

# New Delta ideas

By LEN RICHARDSON

**I**N its long history, *California Farmer* has backed Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta solutions. Historically, the magazine supported the Reber plan to build a dam between salty San Francisco Bay and the freshwater Delta — in short creating two lakes at the upper and lower bays with a dam between Richmond and Marin counties, and San Francisco and Oakland. The idea died. The magazine supported the peripheral canal that was defeated by 90% of voters in 1982. In April 2006, the idea of a baby peripheral canal was again floated.

Finally, these losing ideas are gaining new energy. Scientists from the Public Policy Institute of California and the University of California looked at some possible solutions and released a report with their conclusions.

Of nine suggested ideas for Delta management, only the Peripheral Canal Plus, the South Delta Restoration Aqueduct and the Armored-Island Aqueduct are thought to be worth considering.

## Canal options

Under the canal alternatives, environmental and salinity conditions would be allowed to fluctuate in the western Delta to improve habitat conditions for native species. Urbanization would be possible behind strong levees.

For water exporters, a peripheral canal assures water quality (especially salinity) and higher water deliveries because exports would be less susceptible to conditions within the Delta. With adequate fish screens, the canal would result in less disruption of fish



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**FAILURE COST:** A Public Policy Institute of California study says the cost of a single Delta failure could reach \$40 billion.

## Key Points

- PPIC report scraps keeping Delta as a freshwater system.
- As it is now, the Delta is unnatural and at great risk.
- Three peripheral canal options are considered the most viable.

migrations or entrapment.

■ **Peripheral Canal Plus.** An aqueduct would be constructed from Hood, on the Sacramento River, south along the Delta's eastern edge, sending exports to Clifton Court Forebay. This would allow water to bypass the Delta while meeting Central Valley and State Water Project needs.

It is called Plus because it would be supplemented by actions to improve ecosystems, agriculture, recreation and housing, and would export only 10,000 to 15,000 cubic feet per second, compared to the original canal's 22,000 cfs.

■ **South Delta Restoration Aqueduct.** The SDRA is the same peripheral canal, but its outlet would enter the lower San Joaquin River, perhaps as far upstream as Old River, to flush the southern Delta that is known for poor water quality and low water levels.

The scientists indicate an option would be to have a smaller branch of the aqueduct feed high-quality water into the California Aqueduct and the Contra Costa Canal for city use.

■ **Armored-Island Aqueduct.** By armoring select islands and cutting off or tide gating various channels within the central-eastern Delta, a major, semi-isolated freshwater conveyance corridor for water exports could be created. Various versions of this approach have been considered since the 1950s.

The scientists explain that this plan would allow restoration and reconfigurations of western islands and urban development on higher-elevation eastern lands and islands. Water exports might be supplemented with a through-Delta canal at Snodgrass Slough or a northeast Delta floodway at Tyler or Staten Islands.

## Freshwater Delta out

A seawater-saltwater barrier is among the ideas tossed out by the PPIC. It notes that the Army Corps of Engineers tested the idea in the late 1970s using partial barriers (underwater sills) in Carquinez Strait to restrict seawater flow into the Delta. Dutch engineers also have floated a large, movable barrier similar to the

Maeslant storm surge barrier that protects Rotterdam.

The report, however, writes off the idea as expensive — not unlike the Reber plan — without resolving ecosystem issues. Indeed, all freshwater Delta ideas were eliminated.

"By insisting that all of the Delta be managed as a static system, as it is now, a very unnatural Delta has been created. Maintaining such a vast area, subject to great natural variability, as a more or less homogenous region requires and implies substantial risks. The Delta is now too important to tolerate such risks," the scientists conclude.

## He said it

"In developing this report, PPIC has done a great public service; now it is up to our political leaders to do their job and take the next step."

— Steve Hall, executive director, Association of California Water Agencies, Sacramento



## News Net Briefs

### Veggie law means wider liability

Assemblywoman Audra Strickland, R-Thousand Oaks, has introduced AB 698, which would allow growers to sue those who abuse their asparagus — or their spinach, broccoli or any other "perishable agricultural product." The bill states that the disparagement could be disseminated to the public "in any manner." So any food-purity fanatic with a blog and a distaste for genetically modified crops or *E. coli* in his or her spinach could get an unpleasant notice from a lawyer.



feed in the year before becoming certified. Transition after June 2006 must use 100% organic feed in the transition year.

### California holds the energy line

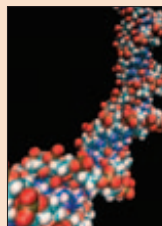
Since 1974, California has held energy consumption constant, reports *The Washington Post*. During that time, U.S. energy use per person has jumped 50%. If California hadn't made changes to its electricity consumption habits, the state would now need the equivalent of one nuclear plant every eight miles between San Diego and San Francisco, says Arthur H. Rosenfeld, California Energy Commission.

### Law will disclose store recalls

A California law that takes effect July 1 will allow health officials to reveal which food retailers sold meat and poultry involved in serious recalls, reports *USA Today*. The USDA is pushing a national proposal that would post retailer names and store locations on its Web site.

### Store digital data in DNA

DNA, perhaps the oldest data storage medium, could become the newest. Scientists are making progress using DNA to store text, images, music and other digital data inside the genomes of living organisms. In American Chemical Society's *Biotechnology Progress*, scientists report that DNA may be the ultimate option in permanent data storage.



### 2007 federal grazing fee falls

The Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service announced the federal grazing fee for Western public lands will be \$1.35 per animal unit month in 2007, down from \$1.56 in 2006. The newly adjusted fee applies to nearly

18,000 grazing permits and 8,000 Forest Service permits.

### Colombian flowers dominant

Sixty-two percent of all fresh-cut flowers now sold in the United States are imported from Colombia, including 50 different varieties of flowers and 2 billion stems. Furthermore, 77% of all flowers imported into this country are from Colombia, reports the Colombian Association of Flower Exporters. Of all roses sold in the United States, 62% are Colombian.

### Feds boost meat, poultry security

Federal food-safety organizations will toughen inspections of poultry and meat plants to decrease unsafe practices and outbreaks of germs such as *E. coli*, reports *Forbes*. This is the first major change to food inspection in 10 years and will result in fewer inspections at plants with better records and lower risks.