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Note: The Executive Summary is being rewritten and will be presented with the final Delta Plan.

The Delta and Suisun Marsh lie at the intersection of California's two largest rivers, the Sacramento and the San Joaquin. They are also at the intersection of many of the State's water policy and science debates, a locus for decisions that, in one way or another, affect almost every Californian.

After decades of debate that served mostly to prolong the *status quo,* the California Legislature in 2009 faced the challenge directly, declaring that the Delta watershed and California's water infrastructure are in crisis and that existing Delta policies are not working. The Legislature further said that resolving the crisis would require fundamental reorganization of the State's management of Delta watershed resources, both upstream and in the areas that receive water taken from the Delta. This Delta Plan responds to that declaration.

The Delta is the hub of the state's major water supply systems, crossed east to west and north to south by channels, aqueducts, and pipelines that convey water from where it falls as rain and snow to where the vast majority of Californians need it to sustain one of the world's largest economies. The Delta also is the largest estuary on the West Coast, a place where fresh and salt water mix to support a vast array of birds, fish, and wildlife. Protected from flooding by levees, its islands are a critical resting place on the Pacific Flyway and its channels a transition zone for salmon on their way to the ocean or returning upstream to spawn. The Delta, too, is home to a half million humans spread across cities and rural lands, all on a unique patchwork of mostly agricultural islands surrounded by an increasingly urban landscape.

Today the Delta faces a crisis that has been building for some time. The Delta's tributary rivers and streams drain about 40 percent of the land in California and carry about half of the state's total annual freshwater flow. Over the past 160 years, humans have sent the mercury-laden debris of hydraulic gold mining flowing toward the Delta, built levees to drain wetlands and carve out more than 50 large and several small "islands," and built massive water supply projects to take water around, through, or directly out of the estuary. They also introduced nonnative species both by accident and intent, and watched as the residue, and in some cases legacy pollution, of upstream agricultural and urban uses altered the water quality and resulting characteristics of the estuary.

The Delta had been showing the effects of decades of abuse, but only in the last several decades have we really come to understand the magnitude of change this has caused, and the tradeoffs inherent in the multiple—and often competing—functions we ask the Delta to perform.

Although the numbers of species of fish in the Delta have fluctuated over time, four in particular dropped precipitously since 2001. Although acknowledging that the drop likely had multiple causes, fish and wildlife agencies put new rules into force to limit the timing and amount of water that could be exported by the two largest export projects—the federal Central Valley Project (CVP) and the State Water Project (SWP). Those restrictions, combined with a drought, caused water shortages in many parts of the state in 2007-2009, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley and portions of the San Francisco Bay Area.

As a result, the Delta today is not meeting the needs of farmers and urban water users who want certainty of supply and—in some cases—additional water from the Delta. Nor is it meeting the needs of fish and wildlife—the numbers of some threatened or endangered species remain perilously low. And the Delta itself remains an inherently floodprone area with uneven levels of flood protection.

Finding the right balance of these competing needs and demands on the Delta has bedeviled California policy makers for decades. Regulators clash with water system operators, stakeholders often take each other to court, and Delta residents fear that the solutions will alter their way of life and land.

A New Path Forward

Creation of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program in 1995 was supposed to bring everyone together and it did, for a short time, until State and federal budgets were cut and hard decisions ultimately were deferred. In the aftermath, a gubernatorial Delta Vision Task Force in 2008 declared that Delta problems could not be solved in isolation—they were inextricably linked to statewide water supply, habitat, and flood management programs—and that stronger governance and accountability were a must. The Task Force recognized the need to reconcile competing goals of ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability in the Delta, and recommended that a new governance structure be put in place to integrate and implement those goals. In response, the Legislature, water agencies, and environmental groups throughout the state united in an unprecedented manner in 2009 to pass a series of water-related measures that included the Delta Reform Act.

The Delta Reform Act established coequal goals of a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem as overarching State policy, even going as far as to define restoration. Furthermore, the Act notably required that Californians reduce their reliance on the Delta. Subsequently, Congress passed legislation requiring federal agencies to abide by the coequal goals as well, thus setting a new course for water management in the state.

In a nod to lessons learned from CALFED, the Act created the Delta Stewardship Council (Council) with the authority and responsibility to develop a legally enforceable Delta Plan, and to ensure that actions by State and local agencies in the Delta are consistent with the Plan. It was directed to adequately incorporate the best available science and adaptive management principles in order to improve decision making and reduce stakeholder conflict. The Council also was empowered to coordinate and collaborate across the myriad governmental agencies that have responsibility for some aspect of the Delta. In this way, the Delta Reform Act signaled that business as usual is over.

After more than 2 years, nearly a hundred public meetings, and after reviewing thousands of public comments, the resulting Delta Plan relies on a mix of legally enforceable policies and essential recommendations to prioritize actions and strategies for improved water management, ecosystem restoration, and levee maintenance. It also restricts actions that may cause harm, and provides regulatory guidance for significant plans, projects, and programs in the Delta.

