

Tom Mulvihill, GM Column

California In Water Crisis

California is in a water crisis. Water is the life's blood of our state's trillion dollar economy and supports the "bread basket" of our agriculture to the tune of \$27 billion. Therefore, postponing action is not an alternative.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is in extreme straights. In fact, a state panel has advised that "... each day brings us closer to a major disaster." Environmental court decisions have already restricted water deliveries from the area's seven water diversion projects. Furthermore, litigation to protect additional species of plants and animals is in the works. A three-year drought and increased demand have emptied many of our reservoirs to all-time low levels. Experts have begun referring to our water emergency by the term "perfect storm."

Unfortunately, this is not a temporary situation. Scientists agree that global warming will increasingly negatively impact rain and snow fall throughout the West. The Delta's levee system, which is used to keep sea water from contaminating fresh water supplies, has been deteriorating at an alarming rate. In the event of an earthquake, experts predict that vast segments of the levees will fail, allowing ocean water to flood the fragile Delta environment. The ability to convey fresh water to two-thirds of the state will be lost. Railroads, energy corridors, highways, even entire towns would be obliterated. This inundation could also allow sea water to damage fresh groundwater reservoirs and ruin tens of thousands of acres of riparian habitat.

The Indian Wells Valley Water District's long-term plan to import water has already been adversely impacted by the Delta emergency. If the Delta collapses, so will the Water District's hopes for securing alternate water sources in the future. There wouldn't be any water available to buy or trade for and the infrastructure to get it here would have been damaged or destroyed. And with irreparable harm done to our state's largest agricultural water supply, food costs throughout the nation would soar.

To avert this looming catastrophe, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger established Delta Vision in 2006 and subsequently appointed an independent Blue Ribbon Task Force in February of 2007. The purpose of these actions and appointments is to implement a multi-pronged long-term solution.

The Task Force, along with a 43-member Stakeholder Coordination Group and the Delta Science Advisors, urged adoption of 12 "integrated and linked" recommendations outlining programs designed to save the Delta. Chief among these is immediate physical and structural improvements to Delta conveyance infrastructure and increased water storage. The Nature Conservancy, one of the nation's most influential environmental groups, sees a new canal around the Delta as an essential component of protecting water supplies and restoring habitat.

Other recommendations specify that the Delta must operate under a separate governing system with secure funding and autonomy over planning, land development and water exportation.

These actions will take tremendous money and manpower to achieve along with previously unseen levels of cooperation. No matter. They are absolutely necessary and should be adopted immediately. To avert a catastrophe, something must be done now.

We urge you to learn more about the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta, its problems and their solutions by visiting delta.ca.gov/DeltaVisionVisions.html. If you agree that the time to save the Delta has arrived, please contact our state and county legislators: Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger; Senator Roy Ashburn; Supervisor Jon McQuiston; Assemblywoman Jean Fuller; Assemblyman Phil Wyman; and Senator George Runner.