



April 18, 2012

Attention: Imported Water Committee

Bay-Delta Quarterly update. (Information)

Background

This quarterly update discusses activities that are taking place in the Bay-Delta region.

Discussion

Delta Stewardship Council

The Delta Stewardship Council released a draft environmental impact report on its Fifth Staff Draft Delta Plan in December 2011. The Council has received several thousand pages of comments, including comments from the Water Authority, to which it is required to respond under CEQA. The Council is also working on a Sixth Staff Draft Delta Plan. Water Authority staff is participating in an Ag-Urban Coalition at ACWA, which is commenting on the Council's drafts and providing advice and drafting to the Council.

Bay-Delta Conservation Plan

The Resources Agency released an administrative draft of the BDCP in late February, including an effects analysis and conservation plan. The administrative draft identifies and analyzes the effects of a project that would include a double-bore, 15,000 cubic-feet-per-second tunnel under the Delta, with five 3,000 cfs intakes on the Sacramento River. This project may not be the final recommendation, and the EIR also considers a number of alternatives. The Resources Agency's logic is that if the largest possible project is analyzed, the state can downscale the project without having to reconsider their analysis.

The effects analysis and conservation plan would offset the environmental impacts of the project by expanding habitat in the Yolo bypass area and the Cache Slough. These are excellent breeding grounds for Delta smelt, longfin smelt, and provide protection for juvenile salmon as they return to the sea. The administrative draft states that the project will result in some loss of fish populations in early years, but will eventually serve to recover the listed species.

More recently, the Agency has released the administrative draft of Chapter 8 of the BDCP. This is the chapter that relates to financing the BDCP. The Agency has contacted each of the state and federal water contractors and has received assurances that they are willing to finance the conveyance project. The Resources Agency has not investigated the financial ability of the contractors to finance the project, even though the Water Authority has expressed concerns about the long-term ability of the Metropolitan Water District to carry its share, due to declining sales, rising rates, and the lack of commitments from its member agencies to pay the fixed costs of MWD's State Water Project contract.

National Academy of Science Report

The National Research Council, a branch of the National Academy of Sciences, has released a “pre-publication” draft of its report on the Bay-Delta, entitled, “Sustainable Water and Environmental Management in the California Bay-Delta.” The report examines the issues of restoring a reliable water supply from the Delta, as well as restoring the environment and fish populations.

The report concludes that the reasons for the decline in fish populations are complex and interrelated. There is no simple fix that can be achieved by any particular action. Instead, a Delta fix will require addressing a number of factors, such as water quality, water temperature, terrestrial and aquatic habitat, invasive species, loss of wetlands, seismic and flood risks, and others. Any action taken will have impacts on some user of the Delta water system, either human or fish species. It is not possible to return the Delta to its natural condition before the Gold Rush of the 1850s. Actions taken must be considered in terms of changing climatic and hydrologic conditions, due to climate change.

Resolution of the Delta’s problems will require sacrifices on all parts, the report continued. While the co-equal goals of water supply reliability and environmental restoration are one way to allocate the resources of the Delta, it must be understood that the results of actions will not always be balanced between the two goals.

The report continues on to address in detail a number of stressors and factors that must be addressed to meet the co-equal goals. The report will be used by the state and federal governments in assessing the BDCP and in choosing a preferred alternative.

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