economic impacts if this is implemented," Minturn said. "It will raise the cost of development. It will become necessary to construct oil-water separators and settling basins. It will be necessary to set aside grassy areas that (runoff) would travel through. It will become more difficult to put storm drains in, and it will make some land undevelopable."

The two agencies are submitting comments as part of the review period for CALFED's 4,200-page environmental report. The report is the latest step in a long effort to enhance water quality in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the source of 80 percent of California's drinking water, without threatening supplies for farms and cities.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Plan would widen and deepen channels, increase the capacity of state and federal pumps that send water to the Central Valley and Southern California, expand the transfer of water between private entities, restore fish habitats, improve conservation and recycling, and increase storage.

The north valley advisory group, which includes leaders from Shasta, Tehama, Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sutter and Yolo counties, said the region would bear the brunt of remedies for the poor delta water quality even though it isn't contributing to the problem.

The quality of Sacramento River water is excellent, Minturn said, but it mixes in the delta with sea water, which contains natural pollutants.

"In its current form, there appears to be limited benefits in this plan for Northern California water users," the group asserts. "The preferred alternative provides no new water for our region, and advocates that water and land will be removed from agriculture to compensate for bay-delta problems that were not caused by our actions."

Shasta County likes language in the latest draft that gives local areas more control over their own groundwater supplies, Minturn said, but the county asserts proposed restrictions on grading for development would cause the development to go elsewhere.

"Like stomping down on a ketchup bottle, it just goes somewhere else," Minturn said. "Where it's going to squirt to is agricultural areas and areas that currently have water supplies available ... All of the infrastructure is developed, but because of the restrictions on grading that development is pushed somewhere else."

People and agencies have until Sept. 23 to comment on the CALFED plan. A public meeting will be held Sept. 21 at the DoubleTree Hotel on Hilltop Drive in Redding, beginning with an information session at 6 p.m. #

**CalFed plan adds fears of utility hike; Water officials query proposal
Oakland Tribune - September 13, By Mary Nauman, staff writer**

Concerned that a \$10 billion plan proposed by CalFed will cause local water rates to go up, officials from the Alameda County Water District are lobbying to change the plan.

CalFed, which oversees water issues for the San Francisco Bay and San Joaquin Delta, released a 30-year plan in June that is designed to balance environmental concerns with drinking water needs.

The Delta's water ranks among the bottom 10 percent, placing it among the worst in the country for bromide, a cancer-causing byproduct that stems from farming. Therefore, CalFed's plan focuses on ways to eliminate bromide at the source.

But Alameda County water officials say they are afraid this won't be enough to eliminate the problem.

If it isn't, the water district thinks it may be caught between the Delta's high bromide levels and the federal government's increasingly tough drinking water regulations, officials said.

This could mean the district would have to overhaul its new treatment facility on Mission Boulevard to include even more modern water treatment equipment, said Leasa Cleland, the district's water resources planning manager.

And rate payers would have to pick up the tab, she said.

"Definitely over the next five to 10 years, it's going to become more expensive, no doubt about that," Cleland said. "Without a better supply, we can't be sure that we'll be able to meet future quality regulations or meet water supply needs on a reliable basis."

But CalFed officials say they are confident their plan will reduce the Delta's bromide levels. It calls for cutting back on pesticides and expanding agricultural conservation incentive programs. A committee also will make sure the plan is meeting certain goals over the years, said Valerie Holcomb, spokeswoman for CalFed.

"We think the actions identified can help achieve our water quality objectives," Holcomb said.

The local water district is urging CalFed to add a backup plan to its proposal. This way, if the current proposal doesn't work, then a second proposal can quickly be put into effect, said Karl Stinson, the district's operations manager.

"If we don't have any backup plans in place, it might set us back seven years," Stinson said. "Until we know it's not needed, we can always not use it. It'll still be money well-spent."

One hurdle for the district, however, is that the only viable backup plan is extremely controversial.

It calls for building an aqueduct that starts on the Sacramento River, goes around the Delta and reconnects at a pumping plant south of the Delta. This will help the drinking water avoid the farming chemicals that create bromide, Stinson said.

But officials know this plan would spark heated debate because it is similar to another project proposed more than 30 years ago. That project, known as the peripheral canal, was overwhelmingly voted down by residents.

Although the aqueduct would be much smaller than the canal -- the aqueduct would move 29,600 gallons per second compared to the peripheral canal's 162,800 gallons per second -- the idea is still very unpopular with taxpayer groups, environmentalists and residents of all parts of California, Holcomb said.

This controversy is exactly why the aqueduct should be planned ahead of time, water district officials say. It will take years to plan, and developing a blueprint now will give them a jump start if the first plan isn't successful, Stinson said.

But Holcomb disagrees.

"It's not very efficient to take all your actions right out of the gate," she said. "You start out taking actions and see how they respond. Then, if you need to, you take additional actions."

There is a possibility that CalFed will consider an aqueduct anyway, she said. If the oversight committee determines the first plan is not working, it will consider building a small aqueduct from Hood to the McCullamy River, Holcomb said.

Alameda County Water District officials have spoken out at several town hall meetings about CalFed's proposal, urging them to begin outlining a backup plan. If that proves unsuccessful, they plan to lobby state representatives who will begin considering CalFed's budget next June.

"We're not promoting one particular backup plan, we just want to supply good quality water and to have a good quantity water," Cleland said. "We just want to plan ahead and avoid the crisis, rather than react when the crisis happens."

A public hearing about CalFed's proposal will be held Sept. 22 in Room 203 at the Sacramento Convention Center, located at 1030 15th Street from 6 to 9 p.m. For a copy of the proposal, call (800) 900-3587. #

**CalFed's recommendations on water prompt complaints at Visalia hearing
Fresno Bee - September 15, By Marc Benjamin, staff writer**

When the CalFed process started taking shape more than four years ago, the objective was to forge a compromise among California's competing water interests.

But, if the prevailing opinion of 350 people pronounced during a Tuesday night hearing in the Visalia Convention Center was any indication, all that has been forged in those four years is a greater wedge between environmental and agricultural interests.

It did not take long for the criticism to mount during the meeting, which boasted the largest crowd out of the 13 hearings held thus far on the CalFed process. Hearings remain in Chico, Redding and Sacramento.

Sen. Jim Costa (D-Fresno) kicked off the meeting by saying CalFed process leaders have become mired in politics. He said the 16 state and federal agencies that comprise the CalFed working group need to make what he described as "midcourse corrections." Those corrections are long-term fixes for agriculture, such as additional above-ground water storage and continuing to provide for urban growth and the environment.

"CalFed has been unfortunately allowing politics to create its direction," Costa said.

The preferred alternative, which was released in June, offers a 30-year, \$10 billion plan for restoration of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta's ecosystem, levee system improvements, water conservation and recycling, as well as proposals to curb water pollution.

During the comment period, farmers said environmental interests have had the upper hand in the preferred alternative of the CalFed plan.

"I think the draft plan is pandering to radical environmentalists because there is no new storage," said Kole Upton of Chowchilla, a Friant Water Users Authority board member.

Don Mills of the Kings County Water District claimed the final report failed to practice what it had preached four years ago.

"Instead of the balanced water plan that we were promised, we have a massive land and water grab by state and federal government agencies in the name of environmental restoration," Mills said. "CalFed has lost the fragile balance that gave us hope when it began."

He said a recommendation in the plan for a 720,000 acre-foot expansion of Millerton Lake reservoir is encouraging to a point.

"The increased water storage will help overcome the Valley's long-term ground-water overdraft problem, and make water transfers more timely and beneficial without additional conveyance facilities," he said. "Unfortunately, CalFed only wants to study the Millerton project for the first five or six years, there is no funding or promise of construction."

Striking a more conciliatory tone was John McCaull, a legislative representative for the National Audubon Society.

"I believe we need to develop more partnerships between agriculture and environmental interests - I hope we can get away from the rhetoric and move toward common ground," he said. "I don't believe environmental restoration needs to be done on the back of agriculture." #

**This meeting is vital to the future of our water, Oakland Tribune - September 14, 1999
Commentary by Pietro Parravano, member of California Bay-Delta Advisory Committee**

Tonight, Bay Area citizens have an opportunity to speak out on a plan to resolve the decades-old environmental and water problems plaguing California's Bay-Delta system.

The stakes couldn't be higher. The San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the most important estuary on the West Coast of North and South America. This system of rivers and complex waterways once teemed with waterfowl and wildlife, supported important fisheries and provided a transportation corridor for ships from Central Valley ports to the ocean.

It produces the largest salmon run left in the lower 48 states and supports the largest fishery south of British Columbia. It abounds in recreational fishing and boating. And, of course, water diversions from the

Delta and its rivers established agriculture in the arid areas of the great valley and now supply drinking water to two-thirds of all Californians.

The Bay-Delta is threatened. Demands on its resources over the past 150 years and piecemeal planning have left this system in a sorry condition.

