

***Los Angeles Times***  
**Editorial: Don't take the delta for granted**  
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WATER SHOULDN'T be taken for granted in California, a state where billions of gallons are conveyed over thousands of miles to millions of customers. And yet it is. Turn a faucet and, abracadabra, the stuff flows. Most of us don't know where it comes from, how it gets here or where it's stored. Politicians often ignore it too, preferring to focus on (what seem like) more pressing crises.

But a recent ruling by the Alameda County Superior Court is a reminder that this shouldn't be the case. The decision says that California's State Water Project, which moves water through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to other parts of the state, is in violation of the Endangered Species Act because its enormous pumps kill endangered fish. The judge gave the state 60 days to get a waiver or he will shut the pumps down.

That probably won't happen. But make no mistake: The state's water system is in trouble.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta provides water for 25 million Californians — including 60% of Southern California's supply — and supports \$400 billion of economic activity, including fishing and farming. And demands on it will only grow. California's population is expected to jump 30% in the next 20 years, while global warming could reduce the state's snowpack (and the water flows it creates) by the end of the century.

Even without these challenges, the delta faces problems. Like New Orleans, it's protected by old earthen levees — one major earthquake away from crumbling to bits. Also, it is home to rare native species, such as the fish in the Alameda County lawsuit, which support its fragile ecosystem. So the pumping system is vulnerable to environmental litigation.

State officials have known about the delta's weaknesses for decades, and they have talked about various ways to mitigate damage to the delta or to bypass it altogether. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was in Los Angeles on Friday to promote a \$6-billion water bond that will include \$1 billion for improvements to the delta.

With the governor in his second term, and politicians worried about Hurricane Katrina-like doomsday scenarios, the time is ripe for action. Not-so-subtle nudges like last week's ruling could provide a push to officials who need to get serious about managing the delta. And it could remind the rest of us that the water in our faucets is at the end of a very long and costly journey.