

Op-ed: A sense of urgency, equality to address Delta goals (Part 2 of 2)

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The Bay Delta Conservation Plan — endorsed by the Castaic Lake Water Agency as a key tool to addressing the technical issues in resolving the Delta crisis — follows a nationally recognized habitat conservation planning process advocated by state and federal endangered species laws.

The plan is being developed by a diverse collection of water agencies, biologists, environmentalists, engineers and policy experts.

Those involved are committed to the equal goals of creating a more reliable water system and helping fish species recover in the Delta.

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan effort is collaborative, public and science-based. The issues are difficult and often controversial.

Perspectives around the table vary widely, leading to candid and lively debate. Out of this transparent process, common ground and real solutions — so elusive in the past — are emerging.

The plan will create a permitting process to enable water providers to design a new delivery system that will help protect fish species.

Its process goes far beyond bare-bones compliance with individual endangered species laws; it aids the recovery of numerous species at once and the restoration of thousands of acres of habitat.

California's state and federal water delivery systems were built a half-century ago and no longer meet modern economic and environmental needs.

A critical element of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan involves the study of a possible new canal or other structure to separate the conveyance of freshwater deliveries from the natural flows in the Delta during periods critical to the fisheries.

This would involve a delicate balancing act of diverting water out of the Sacramento River when rain and Sierra snowmelt are plentiful without causing harm to water quality and fish.

The situation is different than it was a quarter-century ago, the last time California considered a canal.

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan represents a far more comprehensive plan that would help protect fish, and a new conveyance facility would be paid for by public water agencies, not the state general fund.

And a possible canal is only one component of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, which includes a long list of measures to enhance the Delta ecosystem, some of which would be appropriately funded through public sources.

Lastly, as legislators roll up their sleeves to craft a package of water bills, we ask that they also:

n Bear in mind the need for a balanced approach to funding, including a public financing component to complement the investments that will be made by California water agencies.

Reading between the lines: It's likely California will need to seek voters' approval of a funding mechanism to cover part of the expense of an overall Delta solution, which may include new water storage facilities and other infrastructure improvements in addition to a conveyance facility.

n Avoid letting broader statewide issues unduly divert the focus from finding a Delta solution. Issues like conservation, groundwater management and water rights are all important, too, but the Delta issue's urgency is unrivaled.

n Ensure that any new bodies or review boards created to oversee the Delta solution are not duplicative of existing authorities, and that they are designed to promote pursuit of the coequal goals of ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability.

As you absorb all of this information, you might ask, "What can I do?"

Every voice matters. You can visit the Southern California Water Committee's Web site, www.socalwater.org, and click on the link "Delta Call to Action."

There you will find the water committee's Delta policy position, which has been endorsed by Castaic Lake Water Agency and many other agencies.

If you would like to add your name as a supporter, or if your business or organization would like to do so, you can download forms to return to the water committee and join us in advocating a sustainable solution for the Delta.

We're glad to see the sense of urgency in Sacramento is real — there seems to be recognition among legislators that this is not an issue to be dealt with some time in the future, but now.

Hopefully, with this sense of urgency, our leaders will remember that a sustainable Delta ecosystem and a reliable water supply are equal in importance, and in fact each of the two goals is dependent upon the other.

Our state's future depends on it.

R.J. Kelly is president of the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board of Directors. His column reflects the agency's views and not necessarily those of The Signal.