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Bay Delta Conservation Plan is best option

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For centuries, without a single dam or pipe, water in California's rivers and streams supported about 300,000 people. Now, California's population is 38 million, and will grow by 10 million in the next generation. This constant change confounds California voters and leaders. Circumstances that established the federal Central Valley Project in the 1930s, and led voters to approve bonds for the State Water Project in 1960, are gone. The environmental, economic and legal landscape has dramatically shifted since 1982, when voters last considered building a water conveyance around the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

To protect endangered species, the Legislature and courts restricted water exports from the delta. Despite these restrictions, fish populations have crashed. Recent independent [university](#) research says 83 percent of California's native salmon, trout and other freshwater fish are at serious risk of extinction with no action. Half of the water supply for Santa Clara County and part for Alameda County is at risk if delta levees fail.

The delta is unsustainable in its current form. The Legislature responded in 2009, mandating the state reduce its reliance on delta water and adopting a water conservation goal of a 20 percent per capita reduction by 2020 in urban areas. Key in the legislation are co-equal goals: provide a more reliable water supply for California and protect, restore, and enhance the delta ecosystem.

Nearly a decade of scientific analysis and community discussion went into this legislation. In the first year of the Brown administration, we enhanced this already robust process by making it public and transparent, increasing stakeholder participation and clarifying the goals and analysis of a science-based process. In late February, thousands of pages of science and analysis will be presented publicly. There is no doubt this will be controversial. It will be the first full public airing of all scientific aspects in one place.

It is worth repeating that this is a place to start, not to finish. There is no state commitment to this first draft. There is a commitment to working with all stakeholders to complete the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. The BDCP is the most holistic, complex, science-based regulatory effort ever undertaken in the delta. As information is developed, vetted and reviewed in a process more transparent than any other conservation plan or water project in California, public policy choices will emerge.

The [Obama](#) administration is fully committed to BDCP. California's agencies are given the task of making the BDCP successful. In that process, water agencies - with elected boards representing 25 million Californians - are providing \$250 million in funding; however, it does not guarantee a pre-

determined outcome. That is why we are weighing the views of the environmental community and the rights of delta communities.

This robust public stakeholder process was developed to hear all sides and understand issues. But we must achieve progress. That requires all Californians, of whatever historic views, to decide what they want out of this process. The status quo is unacceptable, and fish species could go extinct while talk goes on and on. It is time to decide and move ahead.

John Laird is the California secretary for natural resources.

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