

CalFed

The Hood Diversion Issue

The Hood Diversion has been identified in the Federal-State discussions as a key component of both a comprehensive water quality program and conveyance strategy. The proposed diversion has a complicated political history – and a broad set of pros and cons, assets and liabilities, as well as advocates and opponents. Along with storage proposals, the Hood Diversion has generated the most controversy both among agencies and stakeholders. While some view the proposed Hood Diversion as the primary "fix" to Delta water quality problems, others remain convinced that the set of Stage 1 water quality actions could achieve the same goals without the need for this controversial new facility.

As you'll see below, given the controversy and the diverse mix of alternative solutions currently on the drawing board, there is some merit to the "wait and see" approach on this key issue.

Background

- The current preferred alternative includes an evaluation of a screened diversion structure on the Sacramento River at Hood (up to 4,000 cfs) to improve water quality in the event CALFED's actions do not result in continuous improvement toward its drinking water goals. The proposal also sets up a series of conditions (e.g., regarding the need to resolve fish migration issues) that must be met before it could be built.
- This diversion is intended to improve water quality in the Delta and for South Delta export pumps by increasing the flow of high quality Sacramento River water into the South Delta. Delta water quality is currently controlled by the Delta Cross Channel downstream from Hood. The unscreened Delta Cross Channel is subject to periodic closure by the fish agencies because of fish migration concerns.
- While this proposal has always raised many questions and concerns, the controversy associated with this issue peaked this past June with the release of the Revised Phase II Report. The report included new language increasing the size of the Hood facility (from 2000 cfs to 4000 cfs) and seemingly elevating its priority from a "study" to a "project." In addition to the outcry from the environmental interests, Miller and Boxer both sent written inquiries about Hood, requiring a detailed CALFED clarification last fall.

Stakeholder and Agency Perspectives

- MWD and other Southern California municipal suppliers are strongly in favor of the diversion as a way to obtain more reliable access to high quality Sacramento River water.
- The proposal has raised concern in the environmental and Delta stakeholder groups since it is viewed as essentially the northern third of the controversial proposed Peripheral Canal. Both Senator Boxer and Congressman Miller have also expressed this concern.
- While Contra Costa Water District could potentially realize some water quality benefits from such a diversion, it has questioned both the efficacy of the proposed diversion and the computer models used to justify the need for such a facility on water quality grounds.
- Fish agencies have always expressed concern that a screened Hood diversion will have adverse impacts, notably because the screens will prevent return upstream migration of

anadromous fish. NMFS and USFWS have agreed to the preferred alternative language only because it includes substantial caveats about the need to resolve these fish migration issues in some as-yet-unknown way. At the same time, the fish agencies have focused on initiating evaluations of the Delta Cross Channel operations - to identify alternative operating rules that protect water quality with reduced impacts to fish.

- Others, recognizing the significant fishery concerns that may prevent the project from ever moving forward, are committed to studying the technical constraints of the proposal in Stage 1 while aggressively pursuing the larger set of "water quality fixes" outlined in the water quality plan currently being floated in our Federal-State discussions.

Issues and Recommendations

- **The "good government" question.** While the fish agencies are unwilling to completely take Hood off the table at this point, they acknowledge it is highly unlikely that it could overcome the significant "fish hurdles" CALFED has established for it to be built. While some are willing to take that risk and include it as a key piece of this package to satisfy some urban users, others view this as anything but "good government" and a hollow drinking water assurance for urban water users that will likely never materialize. They argue that this shell game approach offers no assurance to anyone.
- **Potential gap in the Water Quality program.** The Hood facility is identified as an important fix for achieving continuous improvement in drinking water quality and for alleviating water quality impacts associated with closure of the Delta Cross Channel. However, if (as expected) the fish agencies' concerns about Hood remain unresolved at the end of Stage 1, we could be left without that fix and instead with a big gap in our water quality program. Although the current language provides the flexibility to pursue other options in the future if Hood proves untenable, some argue that it is more responsible and appropriate to identify a better option now.
- **Other viable options.** The Federal-State discussion group has identified a comprehensive package of Stage 1 water quality tools. This package does not represent one simple fix, but rather identifies a potentially more effective mix of source water protections, treatment investments (UV and desalinization), and water quality-focused infrastructure (San Luis Bypass, Los Vaqueros). For example, the CALFED package is likely to consider the use of multiple-screened intakes on a flooded Central Delta island as a potential tool to improve water quality with fewer fish impacts. That action, in addition to reoperation of the Delta Cross Channel, may substantially improve water quality in the Delta without the need for a Hood facility. Aggressive implementation of these types of actions can provide short-term, tangible benefits to both Northern and Southern California urban water suppliers.
- **The "wait and see" approach.** While there is some desire and real political pressure to "just build it," a wait and see approach may be more appropriate on this particular issue. As we begin to implement the Stage 1 water quality actions, we'll have the chance to assess how well all of those actions (e.g., source water protections, treatment investments, infrastructure, Delta Cross Channel changes, flooded Delta islands) are performing towards our goal of improved water quality. While some things may not be fully implemented in the first few years, we will still be in a better position to gauge their likely collective success in making a real dent in the Delta's water quality problem.