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Brown Administration Releases Preliminary Bay Delta Conservation Plan

First Chapters of Extensive Plan to Protect Both Delta Ecosystem and Water Supplies Posted for Public Discussion; Public Meetings to Follow

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – A cooperative effort to restore the ecosystem and improve water supply reliability of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta marked significant progress Thursday with the state's public release of the first portion of the draft plan.

The administration of California Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. today released the first four of 12 chapters of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). The comprehensive plan is the Brown administration's proposal for new water intakes and tunnels and habitat restoration to reverse the decline of native fish populations in the Delta and provide reliable water deliveries for two-thirds of California's population and much of the state's agricultural economy. The plan has been developed over the last seven years, with substantial technical advice and input from federal agencies.

Last July, Governor Brown, joined by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, announced revisions to the plan, including a 40 percent reduction in the capacity of proposed new water diversion intakes along the Sacramento River. The Obama administration has been working with state agencies to assist in developing a plan that will meet legal requirements and allow for appropriate integration with the federal Central Valley Project.

The full plan will be released in three stages over the coming weeks and accompanied by public meetings in West Sacramento to allow interested citizens to learn about the plan. The full plan and an accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report will be released for formal public comment later this year.

The newly-released documents describe in detail the more than 200 specific biological goals and objectives that will guide implementation of the plan over coming decades so that it achieves the dual goals of healthier, more resilient populations of native fish and wildlife while at the same time improving water supply reliability. Progress toward achieving biological goals and objectives, which range from the growth rates of individual fish, to overall increases in a species' population, will be assessed through sustained monitoring and research, and assured by adaptive management of the underlying conservation measures.

The newly-released chapters also detail the proposed operation of a new system of pumping plants and tunnels to carry water from the Delta. A new water project diversion point on the Sacramento River near Sacramento and 35 miles of underground tunnels would secure water deliveries against catastrophe; at any time, a flood or earthquake could inundate the below-sea-level islands in the interior Delta and draw salt water toward the existing south Delta pumping plants, which would have to be shut down to avoid contamination.

The existing water delivery system is prone not only to earthquakes, flooding, and the effects of a changing climate. Additionally, water deliveries to the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, and Southern California have been reduced in recent years in part because of the presence of federally protected salmon and smelt near the existing water pumps in the south Delta. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan proposes new water intakes located on the Sacramento River, out of the range of some fish species and effectively screened for others. The operating criteria for this dual system, in combination with habitat restoration, are designed to restore more natural flow patterns and help native Delta fisheries recover.

Ultimately, federal and state water project deliveries might be moderately lower or higher than average deliveries over the past 20 years, when factoring in the effects of climate change and ongoing scientific analysis required in the plan to determine Delta outflow needs of Delta fisheries.

"We are making real progress," said California Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin. "Getting to this point has been a long, complicated journey, but we have worked through some truly difficult issues. We are now closer than ever to finally safeguarding a water supply critical to California's future and restoring vitality and resiliency to the Delta ecosystem."

Mike Connor, commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation added, "We are very encouraged by the progress on the BDCP that has resulted from the close collaboration of federal agencies and our state partners. While more work remains, we will continue to be guided by sound and credible science as we support the Department of Water Resources in moving the plan forward."

BDCP is a Habitat Conservation Plan and Natural Community Conservation Plan that must meet the standards of the federal Endangered Species Act and California's Natural Community Conservation Planning Act as it seeks to protect more than 50 species of fish, wildlife and plants over 50 years. It takes into account the effects of climate change, which experts predict will hinder the recovery of the Delta's already-stressed native fish species and also threaten the reliability of water deliveries.

The plan includes 22 separate "conservation measures," many of which are designed to offset the effects of covered activities, including operation with new diversion and conveyance facilities of the State Water Project (SWP) and Central Valley Project (CVP), which draw water from the Delta. The California Department of Water Resources, which operates the SWP, will apply for state and federal permits for the plan, while the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates the CVP, will seek coverage under a separate provision of the federal Endangered Species Act.

Chapters of the plan to be released in coming weeks will describe estimated costs and potential funding sources and analyze alternative ways that the dual goals of ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability might be achieved.

The four chapters released Thursday include:

- **Introduction:** background, planning goals, regulatory context, a description of the scope of the plan, overview of the planning process, and details of how the plan is organized.
- **Existing Ecological Conditions:** historic and current ecological conditions in the Delta.
- **Conservation Strategy:** biological goals and objectives and details of the 22 conservation measures.

- **Covered Activities:** activities for which permits will be sought from regulatory agencies as a result of project proponents agreeing to implement the components of the plan upon its approval.

A public meeting to discuss these chapters is scheduled for March 20 from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Ramada Inn, 1250 Halyard Drive in West Sacramento. A meeting agenda, along with a schedule for the next release of BDCP chapters and upcoming public meetings, is posted at <http://baydeltaconservationplan.com>.

Chapters to be released in coming weeks include those that describe:

- the effects of the plan on ecosystem processes
- plan implementation
- governance structure
- costs and funding sources
- analysis of alternative ways to minimize harm to protected species
- the role of independent science in the creation and implementation of the plan.

To read the BDCP chapters and obtain more information about the plan, please visit: <http://baydeltaconservationplan.com>.

To view a 10-minute video about the BDCP produced by the California Department of Water Resources, please visit: <http://baydeltaconservationplan.com>.

B-roll footage of the Delta is available; please contact nancy.vogel@water.ca.gov for further information.

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