Successful implementation of the Delta Plan depends not only on the Council, but also on coordinated actions by other government agencies—federal, State, and local—and the stakeholders to which they are responsible. Through this Delta Plan, the Council details an interagency structure for decision making that fosters communication among scientists; local, State, and federal decision makers; and stakeholders. Future plan iterations will build on successes as well as lessons learned in order to achieve the coequal goals.

Lessons from the Delta Plan Process

Act Now and Invest Big

We have been studying the problems of our water supply and the declining Delta ecosystem for decades. Near-term actions must move forward while long-term conveyance, storage, and ecosystem solutions are brought to completion. We also must consistently invest in the Delta ecosystem and in California's water supplies. Boom and bust funding will occur, but steady and reliable funding must be found to sustain needed scientific advancements and infrastructure improvements to achieve the coequal goals.

Improve Water Supply Reliability

This is a responsibility shared by all Californians, who must treat water as a precious and scarce natural resource that must be used as efficiently as possible. We must make a strategic combination of State and regional investments that enable California to avoid environmental conflicts and better match water use to the amount of water that is available. New surface and groundwater storage is necessary to manage the timing of water for people and for fish, and successful completion of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is essential to finding the right balance for the ecosystem and exports from the Delta.

Commit to Delta Ecosystem Restoration

Restoring the functionality of the Delta ecosystem is also a responsibility shared by all Californians. We must preserve land for future habitat restoration, and we must immediately begin restoration efforts in priority areas. In the Delta, we must change the way we move water so that it better protects the health and viability of native species. To do this, minimum flows must be established for the Delta and its major tributaries as part of a comprehensive effort to address all ecosystem stressors.

Protect the Delta's Unique Values

The Delta serves many demands but its unique sense of place must not be lost in that service. The inherent high flood risk in the Delta mandates that agriculture and natural resource land uses are the most appropriate, but we also must protect legacy communities and a mix of economic and recreational activities.

What the Delta Plan Does

The Delta Plan seeks first to arrest declining water reliability and environmental conditions related to the Delta ecosystem, and ultimately improve them. Additionally, it seeks to reduce flood risk, improve water quality, and protect the Delta's unique values. Generally speaking, these are long-term goals to reverse or reduce increasing long-term environmental impacts from past abuses.

In the Delta Reform Act, the Legislature outlined a process for what it called "covered actions," projects, plans, or programs over which the Council would have regulatory jurisdiction. Entities proposing covered actions must comply with the regulations (policies) in the Delta Plan. In addition, the Legislature gave the Council the authority to hold hearings and make recommendations.

Through its regulatory policies and recommendations, the Delta Plan:

- **Improves California's water supply reliability** by calling for more regional water supply development and setting a deadline for successful completion of the BDCP, which is intended to improve water conveyance through the Delta and improve habitat for threatened and endangered species.

Consistent with the longstanding water rights in California, it also reduces reliance on the Delta watershed by recommending that all local agencies implement local plans to diversify water supplies, improve efficiency, and plan for drought and interruption of supplies in an inherently volatile system.

- **Protects and enhances the Delta ecosystem** by identifying and protecting high-priority restoration areas and setting a deadline for the State Water Resources Control Board to take actions that support the coequal goals by updating water quality objectives, including flow objectives, for the major rivers and tributaries of the Delta.

  It also reduces Delta ecosystem stressors by making specific recommendations to address such problems as pollution and invasive species.

- **Protects and enhances the Delta as a place** by recognizing that all actions must be achieved in a manner that protects and enhances the values and unique but "evolving" characteristics of the Delta. The Delta Plan defines a role for local input in decision making about major projects and minimizes interference with local land use planning. It also supports designation as a National Heritage Area and encourages economic development through agriculture and recreation.

- **Improves water quality** by prioritizing State and regional actions to deal with high-priority Delta-specific water quality problems.

- **Reduces risk** by requiring new development in and around the Delta to have adequate flood protection, protects and preserves floodplains, and promotes setback levees to increase habitat and reduce flood damage.

- **Sets an example by using "best available science"** and adaptive management and requires that others do the same so that projects can move forward in a way that is efficient and allows decision making in the face of uncertain conditions.

The Delta of 2100 likely will be very different from the Delta of today. Some of the changes will be intentional or predictable, and others will be unintended and surprising. Changes are likely or expected to result from population growth, climate change and sea level rise, land subsidence, and earthquakes—most beyond human ability or willingness to control. Human-made changes in land use and water use are also expected to continue.

All of this will involve tradeoffs between competing—in some cases mutually exclusive—values, goals, and objectives. The Delta Plan seeks to ensure that these decisions are made in a timely and open manner, based on best available information and science as a predictor of the future. Thus the Legislature required that the Delta Plan be updated every 5 years, and each plan is intended to build on an evolving base of knowledge, directing near- and mid-term actions, and preserving and protecting longer-term opportunities as yet unknown.

Special Note: This Delta Plan was developed with extensive public review and comment, including nearly 10,000 specific comments and suggestions from hundreds of individuals and organizations submitted on six public drafts and an environmental review over a period of almost 2 years. In addition, the Council held eight public workshops to explore a variety of specific issues such as risk reduction, reduced reliance on the Delta, performance measures, and covered actions. All correspondence, materials, and draft versions of the Delta Plan are available at http://deltacouncil.ca.gov.