San Mateo County residents have done a good job of airing their views on issues ranging from coastal transportation to protecting the Bay from fill. We now have an opportunity to speak out about the very future of California.

It's about your opportunity to buy a fresh salmon off a boat in Half Moon Bay. It's about your ability to buy fresh produce from a local farmer. It's about a Bay we can all enjoy.

CALFED, the consortium of state and federal agencies created by the December 1994 Bay-Delta Accord, has been working with various stakeholders and special interests in developing the plan to restore the Bay-Delta and a "reliable" water supply. Over the past three years, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program has provided \$177 million for resource restoration projects in the Bay-Delta system. In 1999, \$85 million more is available for similar projects. Over the next seven to 10 years, \$4.4 billion is planned to fund CALFED Bay-Delta projects.

CALFED's current plan, which we all need to comment on, contemplates both a massive infusion of tax dollars to pay for environmental fixes and the redistribution of water flows by increasing water storage, even building more dams and reservoirs and, perhaps, even a peripheral canal to divert Sacramento River water south. Some of the "fixes" contemplated are old and controversial, such as a canal or more surface reservoirs. Some of the ideas are new and have broad support, such as water conservation and reuse projects.

There is much to praise in the CALFED proposal and much to criticize. While the plan is generous in its proposed funding, it is terribly short on fundamental changes needed to assure reliable water supplies for California's economy, environment and quality of life. To date, CALFED's leadership has not wanted to take on the fundamental policy questions the state must tackle.

Those fundamental changes needed in California for a secure water future include: mandatory statewide groundwater management (only Texas and California have no such programs); water metering (which is critical for any water conservation program); water rights for instream uses (essential to any "environmental water account"); and a statewide planning process for growth around available water supplies. These are difficult issues, but they can no longer be avoided.

Moreover, California has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, with the restructuring of its energy markets allowing competition, to "clean up" and re-operate hydropower operations. The divestiture of hydro facilities could provide some additional water at critical times for diversion. More importantly, correcting fish problems upstream at the hydro dams and diversions could mean fewer restrictions on Delta diversions for agriculture and municipal uses.

To date, however, CALFED has failed to act in a timely manner to take advantage of the opportunity. The public hearings are our chance to prod CALFED into making hydro operations a top priority in their planning.

On June 25, CALFED released its revised draft environmental document; it will be the focus of tonight's hearing. The plan should not simply be about "peace in our time" for California's water wars. It must be thoughtful and thorough. That is the only way to achieve a lasting peace.

The direction CALFED takes will surely determine the future of the Bay-Delta and all that most of us treasure as Californians. Don't pass up this opportunity to make your voice heard. Our future is worth fighting for. #

**Plan Designed to Bring Delta Foes Together Inflames Debate Instead
Water: State and federal proposal to save the key watershed angers farmers, environmentalists
and suppliers. Its future appears threatened.
Los Angeles Times - September 16, By Tony Perry, staff writer**

After four years of urging the state's water rivals to cast aside their differences long enough to save the sickly Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, state and federal officials instead are being barraged with uncompromising rhetoric from all quarters.

At a series of public hearings throughout the state, officials from Calfed, the program aimed at saving California's major watershed, are on the receiving end of a litany of complaints and dire predictions.

The delta, which supplies water to 22 million people, is the lifeblood of the state's trillion-dollar economy.

The Calfed program is an attempt to improve its conditions by considering measures to clean up tributaries and control flooding and siltation.

But farmers say that the proposed plan tilts too heavily toward birds and fish. It would be ruinous, they say, to agricultural interests in the Central Valley by pushing tens of thousands of acres out of production by taking away water.

Environmentalists counter that the plan would signal a retreat in the fight to save imperiled wildlife and restore natural habitat. It would do nothing, they say, to curb the farmers' wasteful ways or to prohibit them from planting super-thirsty crops like alfalfa.

And the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which supplies water to six counties, says that the Calfed proposal does virtually nothing to improve the quality or reliability of water that flows south from the delta through the California Aqueduct.

All this is ominous for a program predicated on the optimistic notion that archenemies can be persuaded to reach a compromise rather than let the delta continue to suffer flooding, brackishness, contamination and loss of fish and wildlife.

When the Calfed effort was announced in 1994, it was hailed as the most ambitious watershed restoration program ever attempted in the United States--bringing together a Democratic administration in Washington, a Republican administration in Sacramento, and the usual suspects of California water wars: agribusiness, environmentalists and urban water districts.

The nonpartisan Sacramento-based Water Education Foundation refers to the delta as "probably the single most important aspect of California's complicated water picture," an aquatic switching yard for water destined for the San Francisco Bay area, Central Valley and Southern California.

From Silicon Valley to the smallest avocado patch outside Fallbrook, the state's trillion-dollar economy is inextricably linked to the health of the delta created by the confluence of the state's two major rivers. The 1,600-square-mile estuary provides a home to 120 species of fish and irrigates 200 different crops, including 45% of the nation's fruits and vegetables.

The first years of what is envisioned as a 30-year project have been consumed with studying the many issues, trying to bring together suspicious foes, and authorizing only the least controversial of projects. But now the time is fast approaching to make decisions that could cause considerable anger among one group or another. The Calfed staff, employees of state and federal agencies with a stake in the delta, hope to have a plan of action for big-ticket items by early next year and are midway through 15 public hearings from Redding to San Diego to test the political waters.

The waters are proving quite chilly. The regionalism and tribalism that have blocked previous efforts at restoring the delta are again reasserting themselves.

"What we're seeing now is people digging in to protect their positions," said Calfed Executive Director Lester Snow. "It is very distressing because we've made so much progress in other areas, but it's also predictable.

"The stakeholder-based process is arduous, long and frustrating, but for this kind of program it's the only way to go."

Despite all the tough talk of competing interests, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt says that he remains optimistic about Calfed.

"People are repositioning themselves during these hearings and that's normal," Babbitt said. "But the bottom line is that they have to realize that if we do nothing in the delta, it gets worse for every single stakeholder."

Babbitt says that his optimism is buoyed by an August meeting with Gov. Gray Davis, a fellow Democrat. Babbitt said he is convinced that Davis is fully engaged in the process and has the moxie to make Calfed a success. The two share authority to decide which projects Calfed will pursue.

So far, the politically cautious governor has not offended environmentalists or Northern Californians.

Yet the future of Calfed may hinge on whether Davis will risk the wrath of groups that are part of his core political constituency.

"Babbitt and Davis have the opportunity to lead in a very positive direction as long as they realize that governing from the middle does not mean governing without controversy," said Tim Quinn, the MWD's deputy general manager.

Thomas Hannigan, director of the state Department of Water Resources, said the Davis administration sees no need for a peripheral canal around the delta, a project despised by Northern California as a trick by Southern California to drain the Sacramento River. The MWD contends that the canal is needed to ensure that the water sent to the south in the California Aqueduct has not been tainted by the contaminants in the delta.

The \$1.97-billion water bond endorsed by Davis last week and set for the March ballot also demonstrates a cautious approach. A demand by Republicans to add money for reservoirs was thwarted by Davis—who acceded only to study whether reservoirs are needed.

The question of reservoirs is a flash point in the Calfed process. Calfed officials are studying a dozen possible sites where water could be stored.

Water districts and farmers say that increased water storage is necessary to prevent flooding and to capture water during rainy years that would otherwise be flushed into the San Francisco Bay and out to sea. Stored water could be used in dry years to prevent cutbacks.

The pro-storage side feels that the issue is going the way of the peripheral canal proposal.

"The political pressure is overriding the engineering and the science," Charley Wolk, a Fallbrook avocado farmer and chairman of the California Avocado Commission, told a Calfed hearing in San Diego this month. "I beg you not to let that happen."

To the environmentalists, storage is a code word for a return to the days that California thought it could solve its water problems with dams. There also is the fear that building reservoirs only avoids coming to grips with what they see as a continuing outrage: that 80% of the state's water is devoted to agriculture.

"The old strategy for water problems was to build massive facilities, ignore the environment and stick taxpayers with the bill," John McCaull of the California chapter of the Audubon Society said at a Calfed

hearing in Huntington Park. "It's disappointing that Calfed is still considering taxpayer-subsidized, damaging projects."

Similar philosophic chasms can be found in other key areas: improving water quality, stopping the intrusion of saltwater into the delta from San Francisco Bay, and divvying up acreage and water between wildlife and farms.

"In the water wars, when Californians are forming a firing squad," Babbitt said, "they form a circle facing inward."

Delta Dispute

The vast Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the state's largest watershed, provides water for 22 million people and habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife, and undergirds the state's trillion-dollar economy.

