

Calif. water groups want conveyance in delta plan

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A coalition of California water contractors, business and agricultural groups wants a state agency to include a canal or pipeline, groundwater and surface water storage, and ecosystem restoration investments in its plan for the fragile freshwater delta.

The alternate proposal was submitted as the Delta Stewardship Council prepares to release the fourth draft of its plan for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta late Monday or Tuesday.

The council's final plan may include recommendations for some type of water conveyance system, which is being developed through a separate federal and state initiative called the Bay Delta Conservation Plan.

The coalition argues that the council's latest draft aims to reduce demands on delta water and augment flows for fish through an approach that relies on regulations alone. That approach, coalition members say, does not address improving water supply reliability — one of the co-equal goals of the future Delta Plan — and would have dire consequences for farmers and urban water users.

"We need to have a plan that will provide for a successful pathway for the BDCP, if it moves ahead and meets its requirements," said Lisa Lien-Mager, spokeswoman for the Association of California Water Agencies. "It should not serve as a barrier or obstacle to that process."

In order to be included in the Delta Plan, the BDCP must be approved by state wildlife and water agencies and can't violate other laws meant to protect wildlife.

The seven-member council has received over 1,000 comments between releases of the third and fourths draft of the plan, said its spokesman Eric Alvarez. This month, the council will determine how to incorporate the comments, including the coalition's alternate proposal, he said.

The Stewardship Council will vote to adapt the Delta Plan in November 2011, Alvarez said.