



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement on close of public comment period from Mark Cowin, Director of the California Department of Water Resources, and David Murillo, Regional Director, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Today ends the public comment period on the updated draft environmental documents that analyze the potential effects of changing the primary water diversion system in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The alternatives analyzed include California WaterFix, the project preferred by the administration of Governor Edmund G. Brown to achieve the co-equal goals of enhancing the Delta ecosystem and improving water supply reliability.

We are grateful to all the citizens who took the time to submit comments on the draft environmental analyses. We expect to gain valuable information from the public comments submitted. We will consider and respond to the environmental issues raised in each comment. Comments and responses will be published when the environmental analyses are finalized under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is expected in spring 2016.

These updated draft environmental review documents have been available for public review for the last 113 days. They revise and add to environmental review documents that were available previously for public comment for another 228 days. Our agencies have engaged in more than 400 community meetings and briefings related to the proposed project and environmental review documents and have answered countless questions and inquiries on the substance of the documents. The end of this public comment period is an important milestone in a long-running state and federal effort to address the ecologically critical reverse flows caused by the current diversion system and to ensure that water deliveries from the Delta are not catastrophically interrupted by levee failures.

In addition, we are working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and National Marine Fisheries Service as they draft detailed analyses of the needs of threatened and endangered fish and terrestrial species in the Delta that may be adversely affected by California WaterFix.

In the meantime, an important parallel process will get underway at the State Water Resources Control Board. The State Water Board will begin considering a petition by our agencies to add a point of diversion for the State Water Project and Central Valley Project necessary to allow for the implementation of key components of California WaterFix. The petition was submitted to the State Water Board in step with the CEQA and NEPA environmental review process in order to allow the State Water Board and the public the time and information needed to fully consider the proposed changes.

These developments unfold in the context of a larger, comprehensive effort to balance competing interests in the Delta. The State Water Board is in the process of developing and implementing updates to the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan. This plan update, being conducted in phases, will address beneficial uses of the Bay-Delta and water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of those beneficial uses. It will apply to all water users in the Bay-Delta watershed. The existing Water Quality Control Plan dictates to a large degree the operations of the federal and state water projects and includes rules on Delta inflow, outflow, and salinity measurements. The California WaterFix, as with any new Delta conveyance project, would be subject to the State Water Board's updated plan. That updated plan will seek to ensure adequate flows for the sake of the Delta's fish and wildlife, and agriculture, and municipal and industrial water users.

Wide consensus exists that the Delta is in crisis. This year, in the midst of an historic drought, state biologists tallied the lowest level ever recorded in a survey of Delta smelt, which serves as an indicator of the ecological health of the estuary. Water deliveries to two-thirds of the state's population face disruption. Sea level rise and warmer storms -- effects of climate change -- make the status quo untenable. Californians have long debated whether and how to change the water diversion system in the Delta that was built half a century ago, under a different public mindset and far weaker environmental protection laws. Today's milestone moves us closer to a modernization of this critical infrastructure.

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California has been dealing with the effects of drought for four years. To learn about all the actions the state has taken to manage our water system and cope with the impacts of the drought, visit Drought.CA.Gov. Every Californian should take steps to conserve water. Find out how at SaveOurWater.com.

