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State Releases Updated Comprehensive Water Reliability and Ecosystem Restoration Plan

Public Invited to Comment on Bay Delta Conservation Plan to Safeguard Supplies for 25 Million Californians

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The state of California and its federal partners have announced the release of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan for formal public review. This is a significant milestone in the effort to restore ecosystem health and secure reliable water supplies for California. The release is a key step toward completion of a final plan and corresponding environmental documents.

The plan seeks to protect delivery of the mountain snowmelt that supplies water to two-thirds of the state's population from San Jose to San Diego and thousands of Central Valley farms. It focuses on the estuary where the snowmelt flows, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and aims to both reverse the ecological decline of the region and modernize a water system that now depends on hundreds of miles of earthen levees vulnerable to earthquake, flood, and rising sea levels.

Release of the public review draft of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and its corresponding Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) triggers a 120-day period for the gathering of public comments, from Dec. 13, 2013 through April 14, 2014. Citizens, organizations, and government agencies are urged to review and comment on the documents. From mid-January through mid-February, experts will be available at a dozen separate public meetings to facilitate review of the plan, and to hear public comments on the plan and accompanying environmental documents.

All substantive comments received during the public review period will be considered and discussed in a final EIR/EIS. Completion of the final documents would allow project proponents to begin seeking the many permits necessary to implement the comprehensive plan.

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan aims to both stabilize water deliveries from the Delta and contribute to the recovery of 56 species of plants, fish and wildlife over the 50-year life of the plan. The Legislature delineated those co-equal goals in the 2009 Delta Reform Act.

The 9,000-page Bay Delta Conservation Plan and its corresponding 25,000-page EIR/EIS reflect significant revisions since the informal release of administrative review drafts last spring and summer. The public review draft documents reflect changes such as:

- Changes to the alignment of the proposed water conveyance tunnels that would significantly reduce disruption to north Delta communities and reduce by half the project’s permanent footprint.

- More detail about the plan's critical adaptive management process, which would use research, monitoring, and adjustment of actions to ensure that environmental measures truly contribute to the recovery of covered species.
- Refinement and revision of how the plan would be governed.
- A description of the tools and sources of funding potentially available to support the adaptive management process if additional Delta flows and water supply are needed.
- Additional design criteria and operational constraints for the proposed north Delta intakes, including fish studies that would influence facility design.
- Addition of further measures to protect the greater sandhill crane, giant garter snake, and saltmarsh harvest mouse.

"This is a rational, balanced plan to help meet the needs of all Californians for generations to come," said California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird. "By meeting the state's dual goals for BDCP of ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability, we will stabilize and secure against catastrophe the water deliveries that sustain our homes, jobs, and farms, and do so in a way that not only protects but enhances the environment."

The plan proposes to change the way the State Water Project (SWP) and Central Valley Project (CVP) divert water from the Delta. It proposes the construction of new intakes in the north Delta along the Sacramento River about 35 miles north of the existing pumping plants. Twin tunnels would carry the water underground to the existing pumping plants, which feed canals that stretch hundreds of miles to the south and west.

A northern diversion on the Sacramento River would minimize environmentally harmful reverse flows in the south Delta that are caused when the existing pumping plants draw water from nearby channels.

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan has been developed through seven years of analysis and hundreds of public meetings. It is a habitat conservation plan under the federal Endangered Species Act and a natural community conservation plan under California law. It describes 22 separate conservation measures that would be undertaken by the California Department of Water Resources, operator of the SWP, in coordination with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, operator of the CVP. The plan would provide a stable regulatory environment for operation of the SWP, while working toward the recovery of imperiled fish species.

Water users served by the SWP and CVP – primarily in Southern California, the Santa Clara Valley, and the San Joaquin Valley – would pay most costs under the plan, including the entire $16 billion cost associated with new intakes and tunnels.

To read the public review draft Bay Delta Conservation Plan, get guidance on how to comment on the plan, and see the schedule of public meetings, please visit http://baydeltaconservationplan.com.

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