

For Immediate Release
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Blue Ribbon Task Force Releases Vision for the California Delta

The Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force today submitted to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger 12 linked recommendations and several proposed near-term actions to protect the Delta ecosystem and the state's water supply.

The delta formed by California's two largest rivers, the Sacramento and San Joaquin, is the largest estuary on the West Coast and the hub of the state's water systems. California's Delta increasingly has become a center of controversy as federal, state, and local governments and private entities have sought to make use of its resources.

"We've got to turn the water debate in California on its head to make any progress. We can't keep hitting brick walls," said Task Force Chair Phil Isenberg. "The Delta is in crisis and each day brings us closer to a major disaster, be it from flooding, from the decline of important fish species, or from court-ordered reductions in the amount of water that can be pumped for the state's water supply."

Governor Schwarzenegger appointed the seven-member Task Force in February to develop a long-term sustainable Vision for the Delta by the end of the year, and an implementation plan by October 2008.

"We started from the premise that the Delta ecosystem and a reliable water supply for the state are co-equal values, and that conflicts between them should be resolved by applying the state constitutional principles of 'public trust' and 'beneficial use,'" said Isenberg.

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From there the Task Force recommends a significant increase in conservation and water system efficiency, new facilities to move and store water, and likely reductions in the amount of water taken out of the Delta watershed. The Task Force also recommends a new governing structure for the Delta that would have secure funding and the ability to approve spending, planning and water export levels.

In addition, the Task Force recommends several near-term actions. These focus on preparing for disasters in or around the Delta, including emergency flood protection and disaster planning, protecting the Delta ecosystem and water supply system from urban encroachment, and making immediate improvements to protect the environment and the system that moves water through the Delta.

Task Force members cautioned that their recommendations are linked and meant to be implemented together. In their cover letter to Governor Schwarzenegger they noted that “The Delta cannot be ‘fixed’ by any single action. No matter what policy choices are made, we Californians are compelled to change the ways we behave toward the environment and water.”

Addressing the inevitable questions about water conveyance facilities the Task Force members wrote: “For those who rush to discuss Delta water conveyance as if no other issue is of importance, we caution that decisions about storage and conveyance flow from all twelve recommendations in our Vision, and cannot be decided by themselves. To that end, we have recommended an assessment process focused on dual conveyance as the preferred direction, allowing an ultimate decision which fits into the other elements of this Vision.”

Developed during 14 days of public Task Force meetings since March, the full report is available at www.deltavision.ca.gov. In addition to Isenberg, Task Force members are: Monica Florian, Richard M. Frank, Thomas McKernan, Sunne Wright McPeak, William K. Reilly, and Raymond Seed.

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