

# Paying Sacramento's Water Bill

*State lawmakers need to reach a deal on financing measures sustaining the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.*

**Holly Schroeder and David Fleming, Los Angeles Business Journal, 10-5-09**

After decades of inaction and contentious disputes, California's water system is finally on the brink of bringing us into the 21st century and preserving the vital Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta hub that is the conduit for the liquid lifeblood that sustains the vast majority of the state.

The Legislature recently reached agreement on a wide-ranging set of measures aimed at improving the state's water supply – and stopping the environmental hemorrhaging in the delta – but is just short of reaching consensus on financing.

The need is critical – now more than ever – for the Legislature and all parties involved to quickly and fairly resolve this matter. We cannot afford to wait a moment longer to find real solutions to balance the ecological and economic needs pressuring this vital 700-mile maze of waterways, levees and islands that drives the state's economy.

The delta supplies water to two out of every three Californians in Southern, Central and Northern California. And it is the largest single drinking-water source in the nation. Delta supplies are also used to irrigate 750,000 agricultural acres, directly supporting \$400 billion of the state's \$1 trillion industry.

But California's water system – built for a population of 18 million and now serving nearly 30 million – is strained to the breaking point, seismically vulnerable and in need of being upgraded immediately. Some have estimated the aging system of canals and levees is just a single moderate earthquake away from collapse, which would flood the delta with saltwater and render it unusable.

Without quick and immediate action, economic development and job creation are at serious risk of becoming secondary considerations if Southern California cannot guarantee safe, reliable and competitively priced access to water.

Ecological considerations also are straining the system and thousands of acres of delicate delta habitat need to be restored for native fish and other species. Dwindling fish populations, and the endangered delta smelt, have triggered judicial monitoring and delta water-supply restrictions that threaten to keep Southern California and much of the state in shortage conditions.

## **No time to waste**

While it has long been said in California that “Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting,” those times are gone. There is no longer time for any battles or delays in fixing this situation to ensure conveyance and delta ecological issues are co-equally represented in decisions that will affect all of our futures.