

THE DELTA CONVEYANCE PROJECT - EVERYONE WINS

Science Proves, the Tunnel is the Best Way to Protect the Environment, the Ecosystem, and the Economy from Climate Change and Seismic Risks

Sat Tamaribuchi, Board President, MWDOC



Since its inception more than 60 years ago, the State Water Project has been at the epicenter of California water wars. The battles over the precious waters of the Delta are dressed with different storylines; north versus south, fish versus man, and floods versus drought. To date, despite a few climaxes along the way, none of these chronicles have concluded with a victor. At the same time, the Delta and its watershed fisheries continue to degrade. The only thing everyone seems to agree with is that the Delta is not sustainable in its current condition.

The next chapter of this tale could be pivotal. It could be the part of the story where everyone wins - if it is written correctly.

If environmental groups genuinely want to protect the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Bay Delta, they should embrace Governor Newsom's plans to save it. Governor Newsom has proposed a comprehensive watershed approach. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and its 26 member agencies unanimously support the proposal. His plans provide an alternative to lose-lose litigation and pledges over two billion dollars for habitat restoration and environmental flows while providing for agricultural and urban water supplies.

A key element of his plan is the Delta tunnel, known as the Delta Conveyance Project or DCP, which is in the Environmental Review process. Litigants are lined up to challenge the plan's virtues, claiming that it will destroy the ecosystem and costs too much. Neither is true. In fact, it's just the opposite.

The Delta is a maze of fragile man-made islands, extremely vulnerable to earthquakes, floods, and rising sea levels. In a catastrophic event, saltwater from the Bay would overwhelm the freshwater supply for most of the state, destroying the environment and paralyzing the economy along the way. To protect the ecosystem and the viability of the state's economy, we must re-engineer the delicate estuary that also acts as the heart of its water-delivery system.

The DCP will do just that. It will enhance reliability by capturing water during storms and protecting existing freshwater from climate change, sea-level rise, and seismic events. The project will better protect the delicate Delta ecosystem and provide funds for habitat restoration. The governor's plan will utilize adaptive, real-time water management to optimize freshwater flow in the Delta. This will reduce the number of fish that end up in pumping plants and reduce the number of fish impacted by water diversions with state-of-the-art fish screens.



Scientists predict climate change will bring more spring runoff and less snowpack in the Sierras. Unfortunately, the State Water Project is not equipped to store this additional runoff in its current state. The tunnel mitigates climate change's inevitable effects by allowing us to capture more of these increasingly frequent high flows instead of losing that water to the ocean. The project will improve water management and water quality for California's communities, farms, and fish and restore habitat.

Those who dispute the cost of the \$16 billion project should take solace knowing that pound for pound (or acre-foot for acre-foot), the DCP is the most economical way to ensure water continues to flow reliably throughout the state. Desalination, recycling, and other local projects are certainly part of the blueprint for long term reliability. However, without completing the DCP, these options will not assure sufficient supplies. It's also important to note that the project will be paid for by those who use the water, not the state taxpayer. The best end to this saga is the successful completion of the Delta Conveyance Project and watershed-scale habitat restoration and delivery of environmental flows when needed. The science supports this. Good for the environment. Good for the farmers. Good for the economy. Good for the fish. Everyone wins.

This battle needs to end. Solutions will not be found in court. Litigation will delay essential habitat restoration and environmental flow supplies. We cannot wait for the earthquake. COVID-19 demonstrates that unexpected disasters happen. We need to turn away from the path of litigation and look towards productive discussions to benefit the environment, agriculture, and urban water users. The Federal Government, locals in the Delta region, and state regulators need to work together and do what is right for all Californians and the Delta ecosystem based on the current and best science.

Otherwise, if we continue with this never-ending story, eventually, everyone will lose.

This article was originally published in the Orange County Register's California Water Special on Sunday, March 28. [Click here to download the full spread >](#)