Government officials hoped that a plan by the state and federal governments to save the deteriorating delta would persuade environmentalists, farmers and urban water users to set aside their differences. But the old rivalries appear as strong as ever. #

Crowd mostly critical of CALFED's water quality plan Chico Enterprise-Record - September 16, By Nick Ellena, staff writer

A capacity turnout filled the Community Center on Vallombrosa Avenue Wednesday night to pepper CALFED officials with sometimes heated criticisms of its program.

Chico was the of 13th of 15 stops around the state to gather public comments on CALFED's draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report.

The EIS/EIR will address impacts from CALFED's proposed 30-year program for fixing water quality and water availability problems of the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento Delta.

About 80 speakers signed up to make official comments, limited to three minutes.

Sometimes emotional, the presentations tended to tilt toward the critical side, claiming the plan does not sufficiently emphasize new water storage, protection of water resources for counties of origin, and surface water rights on which the agricultural industry in the Sacramento Valley largely depends.

Conversely other speakers opposed new reservoirs as injurious to the environment and insisted that other water conservation measures should first be implemented including conservation and improved watershed management.

The deadline for submitting comments is Sept. 23. CALFED officials invited speakers to supplement their three-minute verbal presentations with written supplements and encouraged others to submit theirs in writing.

The comments are to be categorized and responded to and made part of the EIS/EIR that is expected to be completed next April.

CALFED is an amalgamation of 15 state and federal agencies committed to improving water quality and availability for the Delta, which provides drinking water for two thirds of the state and sustains more than 750 species of plant and animal life.

The draft preferred alternative being addressed has two goals:

⌘ To improve coordination of water supply operations with protection of endangered species and water quality compliance.

▫ To develop a long-term solution to fish and wildlife, water supply availability, flood control, and water quality problems in the Bay-Delta Estuary.

Officials of several state and federal agencies comprised the panel that conducted the hearing with moderator Rick Breitenbach, assistant CALFED director.

In answer to questions, panel members stated CALFED itself does not have authority to require water transfers that are intended to be voluntary.

Other mixed views offered by speakers included:

▫ Protection from third party impacts, such as unemployment and loss of farmland, might result if agricultural water allotments are cut.

▫ Increased efficiency and conservation would make dams unnecessary.

▫ More existing dams should be removed instead of new ones built to restore fish populations.

▫ Dams are essential for accommodating the vast population increases expected in California in coming decades. #

Water plan open for comments

Redding Record Searchlight - September 20, By Tim Hearden, staff writer

Redding will be one of the last communities to be heard Tuesday as people across the state give their opinions on what California's water solutions should be over the next 30 years.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program will hold its 13th public hearing of the summer beginning at 6 p.m. in the Sierra Room at the DoubleTree Hotel, 1830 Hilltop Drive. The only public forum after Redding's will be Wednesday in Sacramento.

CALFED has been holding forums across the state since the environmental document for its latest plan was unveiled in June. The meeting in Redding comes as north state leaders urge California resource agencies not to trample on the north state's water and agricultural rights to suit the needs of other parts of the state.

One issue may come to the forefront Tuesday as citizen after citizen takes to the podium: the question of whether to raise Shasta Dam and build more reservoirs to store enough water for an anticipated population growth.

"I would say overwhelmingly, most of the comments deal with water storage and water conservation," said Valerie Holcomb, the public affairs director for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. "There's a lot of strong feelings on both sides of water storage - that CALFED needs to begin adding additional water storage immediately, and others who feel strongly that we should not build any more dams and reservoirs in the state.

"On the water conservation side, there are those who say water conservation will solve all the problems in the state, and then on the other side the farmers are saying we're doing all the water conservation we can and we need more storage," Holcomb said. "Those two issues are tied, water conservation and storage."

Tuesday's hearing will begin with an hour long information session, including a video and questions and answers, followed at 7 p.m. by public comments. Each person will have three minutes at the podium to speak, and written comments will be accepted.

So far, CALFED has received about 450 verbal comments at the hearings, Holcomb said. More than 200 people attended Chico's public hearing Wednesday night and about 80 people spoke. "I would expect something similar in Redding."

CALFED must respond to all the public comment in its final plan, which is expected next June. The plan is expected to take three decades to implement and cost more than \$10 billion.

The 4,200-page environmental report CALFED released in June is the latest step in a long effort to enhance water quality in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the source of 80 percent of California's drinking water, without threatening supplies for farms and cities.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program would widen and deepen channels, increase the capacity of state and federal pumps that send water to the Central Valley and Southern California, expand the transfer of water between private entities, restore fish habitats, improve conservation and recycling, and increase storage. #
Editorial: Faltering baby steps; Bay-Delta project moves ever so slowly
San Diego Union-Tribune - September 27, 1999

Farmers in California's Central Valley are demanding to know how fish screens on giant water pumps help them grow broccoli. Urban water agencies are asking how a feasibility study on tidal marsh habitat will fill bathtubs in San Diego.

The CalFed program to fix the San Francisco Bay-San Joaquin Delta was supposed to guarantee a water supply for farmers' cotton, alfalfa and other crops, and for urban dwellers' industries and kitchen faucets. But instead, farmers and cities complain, the only thing it has helped is a bunch of fish.

They're right to ratchet up the pressure on CalFed, a joint state and federal plan to repair the Bay-Delta environment and protect water supplies to farms and cities in the southern two-thirds of the state. We expected CalFed to provide a profound answer to the bottleneck in the plumbing that supplies Northern California water to us. Instead, we got a menu of minor environmental projects.

While it's fine to criticize CalFed, neither farmers, urban water agencies nor environmentalists should entertain any thoughts of withdrawing support for the process. California's water wars have raged for a century. It's naive to think everything could be tidied up in a few years. We need to stick with the solution, because the alternative -- renewed legal and legislative warfare -- would be much worse.

Lester Snow, the former San Diego County Water Authority general manager, has taken a go-slow approach as director of CalFed. Farmers may want new dams and reservoirs, and cities may want a Peripheral Canal (called something else, of course). But Snow believes CalFed can't immediately embrace such controversial proposals without reigniting a war. Gov. Gray Davis has indicated he supports only baby steps. Arguing over new dams or the Peripheral Canal isn't even on the map in Sacramento.

Snow says that if the baby steps -- such as rebuilding levees in the Delta to channel water better or developing more ground water storage -- don't result in necessary improvements, then we can begin talking about canals and reservoirs.

Farmers and city dwellers should continue sounding off. But at the same time, take Snow at his word for now. The reason is, these baby steps won't ultimately be successful in ensuring water for farms and cities, as CalFed's mission statement promises. In fact, they might not even protect the Bay-Delta environment.

The Peripheral Canal may be necessary to reverse the saltwater intrusion from the bay into the delta, which is both killing off fish and degrading water quality.

In a few years, when CalFed's go-slow approach has produced little or no improvement in the agriculture and urban water supply, it will be time to throw down the gauntlet. By then, if cities and farmers have built a solid case that their water needs aren't being met, Snow, Davis and other government officials will have the political cover to say they tried the passive approach to fixing the Bay-Delta and it didn't work. Then we can start talking about the Peripheral Canal in earnest. #

Attempt to overhaul state's water system draws farmers' opposition
Associated Press - September 23, By John Howard, AP writer

SACRAMENTO -- A 5-year-old state-federal attempt to rewrite California's water map entered its final stage yesterday with farmers contending it would remove too many fertile fields from production and cripple their chances for a stable water supply.

The last of 16 public hearings on the multibillion-dollar overhaul of California's water system focused on controversial topics that have dominated talks from the beginning: water conservation, construction of reservoirs and conversion of private land to environmental protection zones.

The crux of the problem is how to move more water from Northern California, where much of the rain is, to the south while maintaining environmental protections for the Sacramento-San Joaquin River delta east of San Francisco.

About 80 percent of California's drinking water flows through the delta, a lush nexus of rivers crisscrossed by crumbling 19th century levees.

A final decision on the water program is scheduled in April by the forum known as Cal-Fed, a consortium of scientists, water experts, state and federal bureaucrats, farmers, water contractors, environmentalists, irrigation district executives, Indian tribes and others.

Backers of Cal-Fed, who include U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, say the program has brought together parties that have traditionally fought over water.

But many involved, including environmentalists and Central Valley growers, are not convinced.

"The most basic problem is that the Cal-Fed plan falls prey to the politics of consensus. Because most people agree we need to do more for fish and wildlife, the Cal-Fed plan focuses only on fish and wildlife," Bill Pauli, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, said in written remarks prepared for Wednesday's hearing.

"Farmers understand that unless more water is added through new supplies, those growing demands will be met by taking water away from agriculture," he added.

Under Cal-Fed, about 240,000 acres of crop lands would be taken from production -- including about 30,000 acres to widen levees, 20,000 acres to build reservoirs or other facilities and the balance to maintain or restore habitats to protect fish and wildlife, the federation said.

"The Cal-Fed plan respects farmland only for its value in sustaining fish and wildlife -- not for its value in sustaining people," Pauli said.

Cal-Fed spokeswoman Valerie Holcomb said the figures cited by Pauli reflect a "worst-case scenario."

