

# WEEKLY FLASH

## Turbulent State Water Issues Crest: Council in the Middle

It might be hard to get excited about water, but indeed, nothing is more important right now. Without massive changes very soon, the state’s main water system, the Delta, will likely fail at some point between this winter and the coming years. It will fail due to flooding, an earthquake, or sea-level rise. Adding further urgency, a U.S. judge [just ordered](#) that the 1.9 trillion gallons of water pumped annually through the Delta, be cut by as much as 35 percent, *next year*.

The Bay Area Council is operating at the absolute nucleus of the negotiations. We wouldn’t be there if not for our a strong history in water policy, thanks to the work of many, especially our former CEO, Sunne Wright McPeak, and Richard Rosenberg, Chairman and CEO, Emeritus, of Bank of America. Our current Water Policy Committee, led by Chair Jim Levine, began meeting with the [Southern California Water Committee](#) two years ago to build a consensus approach, rather than just swinging our political sledgehammer far and wide in a renewed water war.

To the surprise of even us, we made serious progress, bringing in Northern California environmental groups, and water agencies for their buy-in. Governor Schwarzenegger appointed the Bay Area Council to his [Delta Vision Stakeholders Group](#) to make final recommendations to a task force. The Council became seen as an influential and honest broker in these discussions. For the first time ever, we got nearly all of the players to agree to data-driven decision making, instead of political maneuvering, and every option is on the table.

The work has resulted in [promising options](#). Varying the Delta geometry, salinity and flow to favor native fish over invasive clams, coupled with restoration activities, can likely improve habitat. As for drinking and irrigating water, three long-term water diversions strategies are being considered: continuing to deliver water through the Delta; a peripheral canal bypassing the Delta; or a compromise “dual conveyance” with water flowing both through the Delta and a diversion canal. Data in the next 6-12 months should illustrate the most cost-effective answer. What is missing is money to pay for the changes. Enter the [Governor’s and Senator Perata’s](#) multi-billion dollar bonds currently being negotiated in Special Session in Sacramento. The Bay Area Council plans to support these bond funds and insist that language stipulating data-driven decision making drive expenditures on the Delta be included in the final legislation. We will keep you apprised of progress.

### Article of the Week

This [Mercury News](#) article explores California as a “role model for traffic relief.” Seriously.

### Quote of the Week

“Californians are increasingly gloomy.” – [Columnist Dan Walters](#) on new statewide polling.



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