



**CALFED
BAY-DELTA
PROGRAM**

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September 27, 1999

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Boxer:

Thank you for your letter of August 24, 1999, requesting clarification of CALFED's position regarding the Delta conveyance portions of the CALFED draft preferred program alternative.

Let me answer your basic question regarding CALFED's position on the isolated facility (or peripheral canal) directly and emphatically. CALFED and CALFED agencies have not changed their position on the isolated facility.

Comparisons of a Hood-Mokelumne River diversion to an isolated facility or a Peripheral canal are probably inevitable. Therefore, I want to reiterate CALFED and the CALFED agencies' intent - that the isolated facility is not part of the draft preferred program alternative. And as such, it will not be covered by the CEQA findings or NEPA Record of Decision. Any reconsideration of an isolated facility would require additional programmatic environmental review, such as a supplemental programmatic EIS/EIR. Moreover, I wish to assure you that neither the CALFED Program nor the CALFED agencies believe that an isolated facility could be or should be boot-strapped in a piecemeal fashion.

The primary reason for possible consideration of a Hood-Mokelumne River diversion is to compensate for the drinking water quality impacts of increasing the closures of the Delta Cross Channel. The Delta Cross Channel, shown on the attached maps, was constructed by the US Bureau of Reclamation as part of the Central Valley Project in 1951. The purpose of the Delta Cross Channel is to provide a direct hydraulic connection between the CVP water supply (Sacramento River) and the export facilities in the south Delta and in so doing, to provide for higher quality water in the Delta and at the CVP export pumps. The Cross Channel is equipped with gates to regulate flow from the Sacramento River depending on pumping patterns at the export facilities and flow conditions in the Sacramento River. The design flow through the Delta Cross Channel when open is approximately 3,500 cubic feet per second. It has been recognized for some time that operation of the Delta Cross Channel is a significant contributor to salmon mortality. Based on field studies with tagged fish, out-migrating salmon that are diverted through the Delta Cross Channel into the central

CALFED Agencies

California

The Resources Agency
Department of Fish and Game
Department of Water Resources
California Environmental Protection Agency
State Water Resources Control Board

Federal

Environmental Protection Agency
Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Department of Commerce
National Marine Fisheries Service

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Delta are estimated to experience a three-fold increase in mortality. Over the past ten years, and particularly since listing of salmon as an endangered species and passage of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, increasing restrictions have been placed on operation of the Delta Cross Channel. These restrictions are intended to reduce overall salmon and striped bass mortality. Over the years, consideration has been given to screening the Cross Channel, but this approach has been rejected due to space constraints and tidal effects that reduce screening effectiveness at this location.

When CALFED chose a through-Delta conveyance strategy as part of its Draft Preferred Program Alternative, a specific effort was undertaken to develop more fishery protection measures and habitat strategies for a through-Delta approach. As a result of that effort, CALFED identified additional Cross Channel operational constraints - specifically, more closures of the Channel. One of the by-products of the increased closure of the Delta Cross Channel is a reduction of water quality in central and south Delta. Modeling of the CALFED proposed actions revealed increases in total dissolved solids and in total bromide. This degradation of water quality prompted a reconsideration by CALFED agencies of a Hood-Mokelumne diversion as a screened replacement for the Delta Cross Channel to mitigate impacts on water quality. Hood is the proposed diversion site because it provides a good balance of physical features, which would tend to minimize effects on delta smelt migration, diversion of sediment from the river, and tidal influences on fish screen effectiveness, while providing topographic and geologic conditions that would allow a diversion structure to be constructed near sea level, on mineral soils, and through mostly agricultural lands. One earlier concept was to divert water from the Sacramento River into Snodgrass Slough, which flows into the Mokelumne River. However, due to habitat values of Snodgrass Slough, a subsequent proposal would construct a channel from Hood to the Mokelumne River in the vicinity of Snodgrass Slough and the Cross Channel. (Please see attached maps.) This is roughly the alignment that has been contemplated for an isolated facility, which is the primary reason for the stakeholder and press reaction.

Serious fishery concerns exist about a Hood-Mokelumne diversion, even as a contingent action. These concerns center on possible disruption to fish migration patterns. Although a screened diversion on the Sacramento River would keep out-migrating salmon in the Sacramento River, flows from the Sacramento into the Mokelumne system may attract adult returning salmon to the downstream side of the screens. This "back-of-the-screen" phenomenon could result in stranding or potential increased mortality associated with a fish passage structure. More broadly, the concern exists that the negative fisheries impacts associated with the Hood-Mokelumne diversion may actually be greater than the positive

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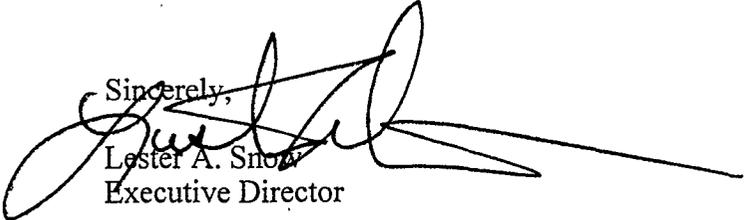
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benefits associated with the Cross Channel closure that produced the water quality degradation. As a result, we have structured the potential Hood-Mokelumne diversion as a contingent action to be considered only after three separate assessments are completed: first, a thorough assessment of cross channel operation strategies (see page 130, item #1 of the June 1999 Revised Phase II Report); second, a thorough evaluation of the viability of a Hood-Mokelumne diversion evaluation; and third, resolution of the fisheries impact concerns.

We intended the changes in the June draft to increase the detail of both the contingency action and the conditions that would have to be met in order for the Hood-Mokelumne diversion to be considered. We did not intend any change in fundamental approach. In retrospect, neither the December report nor June draft are as clear as they could be on this topic. If this contingent action remains in the final preferred program alternative, a substantial re-write will be appropriate. Whether this contingent action will be included in the final preferred program alternative will be the subject of further consideration based on comments received and concerns raised.

I hope this information provides the clarification you requested. Please call me at (916) 657-2666 if you have questions on this matter or any other aspect of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

Sincerely,


Lester A. Snow
Executive Director

Enclosures

cc: Honorable Bruce Babbitt
Honorable Mary Nichols
Felicia Marcus