"But in reality, what will probably happen is quite a bit less," she said.

The farmers have pushed for reservoir construction, and Cal-Fed is considering a dozen sites for possible reservoirs, although the final number could be half that.

Cal-Fed is studying surface water storage from zero to several hundred thousand acre-feet, Holcomb said. An acre-foot of water, nearly 330,000 gallons, is roughly the amount of water a family of four uses in a year.

"No one wants to give up one more gallon than they have to," said Zeke Grader, who represents the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, a commercial fishing group involved in Cal-Fed.

"The tragedy for them is that I don't see them in control anymore," Grader said of the farmers. #

Editorial: 'Water war' needs leadership, Bakersfield Californian - September 26, 1999

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 involve-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.

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.

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.

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.#

Residents worry about water

Redding Record Searchlight - September 22, By Tim Hearden, staff writer

The message from a vast majority of north state residents who spoke at Tuesday night's public forum on California's water future can be summed up in four words: Don't take our water.

Many of the roughly 40 speakers at the hearing at Redding's DoubleTree Hotel urged state and federal resource agencies not to lay the north valley's farms to waste and send their water to thirsty Southern California. About 100 people attended the meeting.

Speaker after speaker during the hearing's first hour said the CALFED Bay-Delta Program should put more emphasis on water storage rather than relying on Sacramento River water to dilute the polluted Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

"I think it's safe to say ... that you're setting up an obligation for Northern California's water users to give their water to the solution," said David Guy, executive director of the Sacramento-based Northern California Water Association.

"We don't want to be the solution for the entire state's water problem," Guy said. "We want to be part of the solution, but we don't want to be the entire solution."

Fourth-generation rancher Richard Taylor of McArthur in eastern Shasta County said CALFED's plan "pits fish against people." He said rather than taking water away, the state should increase the water supply.

Anderson High School agriculture instructor George Wold agreed. "I don't know if we can put agriculture on the endangered species list, but it's going to be there before long."

One of his students, senior Jennifer Owen, urged CALFED officials to save farms. "My main concern is by the time I graduate from college, there won't be an agriculture industry left," she said. "I'll have to leave the state to achieve my goals."

"People throughout California benefit from farmland, whether they work on the land or shop at a grocery store in the city," said Bob Nash, a Shasta County Farm Bureau board member. Aside from CALFED's actually retiring farmland and diverting the water, Nash said, "my big concern is the open-market transfer of water, specifically moving water out of the Sacramento basin into urban areas. To resolve these issues, there has to be additional storage somewhere."

But calls for more storage weren't unanimous. Ecologists said there should be no new dams or reservoirs built until conservation measures have been tried.

"We've only begun to tap the surface of urban water conservation," said Traci Sheehan, a campaign coordinator for the Sacramento-based Friends of the River.

Some of the people at Tuesday's hearing turned in written remarks. People and agencies have until Thursday to comment about CALFED's 4,200-page environmental report.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program would widen and deepen channels, increase the capacity of state and federal pumps that send water to the Central Valley and Southern California, expand the transfer of water between private entities, restore fish habitat, improve conservation and recycling, and increase storage.

Redding's was the second public hearing held in the northern Sacramento Valley; the other, last week in Chico, drew more than 200 people. The last of 16 such hearings statewide will be held today [Sept. 22] in Sacramento. CALFED must respond to comments in its final plan, which is expected in June 2000.

Assemblyman Dick Dickerson, R-Redding, who flew up from Los Angeles to attend the hearing, said CALFED should make more water available through water use efficiency, reducing water loss from "dense unnatural vegetation" and providing more storage of winter runoff and snowmelt.

"The draft plan ... is full of ways to cut the water pie finer but does little to make the water pie bigger - a disservice to our state," said Dickerson, vice chairman of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee.

U.S. Rep. Wally Herger, R-Marysville, did not attend but said in a statement CALFED can't "offer real environmental solutions if we don't begin to seriously consider future storage options." #

**GOP lawmaker rips CALFED report;
Johannessen thinks reservoirs needed to ease water shortage
Redding Record Searchlight - September 21, By Tim Hearden, staff writer**

As north state residents gather at the DoubleTree Hotel in Redding for today's 6 p.m. public hearing on water, state Sen. Maurice Johannessen will have compelling reasons for not being there.

The Redding Republican doesn't want to blurt out his displeasure over the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's 4,200-page environmental document and turn the meeting into a "dog-and-pony show," he said Monday. Besides, he's attending a wine industry meeting in Napa.

But Johannessen generally isn't shy about sounding an alarm over what he sees as CALFED's eventual goal of building a peripheral canal to carry Northern California's water elsewhere and laying hundreds of acres of farmland to waste in order to provide drinking water for Los Angeles.

Johannessen offers a solution CALFED officials concede they've heard from many speakers throughout the state during their 12 previous public hearings on California's water future: build more reservoirs.

"If we do not build reservoirs, the only way to make up for losses is through fallowing agricultural land," Johannessen said. "So far, 400,000 acres of farmland are fallow, and they're talking about 1 million acres.

"That is a direction they want to go in transporting water, and the only way to transport water is to take away farmland," the senator said. "That would devastate Northern California's economy. They're already killing us in timber. Now they're going to kill us in farming."

Johannessen, who chairs the Senate Select Committee on the CALFED Water Program, said California already has a shortage of 1.8 million acre-feet of water a year because of the demands of Southern California cities and San Joaquin Valley farmers.

The quality of water from the Colorado River is below standards for domestic use, so the Metropolitan Water District in Los Angeles has been looking to mix it with water from other places, Johannessen said. And the demand will only grow in the next 50 years as California's population grows, he said.

Some water relief may come from the Imperial Valley, he said, but water will inevitably have to come from the north state, which has 80 percent of California's water supply and only 20 percent of the state's people.

Off-stream reservoirs in the Sierra Nevada would provide storage and allow the state to flush the polluted Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta with fresh water rather than diverting more of the north state's pristine water supplies down south, Johannessen said.

Sacramento Valley farmers might get a short-term boost by selling their water instead of farming, the senator said. But that would lead to long-term ruin in communities whose economies rely on the tractor, truck and supply sales that support agriculture, he said. #

**Dickerson: Water storage is key
Chico Enterprise-Record - October 4, By Larry Mitchell, staff writer**

A way to solve many of California's water worries exists - build a reservoir the size of Lake Shasta west of Colusa, says Assemblyman Dick Dickerson.

But hopes are fading that will happen anytime soon, the Redding Republican said in a recent Chico appearance.

He suggested environmentalists who fear that more water in the north state will bring growth have squashed the idea.

Dickerson spoke at a Butte College-sponsored forum at the Butte Career Training Center. It opened the college's year-long project to study a relevant local issue: water.

That's a wonderful choice, Dickerson said. He called water "the most critically important issue facing all Californians over the next 10 years or so."

Dickerson was the guest of honor at the panel discussion, attended by about 50 people, including Butte College students and staff.

The discussion centered on CALFED, a cooperative effort of 15 state and federal agencies to improve water quality and solve other problems in the Bay Delta, the largest estuary on the West Coast.

The delta, where the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers come together, covers more than 738,000 acres in five counties. It's the source of drinking water for two-thirds of the state's population. It irrigates more than 7 million acres of farm land, and it supports more than 750 plant and animal species.

But there are big problems in the delta. It's polluted, for one thing. And the huge pumps near Tracy, which suck up delta water for the California Aqueduct and the Mendota Canal, at times reverse the flow of water in the delta and bring salt water from the San Francisco Bay into the estuary.

CALFED wants to solve these problems. But that can't be done, Dickerson said, "without addressing all the other problems associated with water in the state." As a result, CALFED has become a vast project.

Next June, CALFED must decide the approach it will take. There seem to be three options, the assemblyman said. One is to do nothing. Another is to make changes within the delta, adding pumps and increasing the flow of water through the estuary. The third choice is the peripheral canal, building a system to carry water around the delta.

"My guess is they are going to choose the second option," Dickerson said. "That seems to be where they are concentrating."

Dickerson said he and others see another alternative in a proposed project, the Sites-Colusa Reservoir. This would involve damming valleys west of Colusa to create a 4-million acre-foot reservoir.

There would be numerous benefits, including flood control and more water for domestic and agricultural use and for improving water quality in the delta, the assemblyman said.

"I am not in favor of damming any rivers," he said. "I'm talking about off-stream reservoirs, where you would direct water to them."

There's abundant water in the north state in the winter and spring, but much of it simply flows down the rivers to the ocean, he said. There could be huge benefits from capturing that water and storing it.

Don Holtgrieve, a Chico State University professor of geography and planning who was on the panel, said the Sites-Colusa location seems suitable for a reservoir. "If one had to build a reservoir, that would probably be a contender," he said. "It's a bathtub-shaped valley. It's so dry out there - an oak woodland with very little environmental value."

