

F-002631

After June 9, 2000

F-002631

# The San Francisco Chronicle

June 9, 2000

Greg Lucas  
Sacramento Bureau Chief

## Bay-Delta Water Pact Has Option For Canal Projects could cost \$8.5 billion over 30 years

Sacramento -- Gov. Gray Davis and the Clinton administration are set to announce an agreement today to restore the health of San Francisco Bay and the Delta that leaves open the possibility of a canal to siphon off more water for the Central Valley.

The plan, which Davis calls "an unprecedented attempt to build a framework for managing California's most precious natural resource," contemplates spending more than \$8.5 billion over 30 years on levee improvements, a score of environmental restoration projects and enlarging dams on Lake Shasta and at the Los Vaqueros Reservoir near Mount Diablo.

Although the plan is being trumpeted as an end to California's bitter water wars between farmers, environmentalists and city dwellers, it will take years before its completion and will probably provoke more fights among the warring parties.

"This is like Round 6 in a 15-round event," said Randy Kanouse, an East Bay Municipal Utility District lobbyist. "This is a good place to be in Round 6, but the heavy lifting is in working out the details."

### ENVIRONMENTALISTS LEERY

Raising the hackles of environmentalists, the plan also calls for studying construction of a canal across one-third of the Delta on the Sacramento River to push water at as much as 4,000 cubic feet per second toward the giant pumps to the east that propel water south to the Central Valley and Silicon Valley.

Although a much smaller project, the so-called Hood connector has been labeled by some critics as the northern leg of a Peripheral Canal -- an idea voters rejected in 1982 as a water grab by the south of Northern California's water.

The overall water plan is the result of six years of labor by a team of 14 state and federal agencies known as CalFed.

Their mission was to improve water supply and water quality in San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta while restoring the ecological ravages of the West Coast's largest estuary and heart of the state's water supply.

The agreement the Democratic governor will announce today is a rough outline of how to do that.

The plan attempts to balance environmental restoration of the Delta, including its dwindling fish population, with the desire of farmers and urban water users for more water.

Islands May Be Flooded Through a mix of expanding the capacity of existing lakes and reservoirs -- including the possibility of flooding Webb and Bacon islands in the Delta for water storage -- and recharging underground aquifers, the plan tries to make more water available.

A large chunk of water, about 380,000 acre-feet or roughly the amount of water 750,000 families use in a year, would be earmarked for increasing the fish population of the Delta.

There are also projects to move water more efficiently and promises to increase water for agricultural uses.

But many aspects of the plan are not ironclad. Some projects are only being studied to see if they are feasible.

As one environmental lobbyist said, "It's not as if the bulldozers and the Caterpillars are going start rolling on Monday."

Said Tom Graff of Environmental Defense:

"This is the atmospherics. What's really going to happen is what the Legislature and Congress do to this. What's legally binding is what comes out in the formal environmental impact statement, which they're predicting will be public in late July."

Other environmentalists were critical of parts of the plan, saying it grants too many agricultural concessions, including a guarantee to politically powerful Central Valley farmers of as much as 15 percent more water in drier years than they receive now.

Western Central Valley agricultural interests, many of whom are campaign contributors to Davis, have long complained that they are regularly shorted a portion of the 1.1 million acre-feet they contract with the federal Central Valley Project to receive.

Davis, who met with farmers in Modesto in April to hear their water needs, promises them 15 percent more water in the plan through a variety of projects and water-efficiency measures.

"The deal overall is designed to keep everybody relatively equal," said Bill Pauli, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation.

"But it's a matter of trying to provide farmers some assurances for a reasonable amount of water. I'm just not sure there's enough supply in the system to do what everybody wants."

Increasing the water supply for farmers comes at the expense of the Bay-Delta's dwindling fish population, environmentalists say.

"There are assurances of how much water farmers will receive, but there aren't the same assurances to protect the environment," said Elyssa Rosen, a Sierra Club spokeswoman. "There's reliability for farmers but none for fish."

The plan also pledges that water deliveries to farmers and others from the Delta will not be reduced below current levels for the next four years to protect fish.

There are also practical problems with some of the plan's key proposals on increasing water storage.

The Contra Costa Water District board said yesterday that any plans to expand the Los Vaqueros Reservoir would have to be put to a public vote.

The \$450 million, 100,000-acre-foot reservoir east of Mount Diablo was approved by water district voters in 1988, with the express condition that it not be tied to any plans for a Peripheral Canal.

Water users in the district pay some of the highest fees in the Bay Area, in part to pay for construction of the existing reservoir.

They would probably be reluctant to shoulder the estimated \$900 million needed to expand capacity by an additional 400,000 acre-feet.

Other Bay Area water districts may also be leery of shouldering the costs.

And there is already opposition to the idea.

A larger reservoir would harm the environment and pave the way for more suburbanization, said Seth Adams of Save Mount Diablo, who called it "a loaded gun pointed at the Delta."