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For Immediate Release

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Strong Governance, Ecosystem, a National Heritage Area and Options for Storage and Conveyance Top Staff Draft Delta Vision Strategic Plan

The Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force next week (June 26-27) will review initial recommendations to improve water management and conveyance in the Delta as well as a proposal for a new governing structure over Delta ecosystem health and water supply reliability. The recommendations are included in the first staff draft of a Strategic Plan that will be revised through a series of public meetings over the next four months.

Consistent with the vision adopted by the Governor's Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force in 2007, the staff draft also recommends special protection for the Delta itself, and strong actions to restore the Delta's physical habitat and actions to safeguard water supplies in wet and dry times through regional self-sufficiency and system enhancements.

The staff draft strategic plan recommends a new governance structure with the creation of the California Delta Ecosystem and Water Council, which would have fiscal and regulatory authority over a variety of projects within the legal Delta. It also calls for a strengthened Delta Protection Commission, a new Delta Conservancy and a new Delta Science and Engineering Board.

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The draft plan calls for the Delta itself to be protected by federal and state recognition as a National Heritage Area and State Recreation Area, intended to recognize and provide protections for the Delta's unique geography, ecosystem, culture and history. The Delta would be further enhanced by improvements to its entry points by land and water, and increased investments in upstream flood protection and in-Delta improvements of levees to safeguard land uses and services.

The staff draft will be discussed at the June 26-27 Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force meeting, and again at subsequent monthly meetings until the final recommendations are adopted in October. In addition, special meetings will be held around the state in August to gain additional public comment.

The staff draft urges enhancement of the Delta's estuarine ecosystem, including restoration of habitats in ways that re-create the land-water interfaces of the historic Delta and other effective estuaries. Additional recommendations call for restoration of appropriate water flows and other ecological processes throughout all Delta habitat types, and the reduction or removal of Delta stressors, such as invasive species, contaminants and entrainment associated with pumping activities.

Recommendations for water supply and reliability point to increased reliance on regional self-sufficiency as a solution through a wide range of supply and demand techniques, and integration of all aspects of the water cycle – from surface flows to groundwater to flood control. The plan also recommends a change from the traditional practice of diverting similar amounts of water each year to one of capturing more water during wetter periods. This paradigm shift would require creation of wet-period diversion, conveyance and storage enhancements undertaken to the “greatest feasible extent” to minimize ecosystem stress and prepare for climate change.

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The strategic plan is the second part of a two-year effort of the Task Force to define a vision for the Delta and then craft a strategic plan to implement that vision. Both the vision and the staff draft strategic plan have focused on all aspects of the Delta's problems, including urbanization, earthquake risk, invasive species, climate change, decline of desirable species, subsidence of its fragile levee system and the lack of definitive governance by conflicting missions of some 200 agencies that have responsibilities and roles in the Delta.

The Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force was established by Executive Order of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on Sept. 17, 2006, to develop a durable vision for sustainable management of the Delta. The Executive Order set December of 2007 as the deadline for the Task Force to submit its vision for the California Delta, which it did in November 2007, with publication of *Our Vision for the California Delta*. Further, the Executive Order called on the Task Force to develop a strategic implementation plan by October 2008, the first draft of which was released today.

The Task Force is chaired by Phil Isenberg and other members are Monica Florian, Richard M. Frank, Thomas McKernan, Sunne Wright McPeak, William K. Reilly and Raymond Seed.

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The full staff draft report can be found at www.deltavision.ca.gov