Unfortunately, Dickerson said, environmental groups seem to have prevailed upon CALFED, so that the agencies have decided not to consider any new reservoirs for at least seven years. He called that decision "a disservice to the people in the state of California."

Besides more storage, Dickerson said he'd like to see efforts to increase the flow of water in streams and rivers by "managing the watersheds above dams." Meadows can be made to serve as underground reservoirs that contribute to the water supply, he said. And if some underbrush in the forests is removed, melting snow will run into the ground and into streams instead of evaporating. That also increases the water supply.

But Dickerson said environmentalists don't want to talk about new reservoirs or watershed management above the dams.

Some people at the forum suggested desalinization plants should be built to increase the water supply. Dickerson said he didn't think that was practical, but others on the panel said the option should be explored along with other possibilities.

It's easy to see why the state faces a water crisis, Dickerson said. "The majority of people in California live south of the Tehachapis, and the majority of the water is in the north."

"The bottom line is California has a vast amount of people. That's not changing. And these people are going to be served," commented Richard Slavich, a Butte College natural-resources instructor and panel member.

Also on the panel were two other Butte College faculty members: Bruce Enyeart, who teaches agriculture mechanics, and Scot Hoiland, a geography instructor.

Butte College President Sandy Acebo said the forum and others that will be held this year are the school's effort to be "a true community college (that) helps the community understand its own issues." #

Editorial: Reservoirs may not be just pipe dream, Chico Enterprise-Record - October 4, 1999

The outlook for a possible new reservoir west of Colusa is brighter than Assemblyman Dick Dickerson suggests, according to John Merz, a Chico environmentalist.

While a huge impoundment like the proposed Sites-Colusa Reservoir isn't going to be created soon, studies of the proposal and other possible reservoirs are going on, said Merz, chairman of the board of directors of the Sacramento River Preservation Trust.

Merz was asked about comments the assemblyman made at a recent Butte College forum on water.

"Mr. Dickerson has provided a much darker picture than exists," Merz said. Proposals for new reservoirs "haven't got a green or a red light" from CALFED, he said. They've been given a yellow light, meaning "proceed with caution."

While a dam that wasn't on a river or a major stream might sound environmentally harmless, there are questions that need study, Merz said. For instance, the Sites-Colusa project would involve pumping water out of the Sacramento River when the river was full. Environmentalists aren't sure that wouldn't disrupt the river's ecosystem, he said.

Merz also took exception to Dickerson's saying environmentalists don't want to consider watershed management above dams to improve water quality and quantity.

"I'm not aware of any resistance, per se, to above-dam watershed-management activities," he said. But such proposals need to be studied scientifically to ensure that they'll work.

"There are no quick fixes," he said. "We're asking a lot of questions."

Merz agreed with Dickerson that many environmentalists are concerned about growth, but he said there's no effort to try to use CALFED as a tool to limit growth.

As he and many other environmentalists see it, water conservation must be the first priority in trying to solve the water crisis, he said. A good step would be to require water meters everywhere in the state.

Before considering new reservoirs, "we really need to make sure we are utilizing the resources" that exist, he said. "It's too easy to go back to the way things have been done." #

**CalFed chief gets key Bureau of Reclamation post
Sacramento Bee - October 7, By Nancy Vogel, staff writer**

Lester Snow, who won the respect of all sides as the leader of a 5-year-old effort to solve California's biggest water problems, has been chosen to head the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's operations in most of California, northern Nevada and southern Oregon.

Snow will take charge of the nation's largest federal irrigation project, the Central Valley Project, which supplies water to one-third of California's farmland and 2.5 million city dwellers.

Snow will step down as the first executive director of CalFed, a coalition of federal and state agencies formed in 1995 to design a 30-year, multibillion-dollar plan for stabilizing water deliveries and restoring native fish in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, a major source of drinking and irrigation water.

As the top man at CalFed, Snow works for U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and California Resources Secretary Mary Nichols. As the regional administrator for the bureau's 800-employee Mid-Pacific Region, he will work solely for Babbitt.

He will leave a job that involves building consensus among fractious environmental, urban and farm groups and take the helm of an agency responsible for delivering water to thousands of farmers, maintaining dams such as Folsom and Shasta and generating power.

A former director of the San Diego County Water Authority, Snow said he looks forward to tackling issues within the bureau that have a huge impact on CalFed's work, such as the implementation of a 1992 federal law that shifts roughly 10 percent of the CVP's water from farmers to fish and wildlife.

"I got into this CalFed stuff because I actually believe there's a more sane way to manage natural resources in this state," said Snow, "and I think at CalFed we've moved the ball down the field a little bit on that."

Snow's replacement at CalFed has not been named yet. He steps down Oct. 24. #

**Key state water official taking a federal post; Another period of upheaval expected
San Diego Union-Tribune - October 7, By Michael Gardner, Copley News Service**

The agency charged with solving California's incessant water woes is about to enter a new period of upheaval, starting with the loss of its widely respected and powerful leader.

Lester Snow, who once headed the San Diego County Water Authority, is expected today to be named director of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's mid-Pacific region, which includes northern California.

In another water-related development, Gov. Gray Davis today is expected to sign papers putting a nearly \$2 billion water bond issue on the March ballot.

The measure would include a provision giving Davis legislative authority to arbitrarily decide how Colorado River water should be divided if those who receive the water can't reach an agreement by Oct. 15.

That could free San Diego officials to complete a water deal with Imperial Valley farmers. The 200,000-acre-feet of water involved in the deal would help satisfy the anticipated demands of growth in San Diego into the next century. (One acre-foot is generally enough to serve a family of four for a year.)

Meanwhile, if the water bonds are approved by the voters, the proceeds would help finance projects vital to San Diego County's drive to find more independent water sources, including desalination and recycling. The bond proceeds also would provide grants for safe-drinking water projects and pollution control.

"Water is the number one environmental problem in our state today," said Resources Secretary Mary Nichols. "We have major issues about water quality and water supply. We have not been funding the necessary capital investments to address these problems."

For more than four years, Snow has guided "CalFed," a joint state-federal agency that focuses on restoring the health of the Sacramento Delta.

Two-thirds of the state's drinking water, including 15 percent of the San Diego's supply, flows through the Delta.

Snow's imminent departure comes just as the agency reaches a critical juncture; CalFed officials have drafted a comprehensive plan to overhaul the agency and board membership.

They also must resolve outstanding wedge issues, including a scaled-down version of the peripheral canal, the building of more storage reservoirs and resolution to the question of who should pay the bill.

"CalFed is getting down to the issues of exactly what needs to be done. It's setting aside people's wishes and getting down to reality," Snow said. "Clearly interests are upset, but they're staying with the process."

Snow dismissed claims CalFed's future is precarious. "People have been predicting the explosion of CalFed since its first meeting," he said.

The continuing turmoil did not push him out, Snow said. "It was just time," he said.

A successor has not been named. Snow assumes the federal post Oct. 25. #

Orange County Water District Board Finds Major Deficiencies in CALFED Proposal to Fix California's Bay Delta Water Supply, News release, Orange Co. WD - October 7, 1999

The Board of Directors for the Orange County Water District (OCWD) have written letters to Governor Davis and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, pointing out major deficiencies in the CALFED Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Impact Study (EIR/EIS) for a preferred method of addressing environmental and water management problems associated with the San Francisco -- San Joaquin Bay Delta.

All Northern California water flowing to Southern California passes through the Bay Delta.

CALFED Bay-Delta organization is group of state and federal agencies and the state urban, agricultural and environmental interest groups attempting to resolve environmental and water management problems associated with California's Bay Delta.

The CALFED Phase I proposal to try to address water quality, water reliability, ecosystem restoration and levee problems associated with the Bay Delta has the following major deficiencies:

*It lacks an overall, effective water management plan that will deal with projected population growth in California

*It lacks a governance plan to implement solutions to Delta problems

*It lacks any details to finance the proposed Phase I solutions

OCWD Board recommendations, which mirror recommendations from other Orange County water agencies, include adding the following specifics to the Phase I proposal:

*Provide Southern California with a minimum supply of 650,000 acre-feet(1) of dry-year yield with total dissolved solids (TDS) of 150 milligrams or less per liter (Current supplies of water from the Delta average between 200 and 300 milligrams per liter of TDS). The lower TDS water is required to facilitate current and future planned water reuse in Orange County.

*Add a commitment for the Banks Pumping Plant to operate at 8,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the first two years of the plan, later expanding to 10,300 cfs.

*Identify specific statewide public funding and federal funding for the environmental and recreational costs of the CALFED solution.

*Add a commitment to have water leaving the Delta meet future known water quality requirements to protect public health.

*Establish a Water Quality Account funded by state and federal sources to implement water quality improvement projects.

*Develop a multi-species agreement that covers the Bay-Delta to provide a special exemption to the Endangered Species Act in order to guarantee ecosystem restoration, water quality and water reliability.

