

# Without strategic plan, Delta continues to be at risk of disaster

Ray Seed, Sacramento Bee, 6-15-11

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Northern California's wet, cold spring may have ruined many a picnic, but it portends a much more serious crisis once temperatures warm up. Across the Central Valley, communities are bracing for a potential onslaught of runoff water brought on by a rapidly melting snowpack. This circumstance would be considered a threat even in places with a robust emergency preparedness plan and a strong infrastructure. For communities near the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, a sudden heat wave and resulting flooding could be disastrous.

The two biggest threats to personal safety of Delta residents are flooding and earthquakes leading to multiple levee failures in the region. Despite recent progress in other areas, realistic preparations by the state for response to a flood or seismic event in the Delta are still sorely lacking, with regard to life safety activities including preparation, rescue and response. In addition, the Delta is the heart of the state's extensive water systems, providing water to more than 23 million Californians. In the case of an earthquake or catastrophic flooding, the state's water, transportation and utility infrastructure could well be disrupted for weeks, months or longer.

On Thursday, the Delta Vision Foundation will release its annual "Delta Vision Report Card," to assess progress on implementation of the Delta Vision Strategic Plan, which includes recommendations to reduce risks to people, property and state interests in the Delta by effective emergency preparedness, appropriate land uses and strategic investments. The Strategic Plan, released in 2008, provides an integrated and linked set of actions that can restore the beleaguered Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and ensure a reliable water supply for California.

Without giving away the plot and ruining the suspense of the report card release, some major challenges remain for the state to move forward to implement the strategic plan in its entirety, especially in the areas of risk reduction and emergency protection for Delta residents, and emergency response planning for events threatening to disrupt a key element of the state's water supply.

There is no time to waste. This work needs to be accelerated with a sense of urgency.

The Delta Vision Foundation acts as a citizen's performance and accountability catalyst, to make sure the state continues to advance efforts on restoring the Delta and ensuring water supply reliability for all regions of California. The upcoming report card is informed by input from stakeholders and the public, and is designed to provide a broad assessment of actions and organizations so that elected officials, agency executives and staff, and stakeholders and the public can understand the opportunities and barriers for achieving the co-equal goals to restore the Delta ecosystem and create a more reliable water supply for California. The annual Delta Vision Report Card also includes recommendations for action and improvement to accelerate implementation and ensure that strategies and actions are comprehensive, coordinated and integrated.

Securing the state's water future will require hard work and a mending of wasteful ways. It will require optimizing efficient water use in every way possible, and constructing new facilities for conveyance and storage. It will also require fostering cooperation among all stakeholders to do what is right for the state as a whole. All of this will need to be accomplished while protecting and restoring the Delta ecosystems while also reducing risks to people, property and the state's economy.

The state's water challenges cannot be solved overnight, but there is now an increasingly clear and defined path forward. The Delta Vision Strategic Plan should be implemented without further delay. If it is not, the Delta will continue to be at risk of either a weather-related or earthquake-related disaster – an entirely foreseeable, preventable and unacceptable disaster, and one just waiting to happen.