

Calif. Dems push for more study of tunnel plan

Debra Kahn, Environment & Energy Publishing, 10-12-12

A group of California Democrats are pushing for a study on the costs of a plan to revamp the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and bolster the fragile levees that line the river systems.

Rep. John Garamendi (D-Calif.), who is running for re-election in a newly redrawn 3rd District, is a staunch critic of the state-federal Bay Delta Conservation Plan, which calls for a pair of huge tunnels that would carry Sacramento River water around the crumbling delta rather than through it. In addition to providing more certainty to the 25 million people, farms and natural systems that depend on the delta, the project would also reduce stress to endangered species, including the delta smelt and chinook salmon.

But he says the plan shortchanges levee repair, guarantees too much water to farmers south of the delta and lacks detail on how it would restore animal habitat.

He and other House Democrats floated legislation ([H.R. 6484](#)) last month that would authorize the Bureau of Reclamation to pay for repairs to levees that funnel water from the federally run Central Valley Project to farmers and other customers south of the delta. The bill would limit the federal cost-share of improvements to 50 percent.

It would also require the Interior Department to conduct a full cost-benefit analysis of the BDCP and compare it with an alternative scenario in which no tunnels are built.

The cost of the tunnels themselves has been pegged at \$14 billion for the water contractors, but the estimate needs to include the costs to landowners, fishermen, taxpayers and other residents, Garamendi said.

"For decades, I have fought to protect Northern California from short-sighted water grabs," Garamendi said in a statement. "[S]imple logic would indicate that before moving head first towards construction of peripheral tunnels, we should first look at the big economic picture to determine which, if any, project makes financial sense."

Co-sponsors of the legislation include California Reps. Jerry McNerney (D), Doris Matsui (D), George Miller (D) and Mike Thompson (D).