The CALFED organization must now address all the major inputs to their proposed alternative and address them in a new document that will again be circulated around the state. #

Editorial: Colusa proposal better than a dam, Chico Enterprise-Record - October 7, 1999

As California looks closely at its water needs for the next century, it needs to keep in mind that dams are what caused many of the problems.

The state's water needs have been well-served by the Central Valley Project and its array of reservoirs, built during a time when nobody envisioned what it would mean for fish, riparian habitat and watershed ecosystems. The dams became a death sentence for some species, and the Endangered Species Act mandates that changes be made. Irrigation dams have been removed on Butte Creek. Englebright Dam on the Yuba River and the Red Bluff Diversion Dam are being looked at with a critical eye. Farther away, the federal government is discussing the once-unthinkable - demolishing dams on the Snake River to help endangered salmon.

When dams are coming down, the people involved in the CALFED process need to think carefully before they decide to build new ones.

There's a problem, though. California will grow and will need more water in the future. To do nothing to increase water storage would be myopic. So CALFED, a collection of federal and state agencies, is supposed to find the answer.

CALFED has heard from people who want dams. It has discussed the inane idea of raising Shasta Dam by nearly 200 feet, which would bury towns, Interstate 5 and the railroad. It has discussed building a dam on Cottonwood Creek, one of the few Sacramento River tributaries that still has a run of endangered spring-run chinook. Neither idea makes sense, and even the proposal of raising Shasta Dam 6 1/2 feet to produce an additional 300,000 acre feet of water doesn't seem worth the expense.

But, we repeat, something must be done. So if some old dams are coming down - or in danger of coming down - and new dams are out of the question, then what?

The CALFED idea of "storage reservoirs" makes sense. The term "storage reservoirs" is used because of the connotations of the word "dam." A dam would hold the water back on the storage reservoirs, but storage reservoirs wouldn't be built on fish-bearing streams. Instead, places like the Sites Valley west of Colusa would become a storage area.

"If one had to build a reservoir, that would probably be a contender," said Don Holtgrieve, a Chico State University professor of geography and planning. "It's a bathtub-shaped valley. It's so dry out there - an oak woodland with very little environmental value."

The state is considering several such storage reservoirs throughout the state, including the Newville area west of Orland, and five different sites in the hills west of the San Joaquin Valley.

We agree with Assemblyman Dick Dickerson, R-Redding, who says: "I am not in favor of damming any rivers. I'm talking about off-stream reservoirs, where you would direct water to them."

Diverting the water causes other environmental concerns, but those are minor compared with damming a river. Diversions could be made in winter and spring, when runoff is highest. Migratory fish in the Sacramento River need ample water even then, but in most rain years it wouldn't be a problem.

CALFED has promised to proceed slowly. It likely won't build either dams or offstream reservoirs for five to 10 years, and we hope CALFED spends as much money mandating conservation and educating big-city water users as it does building dams (ahem, we mean "offstream reservoirs").

With a combination of wise water use and offstream storage reservoirs, we think farmers, environmentalists and Southern Californians who build golf courses in the desert would all be pleased with the result - not that we care too much about that last group. #

**Secretary Babbitt Appoints Lester Snow as Regional Director
News release, Office of the Secretary - October 7, 1999**

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today announced the appointment of Lester Snow as Regional Director of the Bureau of Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region. Snow succeeds Roger Patterson who retired in February 1999. The appointment becomes effective October 24, 1999.

"Lester Snow has served the State of California and the Interior Department in one of the toughest jobs in California - managing the future water resources in that state," said Babbitt. "He did a remarkable job building consensus and managing California's complicated and often competing interests. I am delighted to have him on my management team."

As Director of the Mid-Pacific Region, Snow will oversee Reclamation's water projects in the northern two-thirds of California, northern Nevada, and the Klamath Basin in southern Oregon. The Region is one of the integral components of the CALFED Program which includes the Central Valley Project (CVP), a system of some 20 dams and reservoirs, 11 powerplants, and 500 miles of canals. The CVP provides urban water to 2.5 million people, irrigation water to more than 3 million acres, and environmental water for fishery restoration, and generates 5.6 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually.

The CVP is also the subject of landmark reform legislation - the Central Valley Project Improvement Act of 1992 - that amends previous authorizations of the CVP to include fish and wildlife protection, restoration, and mitigation as Project purposes having equal priority with irrigation and domestic uses. Some 800 employees work in the Region.

Since 1995, Mr. Snow has served as Executive Director of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, guiding the collaborative efforts of Federal and State agencies together with leading urban, agricultural, and environmental interests to address the water management and environmental problems associated with the Bay-Delta system.

Prior to his leadership position at CALFED, Snow served as General Manager of the San Diego Water Authority from 1988 to 1995; Director of the Tucson Active Management Area of the Arizona Department of Water Resources from 1984 to 1987; and Deputy Director of that same agency from 1981 to 1984. Prior to 1981, he held management positions with the Central Arizona Association of Governments.

Mr. Snow holds a Master's degree in Water Resources Administration from the University of Arizona and a Bachelor's degree in Earth Sciences from Pennsylvania State University. #

'Visionary' in state water issues leaves CalFed post
Bakersfield Californian - October 7, By Vic Pollard, Sacramento Bureau

The man who guided the state-federal agency charged with solving California's vexatious water problems through its first four years is leaving the agency.

Lester Snow, executive director of the agency known as CalFed, has been appointed regional director of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region, U. S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced Thursday.

Since CalFed began work in 1995, the easygoing Snow has earned high praise for guiding negotiations among agricultural and urban water users and environmental groups who are fierce competitors for the state's inadequate water supplies.

"Lester is really going to be missed at CalFed," said Tom Clark, manager of the Kern County Water Agency and a major figure in the negotiations. "He was the visionary."

However, he noted that as the Sacramento-based regional director of the bureau, Snow will remain active in CalFed as a member of its central policy-making board.

Snow, a former manager of the San Diego County Water Agency, said he was leaving because a career opportunity opened up with the recent retirement of the former regional director, Roger Patterson. In addition, he said, CalFed has all but completed the first phase of its work, drafting a plan to overhaul the state's major water supply systems to accommodate a growing population.

"We have finished the planning and the public comment process," he said. "We're now pushing to a higher level of detail on what will be involved in the first year of the program and gearing up for actual implementation."

CalFed policy makers are also beginning to discuss an overhaul of the agency itself, replacing the policy group with a new board made up of different membership.

No announcement has been made about a successor, who will be chosen largely by Babbitt and California Gov. Gray Davis.#

Upgrades for Delta on ballot
State water bond measure in March election offers funds for cleanup, fish, levees
Contra Costa Times - October 8, By Denis Cuff, staff writer

California voters will be asked in March to approve a \$1.97 billion water bond measure that would pump \$280 million into efforts to clean up Delta drinking water, help fish and fortify flood-prone levees.

In signing the ballot measure Thursday, Gov. Gray Davis said it would stabilize state water supplies by investing in conservation, recycling, ground-water storage and pollution and flood control.

There is no money for new reservoirs. However, state analysts predicted other saving and storing measures would yield 1 million acre feet of water -- 10 times the content of the new Los Vaqueros Reservoir near Brentwood.

"This water bond will make a record investment in California's economic, agricultural and environmental future," Davis said. "Our success as a people depends upon our ability to sustain our water supply."

Legislators steered large sums of money to the Delta because it serves as the crossroads of the state system for pumping Northern California water to 22 million people from Concord to San Diego.

The bond measure would provide \$250 million for river barriers to block out San Joaquin farm runoff, measures to clean or move Delta farm runoff and new fish screens at state and federal water pumps near Tracy.

"This means a lot to Contra Costa County. There are a lot of resources being devoted to cleaning up our water resources," said Assemblyman Mike Machado, a Democrat from San Joaquin County who wrote the measure, AB1584. "We need to fix the Delta."

Barriers would steer farm runoff away from the giant state and federal pumps, while other projects would reduce farm runoff, Machado said.

There also would be money to reduce, treat, store or move Delta farm discharges that can add salts and chemicals to Delta water supplies, including those for 430,000 Contra Costa Water District customers.

Farm runoff can degrade both district water sources -- Rock Slough east of Oakley and Old River that fills the new Los Vaqueros Reservoir, said Al Donner, a water district spokesman.

"The Delta has hundreds of discharges off farmland. If they discharge near us, they can affect our water quality," Donner said.

Options include moving the farm discharge points and storing and releasing runoff at different times and treating it.

State officials said the bond would advance California's plan to improve Delta water quality as much as possible before deciding in five to seven years on whether to build a giant Peripheral Canal around the Delta.

Money to improve fish screens at the state and federal pumps would reduce the fish kills, Machado said. "We need a screen that works," he said.

The bond measure would also provide \$2 million for creating the Delta Science Center at Big Break in Oakley to showcase the \$1 billion Delta environmental restoration.

