The Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta is the largest estuary on the West Coast and the hub of massive state and federal water projects that serve tens of millions of residents. The Bay-Delta ecosystem is in decline, and that in turn has impacted water users’ ability to export water. The Water Authority has a long history of supporting efforts that could stabilize the Bay-Delta ecosystem and protect the Water Authority’s ratepayers.

Gov. Gavin Newsom is taking a fresh approach to complex water supply and ecological issues in the Bay-Delta. In April 2019, Newsom issued Executive Order N-10-19, directing his administration to “identify and assess a suite of complementary actions to ensure safe and resilient water supplies, flood protection and healthy waterways for the state’s communities, economy and environment.” Newsom also directed state agencies to scrap plans for the $17 billion twin-tunnels project that had been championed by the Brown administration in favor of a smaller, one-tunnel system.

In July 2019, the Water Authority hosted a tour for several of the governor’s top water officials to showcase San Diego County’s portfolio approach and how it has reduced reliance on the Bay-Delta, while protecting the region’s $245 billion economy and the quality of life for more than 3.3 million people. The same month, the Water Authority’s Board of Directors also formally supported Newsom’s efforts to develop a water resilience portfolio approach that meets the needs of California’s communities, economy and environment through the 21st century and advances a single-tunnel Bay-Delta fix.

The Water Authority Board made its backing of the single-tunnel proposal contingent on a project financing plan that treats San Diego County ratepayers fairly through the proper allocation of project costs.

**A Challenging Environment**

The Bay-Delta is a key water source for two-thirds of California’s population, providing vital supplies through the State Water Project and the federally operated Central Valley Project. However, the Bay-Delta’s ecosystem has been in decline due to development, farming, water exports, climate change and other factors. Stronger environmental regulations to slow down ecosystem deterio-
Bay-Delta

ration, coupled with prolonged dry periods, have significantly limited water exports from the Bay-Delta in recent years.

State and federal agencies have proposed various strategies over the past few decades to address these challenges, including, most recently, the now-defunct California WaterFix that involved constructing twin tunnels capable of transporting 9,000 cubic feet per second of Sacramento River flows underneath the Bay-Delta. The state is now undergoing environmental review for a single-tunnel solution.

The Water Authority’s only source of Bay-Delta water is through its water purchases from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Through the Water Authority and its member agencies’ efforts to diversify the region’s supplies, the San Diego region significantly reduced its reliance on MWD, and in turn Bay-Delta supplies. Those efforts — which will continue well into the next decade — are in keeping with the state directives to decrease dependence on the Bay-Delta for meeting California’s future water supply needs.

Conditional Support for Tunnel Project

Following MWD’s action to fund 64.6 percent of Gov. Jerry Brown’s California WaterFix costs, the Water Authority’s Board of Directors conditionally supported California WaterFix, contingent on project financing plans that treated San Diego County ratepayers fairly through the proper allocation of project costs by MWD.

When Newsom scaled back plans in 2019, the Water Authority Board voted to support that approach — with the same caveat that the region’s ratepayers be treated fairly.

Those Board actions followed one of the most exhaustive reviews of any water agency in the state over the past several years. The review included dozens of Board presentations and public meetings on the topic, and the Board heard from an array of stakeholders and experts, including Bay-Delta community leaders and elected officials, farming interests, state agencies, independent economists, environmental groups and others.

Focus on Funding Questions

Because it is uncertain how the state and in turn MWD will recoup its Bay-Delta tunnel costs, the Water Authority remains focused on how the project will be funded and how costs will be allocated.

If the state and MWD recover tunnel costs through water supply charges — consistent with the purpose of the project and in keeping with the state’s historical definition for similar projects — an average Water Authority ratepayer would pay less than $1 per household per month when the project is fully implemented, assuming the new one-tunnel project costs less than the two-tunnel proposal.

However, costs could soar several times over if the state or MWD instead allocate tunnel costs on transportation charges because the Water Authority would be uniquely affected as the only agency that uses MWD’s Colorado River Aqueduct to transport large volumes of independent water supplies.

For more information about the Bay-Delta, including related documents, go to sdcwa.org/bdcp.

A Water Supply and Ecological Resource

The 1,300-square-mile Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta provides a significant portion of the water supply for an estimated 27 million Californians. It is the largest West Coast estuary in the Americas, supporting more than 750 wildlife and plant species, including more than 40 aquatic species. It also is situated on one of four major North American paths for migratory birds.

Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta

San Francisco

San Joaquin River

California Aqueduct

Sacramento River

San Diego

San Diego County Water Authority

Our Region’s Trusted Water Leader

4677 Overland Ave.
San Diego, California
92123-1233
858.522.6700
sdcwa.org

@sdca