

# Now we see real goal of Delta plan

*Want to save the Delta? Don't siphon off the Sacramento River*

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The Bay Delta Conservation Plan has always been based on co-equal goals, or so said proponents. Goal 1A was to make water deliveries south of the Delta more “reliable.” Goal 1B was to save the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The key, said Gov. Jerry Brown, is to build two 40-foot-wide tunnels to carry Sacramento River water beneath the Delta directly to the pumps that send it south.

Apparently, one of those goals isn’t quite as important as the other. Guess which one.

Gov. Brown now appears more intent on sending water south than on saving salmon and smelt. This comes after federal agencies signaled they probably won’t issue the 50-year environmental permits that were a key element of the original plan. Continuing without the environmental goals exposes the plan for what we always believed it was: a water grab.

To pay for this \$25 billion project, the state needs matching money from the water agencies that will benefit – namely, Metropolitan Water District and the large districts such as Westlands that provide water to farmers south of the Delta. Their financing plans are predicated on those 50-year contracts (i.e., reliability). Environmentalists prefer much shorter time frames so they can adapt to ever-changing Delta conditions. These goals don’t mesh; they never have.

That’s one reason the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency criticized the BDCP last year, saying the plan would harm water quality and aquatic life and increase pollution. The EPA wanted “greater freshwater flows through the Delta.”

The new plan, expected sometime this week or next, is to uncouple the co-equal goals. But there’s a problem. Restoring the Delta has always been a critical selling point in Northern California, where voters emphatically rejected the 1982 peripheral canal plan. So now the Department of Water Resources is also proposing to expand rehabilitation plans into the Sierra – where our rivers begin. That will likely require even more water.

We’re left asking the same question we’ve been asking since the plan was first proposed: How do you save a water-dependent environment like the Delta by removing its largest water source? The only way is to replace that missing water with water from somewhere else. That’s where we come in.

The state wants us to believe it is just a happy coincidence that its plan to save the salmon on the Merced, Tuolumne and Stanislaus rivers – which reach the Delta through the San Joaquin River – coincides with its plans to have most of the much-larger Sacramento River bypass the Delta. Right.

Predicting river conditions 50 years from now is impossible. The only prediction we feel safe in making is this: If the state’s plan proceeds, a lot less water will stay in our Valley.

If the governor truly wants to save the Delta, he should prioritize that portion of the plan and drop the part about “more reliable” water deliveries until he knows how much water will be required to save the Delta. Otherwise, this looks like what we’ve always thought it was.