The science center also would get another \$2 million from a state park bond measure on the same March 7 ballot, center organizers said.

The \$30 million earmarked for levee strengthening around the 55 Delta islands would rejuvenate a program that has run out of money.

Levee maintainers at Bethel Island in eastern Contra Costa were glad to hear of the prospect of renewed state funding.

"Levee maintenance is not a one time job. It's forever. These islands sink a few inches each year because of our peat soil," said Christine Thresh of the Bethel Island Improvement District. "You have to keep building them up."

The bond measure is the result of a compromise struck after three years of negotiations between legislators, growers, builders and environmentalists.

Farmers initially had demanded bond money for new reservoirs, but environmentalists objected. In the end, the Legislature and governor decided to put reservoir study funds in the state budget and keep it out of the bond measure.

The last state water bond measure was in November 1996, when voters approved nearly \$1 billion, much of it for Delta environmental improvements. #

AT A GLANCE

Key funding points of the water bond measure:

- \$250 million to improve Delta water quality and fish screens, and install barriers across rivers
- \$30 million to strengthen levees on Delta islands, including Bethel, Holland, Webb, Jersey, Twitchell and Hotchkiss
- \$2 million to help create the Delta Science Center in Oakley
- \$3 million for University of California scientists to create a watershed science lab in the northern Delta near Walnut Grove
- \$450 million for anti-pollution efforts
- \$200 million to store water in underground aquifers
- \$235 million to improve Santa Ana River watershed and groundwater
- \$100 million for water treatment works
- \$90 million to improve river watersheds, help fish, wildlife
- \$95 million statewide to buy and restore land along creeks and rivers
- \$25 million to protect coastal salmon

Source: Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee

Editorial: Maintain the peace; Choose another conciliator for Bay-Delta effort
San Diego Union-Tribune - October 9, 1999

The idea behind CalFed, a state-federal initiative, is almost a fantasy: Get all of California's warring water combatants together in order to agree on a solution for the San Francisco-San Joaquin Bay-Delta, the most important piece of plumbing for the state's water supply.

But it actually has worked. The joint agency began four years ago. Since then, it has maintained an uneasy peace among cities, agricultural interests and environmentalists.

One of the reasons CalFed has worked is that it has been led by Lester Snow, former general manager of the San Diego County Water Authority and a sturdy water wonk who knows how to get along with people.

Of course, he's not a miracle worker. Recently, he has been taking a lot of flak from farmers, and some from cities as well, over complaints that CalFed hasn't provided them a guaranteed supply of water yet.

That's true. CalFed is moving very slowly. But Snow this week announced his resignation to take a job in the Clinton administration. If he is replaced with someone who tries to move precipitately, the whole process may collapse. For example, if the next director of CalFed were to recommend new dams and canals, environmentalists, and probably some federal agencies as well, would drop out. The next time everybody got together would be in federal court. Nobody wants that. Court battles over water are unwinnable.

So, when the Davis administration and the U.S. Interior Department choose the next CalFed director, they need to pick another facilitator, not a czar.

Despite the heated rhetoric aimed recently at CalFed, farmers, cities and environmentalists continue working together within this complex effort. The most important thing for the next CalFed director is to maintain that cooperation. #

Editorial: A fine Snow job: CalFed water leader showed the power of humor
Sacramento Bee - Oct. 9, 1999

It was the kind of moment bureaucrats dread -- a public hearing, a cranky politician and a hardball question. In this instance, a legislator was grilling Delta czar Lester Snow about why water exports to Southern California were being sacrificed to help the migration of some tiny Delta smelt that, despite all human assistance, were by nature "very fragile and sensitive to stress." Snow faced a choice. Would he side with the legislator or the smelt?

There was silence as Snow took a deep breath. "Senator," Snow replied, "I too am a creature who is very fragile and sensitive to stress." The room erupted in laughter. The hearing went on. Snow had dodged another bullet.

For four years, Snow has led with style the effort known as CalFed. An assemblage of federal and state agencies, CalFed's daunting task is to find a better way for the Delta to meet the competing needs of humans and fish. Running CalFed is no laughing matter. It means answering to bosses in Washington and Sacramento, building teamwork among agencies with differing cultures and turfs, collaborating with interest groups with little in common and attending endless meetings.

No wonder Snow is leaving. He is moving across town to run the western region of the federal Bureau of Reclamation. CalFed's loss is the bureau's gain. Snow is a rare breed of public servant, a master of the technical details and the personal touch. He has been the invisible glue behind a Delta peacemaking process that, if it succeeds, will improve the lives of millions of Californians -- humans as well as fish that are fragile and sensitive to stress. #

Farm groups attack Cal-Fed's habitat preservation efforts
Associated Press - October 12, By Kiley Russell, AP writer

There will be dire consequences if some of the state's most valuable farmland isn't protected from slowly being converted into protected wildlife habitat, a powerful water users association says.

The Northern California Water Association has issued a study detailing what it says is the uncoordinated purchase of farmland by government agencies that intend to convert the land into wildlife habitat.

Critics said the practice destroys the land's economic value and ties up water that would otherwise be used for food production.

The report warns that unless the pace is at least slowed, the economic lives of millions of Central Valley residents will be thrown into question.

"State and federal agencies have increasingly focused on procuring farmland in Northern California to achieve various environmental restoration and enhancement goals," said NCWA Chairman Don Bransford.

"Although these projects are well intentioned," he said, "if not implemented in a responsible and coordinated manner, they will directly threaten important economic, social and environmental values in the Sacramento Valley region."

The report, published at the end of September, finds that more than 275,000 acres of agricultural land in the Sacramento Valley have been dedicated to habitat restoration during the past several decades at a taxpayer cost of more than \$226 million.

It also says that 100,000 acres are currently targeted for purchase by a combination of state and federal agencies and that those purchases could run up to \$129 million.

But an official for Cal-Fed, the state-federal agency in charge of the massive plan to overhaul California's water system, says its farmland acquisition has been a "miniscule" 32,000 acres spread out over much of the state. Additionally, Cal-Fed plans to purchase just few hundred acres of often-flooded farmland in the upper reaches of the Sacramento River delta in 2000.

"We're not out there buying the best farmland that nobody wants to sell," said Wendy Halverson-Martin, Cal-Fed's restoration coordinator. "We're looking mostly at lands with marginal profit values that are either wet a lot or flood-prone or have other problems associated with them."

But the NCWA says that thousands of acres of land are being purchased primarily by the California Resources Agency and the U.S. Department of the Interior -- both Cal-Fed agencies.

"Cal-Fed was formed to coordinate all the agencies working on this," said David Guy, NCWA executive director. "Our point is that it's not happening -- the agencies that are buying up all these lands are under the Cal-Fed umbrella but are doing this independently."

"Right now it's going so fast, without any oversight. How do we really know if it's a long-term benefit or not and what will be the cumulative impacts on rural communities," Guy said.

Still, the total acreage being converted into wildlife habitat seems relatively minor compared to the nearly two million acres of irrigated agricultural land in the Sacramento Valley.

Critics say it's not the amount of land in question, but the prime location of the converted land that has them worried.

The areas targeted for habitat restoration lay primarily along the fertile corridors of the Sacramento River and its delta tributaries.

"Roughly 200,000 acres that have been or are being acquired right now are concentrated in the delta region," said Mary-Ann Warmerdam, a spokeswoman for the California Farm Bureau Federation.

"That's roughly 50 percent of land being farmed in that area," she said. She added that the CFBF is "working with the Northern California Water Association and we absolutely share their concerns and we've made that clear to Cal-Fed."

Cal-Fed insists, however, that it's been trying to help farmers convert their land for dual-use purposes for years and would rather not purchase the land outright, because it's too expensive.

"More than 75 percent of all our acquisition is intended to preserve agricultural practices and to encourage farming that enhances habitat preservation," Halverson-Martin said.

"It's the local agricultural economies that can be impacted," she added. "So we're attempting to look very comprehensively at how Cal-Fed will impact these communities and what we can do to mitigate that impact or avoid it."

The American Farmland Conservation Trust is a national organization that works to protect farmland from suburban development. Some 100,000 acres of agricultural land is lost every year to strip malls and housing tracts throughout California.

And while AFCT isn't steadfastly opposed to farmland-to-habitat conversions, the organization would like to see less productive farmland taped for wildlife protection.

"At the same time, there is clearly opportunities to create habitat conversions on land that's already owned publicly, rather than take private agricultural land and convert it," said Erik Vink, the California policy director for AFCT. #

From Chico Enterprise-Record - October 13, by Larry Mitchell, staff writer

Paul Minasian, a member of an Oroville law firm that specializes in water issues, agreed conversion of agricultural land to wildlife habitat presents some real dangers.

The biggest problem may be that the new owners of the land, who try to pursue an environmentally "pure" management style, often don't maintain levees and other installations designed to protect against flooding, he said. When floods come, they can damage not only the wildlife preserve but also adjacent farms.

