

Editorial: Canal Deserves Study
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To the surprise of absolutely no one who's been paying attention, state officials next month will start looking for possible intake sites for a peripheral canal.

This will be done by drilling a series of test holes into Delta river bottoms as part of on-going on-site analyses and surveys.

The peripheral canal, of course, is the hotly disputed idea of building a water conveyance system around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. A through-the-Delta system also is being studied.

The idea is to figure out how to more efficiently send Northern California water south and to the Bay Area and at the same time enhance the health of the state's largest estuary.

Critics claim the peripheral canal is just an underhanded way to rob the north state of water in a way that will reduce flows through the Delta, thus hastening an environmental decline already under way. They claim its health can be improved only by reducing the amount of water being taken out for cities and farms.

Supporters say such a canal holds the promise of more efficient water use while increasing the health of the Delta, which is slowly being destroyed. Delta water flows can actually be increased with a peripheral canal in place, they claim.

Who is right has been debated for decades. Likely, it will be decades before it is resolved, if it can be resolved at all.

But we gain nothing - not more water supplies, not better health for the Delta - by simply arguing.

What we need is information, on-site examinations of the Delta ecosystems as well as a close examination of alternative solutions, including how to improve and maintain the fragile latticework of levees spread across the estuary.

River drilling by the state Department of Water Resources as well as ongoing surveys on private lands through which some sort of conveyance canal might run are part of those studies.

To just say no, to fight any objective engineering and scientific examination of options, is short-sighted and gets us no closer to finding a workable solution. We must base decisions about the Delta on facts, not emotional knee-jerk reactions.