

# Valley leaders demand explanation for feds' water turnabout

**Lois Henry, Bakersfield Californian, 1-15-10**

Looks like the so-called "two gates" project is all but dead.

In case California's never-ending water crisis isn't at the top of your priority list, two gates was the name of a pilot project that would have put movable gates, or screens, in strategic areas in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to try and stop the endangered delta smelt from being sucked into giant federal and state pumps that move water south through the state.

The Department of the Interior put off the project "indefinitely," saying experts needed to review the underlying science.

Though this was an experimental program, it was hoped if the gates were even somewhat successful in aiding the smelt, they could provide users down the line, including many Kern County farmers, at least a little more supply predictability.

"It's unacceptable," was Kern County Water Agency General Manager Jim Beck's response to Interior's actions. "It had the potential to provide some benefit and, at a minimum, give us a greater understanding of how the delta operates at a relatively affordable amount and we couldn't even get that done."

And some of the issues noted by Interior as problematic seemed to fly in the face of their own previously established scientific pronouncements.

One of the things two gates would have done was gain a greater understanding of the smelt's reaction to turbidity (stirred up water) near the pumps.

But Interior said, no, first we need to determine if there is a relationship between turbidity (stirred up water) and smelt behavior.

Well, one of the constraints on wintertime pumping is that it causes too much turbidity, which confuses the smelt and they get sucked into the pumps, according to the feds themselves.

"They are inconsistently applying their own science," Beck said.

He hoped the project wasn't completely dead and said KCWA would continue working with other water users, federal agencies and our Congressional representatives to revive the project.

Meanwhile, Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, was trying to get better information from Interior on what it means by "indefinitely."

"As far as I'm concerned, Salazar owes us a better explanation," Costa said in reference to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who came to California in the fall and seemed to give support to the two gates project.

"He needs to explain why he changed the policy on two gates, which was always seen as a pilot project."