The NCWA report, published at the end of September, finds that more than 275,000 acres of agricultural land in the Sacramento Valley have been dedicated to habitat restoration during the past several decades at a taxpayer cost of more than \$226 million.

It also says that 100,000 acres are currently targeted for purchase by a combination of state and federal agencies and that those purchases could run up to \$129 million.

...Minasian agreed that often the farmers are willing sellers, especially when their land is near the river and very vulnerable to flooding. They calculate how much it will cost to repair levees and may decide selling to an organization like the Nature Conservancy would be wise, he said.

Flood control is a community issue, he said. If one landowner decides it's fine to let the river take its course, that may be all right for him, but the flowing water can wipe out his neighbor's crops. So far that hasn't been too much of a problem in Butte County, but it has in Glenn County, he said.

Minasian said agencies that take over farm land for conversion to wildlife habitat ought to be required to maintain flood-control facilities. #

**Water bank resurfaces southwest of Madera
Texas company wants to store up to 400,000 acre-feet of water.
Fresno Bee -October 13, By Charles Mccarthy, staff writer**

A Houston-based company said Tuesday it wants to build a ground-water storage facility under land it has purchased in Madera County.

The project proposed by Azurix Corp. has goals similar to a state- and federal-government proposal in Madera County that dried up last spring under local opposition.

The latest water-bank proposal targets more than 13,000 acres on the former Madera Ranch property southwest of Madera. Azurix said the aquifer under the property would store up to 400,000 acre-feet of surplus water from local, state and federal water customers during wet years.

"We're in the business of water treatment, water availability," said Cole Frates, Madera project manager for Azurix.

According to a news release from Azurix, "the Madera property is strategically located near existing state and federal canals and aqueducts and the San Joaquin River, all of which could provide a number of alternative conveyance systems to move water to and from the site."

Azurix reported it purchased the grazing land from Heber Perrett, who bought the land in 1991 for \$8 million. Azurix didn't disclose its purchase price.

Kole Upton, chairman of the Friant Water Authority Oversight Committee, said Tuesday he has the same concerns about the Azurix proposal that he did earlier this year with a project backed by Calfed and the U.S. Department of Reclamation.

That project lost steam when the Madera County Board of Supervisors voted to require a county permit to operate a water bank.

The supervisors also formed a 10-member committee of government, water district and community representatives to evaluate the project.

Upton said underground water in western Madera County tends to rise close to the surface in wet years and threaten crops in neighboring fields. In dry years, the aquifer would be drained, he said.

"Underground water doesn't abide by county or property lines," Upton said.

Frates that Azurix has been studying the Madera project for six months.

The company wants to work with local water groups, including the two Madera County committees formed earlier, he said.

Frates said Azurix plans to open an office in Madera County. #

Effects of CalFed may lie beneath surface for Yolo County

Woodland Daily Democrat - October 15, 1999

Commentary by Jim Eagan, General Manager, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

We enjoy a high quality of life in Yolo County. So naturally, we are disturbed with the prospect of change. As a general rule, we are most concerned with those aspects of change that are visible to the human eye. We can see more houses being built. We can see the loss of agricultural land to development. We see more people and cars. On many days we can see the changes in air pollution. But sometimes it's the change in things we can't see that ought to worry us most.

Changes in water use, for example, are largely invisible. How many of us "see" shifts in water quality or consumption? Nevertheless, the impact of unseen change can be substantial and far-reaching.

With nearly 96 percent of its annual water consumption linked to agriculture, Yolo County is now faced with the prospect of substantial, albeit for the time being "invisible" change, under the shadow of project called CalFed. Born out of legitimate concern for the long-term health of the San Francisco Bay/San Joaquin Delta Estuary, CalFed is the outgrowth of an agreement signed in 1994 by 14 state and federal agencies. The agreement sets the stage for dramatic changes in water policy and use for the north state.

Although presented as interim measures for "environmental protection and regulatory stability," CalFed poses the prospect of radical change for many agricultural communities, including Yolo County. Although at the outset one may not be able to "see" these changes their impact will nonetheless likely be dramatic and potentially destructive to Yolo County agriculture, despite local support for preservation of prime ag land and the agricultural economy. Because CalFed has de-emphasized the development of additional water storage capacity with the possibilities for increasing storage put off as the future, for some years the needed additional sources of water for population growth and environmental protection, comes at the expense of existing users, primarily agriculture.

California's agricultural productivity and economy relies on water. Even in an arid region, people often forget how critical water is to production agriculture. The prevalence of periodic droughts, land subsidence, and the systematic drawing down of water tables, with significant and invisible land subsidence in some areas, should be sufficient evidence of the relatively fragile and ephemeral nature of this important natural resource of water.

Unbeknownst to many, Yolo County is designated as a "water deficient" county. This designation means that in times of drought, Yolo County simply does not have enough water to go around. Each year, Yolo County uses about 1.1 million acre-feet of water. One acre-foot is enough to supply one household's needs for a year. An additional 25 acre-feet of water is required to grow sufficient food to feed that same family. Under

CalFed's present proposals, which place a premium on the use of existing developed sources of water and fail to address the need for additional storage, the growing of food will become increasingly difficult. Look into

CalFed's crystal ball and you will see that if no additional storage facilities are built, the primary source for the additional urban water use needed for future population growth will come from agricultural water supplies.

CalFed's current "Preferred Program Alternative" proposes a number of programs that could change the face of Yolo County forever. The impacts from the "Preferred" alternative include:

* **Reduced Supplies** - CalFed could result in less water for local farmers due to water diversions for use in other areas of the state, in part to restore or enhance the environment in these other regions. The reliability and adequacy of the water supply is a major factor in farming. The ability to grow crops from year to year often depends on knowing in advance whether an adequate supply of water will be available. CalFed's current proposals could introduce greater uncertainty into the system.

* Water transfers - Under CalFed Yolo County could see the adoption "market rates," which would inevitably raise the cost of water to Yolo County farmers and to lead to increases in the amount of water sold and transferred out of the county to other regions. Left unanswered is how Yolo County agriculture can possibly compete with the financial clout of Bay area and Southern California water purveyors, who would gladly pay far in excess of today's prices for Yolo County water.

* Increased groundwater extraction - Reductions in the availability of surface water supplies and higher water prices could cause farmers to begin utilizing more groundwater. Pumping from lower levels would increase energy costs. Lowering the water table also works particular hardships on rural residents who rely on groundwater for domestic use. Drilling new wells to reach deeper into the groundwater basin is a prohibitively expensive proposition for many farm families.

* Water Banking - Use of Yolo County aquifers for periodic underground water storage under water banking programs could promote greater land subsidence, and diminish the capacity of or lead to the collapse of our precious aquifers. Damage from subsidence, which is a lowering of the ground levels, may be largely irreversible and signals diminishing capacity to store water in the local basin. Subsidence in Yolo County has already increased the potential for flooding in the northern part of the county and has created problems for construction and piping systems. Measurable subsidence has also occurred in the community of El Macero to the south.

* Fallowing of land - The transfers of water to other regions could mean the fallowing or non-farming at large tracts of prime agricultural land. In response to questions of the Sept. 9 meeting of the Water Resources Association of Yolo county, a spokesperson for CalFed acknowledged that much of the additional water needed at the Delta from the Sacramento Valley would have to come from fallowing irrigated land. Such retirement of productive farm land would result in increased pressure for urban development or other uses and major impacts to the local agricultural economy caused by fewer crops, fewer jobs, and fewer equipment and supply purchases. During the drought year of 1991-1992, when the state operated under Drought Water Bank program, water transfers from Yolo County resulted in increased costs to the County for welfare and other social and health services. These costs, directly related to economic displacement due to the fallowing of land, were calculated to exceed \$127,000.

Implementing water transfers and boosting groundwater extraction may increase the competition for water between urban and rural interests, a process that could well drive the price of water beyond the means of many local farmers. Bear in mind that with the exception of the City of West Sacramento and a portion of UCD, all the cities and other large domestic water users in Yolo County rely solely on groundwater for domestic use.

Alternatives to CalFed currently not receiving much attention include creation of more water storage facilities, specified protections for local agricultural, economic and environmental interests, guarantees of water adequacy and reliability, and "regionalizing" aspects of the plan to ensure its congruity with local water objectives, programs and planning.

CalFed recently released its Phase II report, a document more than 12 inches thick and weighing nearly 50 pounds. Release of the report marked the start of a 105-day public comment period. If you are concerned with preserving the quality of life in Yolo County you should communicate that concern to your elected officials on the city, county, state and national levels. It's not too late to voice your concerns over seemingly invisible changes that one day could adversely affect the quality of life in this county and all of Northern California. Let's not sit back now and then at some future time shake our heads and say "we didn't recognize what was coming."

The District's response to the CalFed Phase II Report is available to the public by contacting the District office at 662-0265. #