

DATE: September 4, 2008  
TO: ABAG Executive Board  
FROM: Kathleen Van Velsor, Senior Environmental Planner  
RE: Draft Delta Vision Strategic Plan

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**Overview**

STAFF is reviewing the Delta Vision Strategic Plan and related materials in preparation for a letter of comment to be issued from the ABAG Executive Board to the State's Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force and other relevant state agencies. At the August 6, 2008 meeting of the Regional Planning Committee (RPC), the RPC supported the staff recommendations as outlined in the attached staff report. In addition and based upon comments from RPC members staff makes the following recommendations.

**STAFF RECOMMENDS:**

**That the Executive Board request that the State:**

- 1) Demonstrate that it has complied with all environmental review requirements for the plan, including public participation in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- 2) Expand on its analysis of potential Bay Area land use changes and regulatory impacts; potential Bay Area water supply and water quality impacts; and other infrastructure impacts.
- 3) Identify potential economic, socio-economic and disaster-related impacts for a range of plan alternatives.

This comment letter can subsequently be distributed to all affected and interested Bay Area communities. Additionally, staff will report back to the RPC and the Executive Board, as requested, on progress made in the Delta planning process.





M E M O

DATE: July 28, 2008

TO: ABAG Regional Planning Committee

FROM: Kathleen Van Velsor, Planner, ABAG Water and Land Use Studies Program

RE: Item 7.0 – DRAFT Delta Vision Strategic Plan

**Introduction**

This agenda item focuses on the state’s draft Delta Vision Strategic Plan. This is the first time that the RPC has examined or discussed this plan. However, some RPC members have reviewed and commented on the draft Plan, or are in the process of doing so as local elected officials.

The State of California has made the Delta/Estuary a high priority, with high profile and partly coordinated planning, funding and engineering initiatives. The declaration of a statewide drought, a gubernatorial interest in passing another water bond, the Katrina disaster and recent academic studies pointing to a comprehensively failing Delta are the underpinnings of a massive public campaign to put a short and long range Delta planning and management program into place.

ABAG Hazards Program and Water/Land Use Studies Program staff have embarked on a team effort to investigate ways to mitigate potential water supply disruptions related to a major earthquake event. Included in this investigation is the Delta/Estuary. Counties in the Bay Region that are most directly affected by local, state and federal water supply programs and planning in the Delta are:

- Solano County
- Contra Costa County
- Napa County
- Santa Clara County
- Alameda County

**Discussion**

The Preliminary Draft of the State of California’s DELTA VISION STRATEGIC PLAN (DVSP) describes planning and programmatic elements that have the potential to significantly impact the interests of five of our counties (Solano, Contra Costa, Napa, Alameda and Santa Clara Counties) and their communities that rely on Delta waters for drinking water, or on conveyances of drinking water that traverse the Delta.

### Proposed Governance

To implement the vision, the state proposes a California Delta Ecosystem and Water Council with authority derived from the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The Council will have authority to issue debt-financing mechanisms and to approve all water, road, railroad, utility and levee infrastructure projects in the Delta. It will take recommendations from the Delta Protection Commission. The DVSP also recommends the creation of a Delta Conservancy to “assist in restoring as much tidal marsh acreage as physically feasible, and conserve adjacent uplands in geographically linked complexes...and preserve and enhance seasonal wetland complexes and adjacent upland grasslands” (highest priority sites for marsh restoration are Suisun Marsh, Cache Slough and the south Yolo Bypass, Prospect and Sutter Islands, New Hope, McCormack-Williamson Tracts, and Dutch Slough), a Delta Operations Team and a reformed Delta Protection Commission with greater land use authority over the legal Delta. The Conservancy proposal is controversial due to the potential loss of valuable agricultural land.

### Proposed Water Conveyance and Peripheral Canal

State Delta planners are currently estimating the costs—ranging in the billions – of “alternative (water) conveyances” for an either an eastern or western Delta alignment,” (Action 11.1). This approach is generally described as a “peripheral canal” and is a highly controversial area of water management due to the environmental, social and economic implications of a re-fashioned peripheral canal concept which was defeated in 1982 by California voters. Key water leaders believe that an “isolated delta conveyance” will create a strong incentive to neglect the needs of the Delta.

Northern and Southern California water allocation issues are a key consideration, since Southern California claims the bulk of the fresh water that flows through the Delta/Estuary. The Metropolitan Water District in Southern California has received accolades for water management and conservation since the 1980’s; however, Southern California like Northern California lacks a fully coordinated water and land use management strategy.

### Levees and Inundation Issues

The related Delta Risk Management Strategy has estimated Delta levee improvement costs at upward of twenty billion dollars. Recommended Action 12.2 (DVSP) argues that not all levees should provide equal level of protection, creating potential balancing issues among certain areas of the Delta and economic interests. The DVSP does not resolve the myriad of levee protection authorities and related conflicts. Concurrently, the strategy seeks to “provide inundation of floodplains on as many years as possible on the three major river systems entering the Delta,” and the creation of “new open water areas within the Delta and Suisun.” The inundation strategy is controversial due to the potential for loss of valuable agricultural lands. Additionally, the strategy seeks to restore variability of water flows (“While completely surrendering our control over these flows is obviously undesirable for necessary water supply and flood control efforts, the ecosystem would benefit from an increase in the variability both within and between years.”) Restored flow variability is a highly controversial area of water management due to potential salinity in Delta waters and the cost of treatment for local water districts.

## Reservoirs and Conveyance Systems

Finally, Strategy 9 calls for new wet-period diversions, conveyance and storage systems (reservoirs), including a “Middle River” Conveyance option. New reservoirs and conveyance systems have been the subject of concern over the possibility that the ecosystem restoration component of the proposed Delta Vision strategy would be a minor consideration relative to a massive public works project to build additional dams and canals to meet current and future water demands. Key conservation organizations question whether the delta’s ecological problems (thought to be caused by dams and water diversions) can be resolved by building yet more dams and diversions.

Several of our region’s local governments have identified key concerns and potential impacts associated with this revised state strategy for the Delta:

- Flooding impacts on the local agricultural industry, public services and infrastructure in eastern Solano County, as well as in and around the City of Rio Vista;
- Impacts on drinking water supplies of salinity intrusion due to expanded freshwater diversions;
- Increased salinity may impact private wells/potable water sources that rely on the recharging of the groundwater aquifer serving Rio Vista and nearby communities;
- Changes in the ownership of privately owned agricultural land, requiring greater oversight by the county;
- Potential reduction in property taxes, and increased maintenance and oversight requirements;
- Potential impacts to the protected Suisun Marsh where water quality and water supply management are important issues;
- Protection, preservation and enhancement of Delta agricultural, habitat and recreation resources;
- Loss of water quality from canal operations that could lead to an increase in the concentration of salts, pesticides and other pollution in the Delta;
- Impacts to agricultural operations and land values;
- Impacts to Delta habitat, including highly stressed fisheries;
- Lack of flood and seepage control
- There is an unfounded assumption that regulations or public agencies with authority in the Delta will be able to limit the flow of water through a large canal.

## **Key Questions**

The following key questions are being considered by staff relative to potential recommendations to the Executive Board for referral to the State’s Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force.

Do proposed “improvements” to the Delta system portend even greater declines in fisheries, water quality and water supply (leading to larger impacts to the regional economy), and sustained loss of valuable agricultural lands?

Is the Delta vision appropriately scaled to meet the incremental needs of our region’s communities given climate change and major demographic changes occurring in the region?

Do the Delta Vision Strategic Plan, and its counterpart state plans, strategies and programs, adequately focus on improving the reliability of water supplies to the nine county Bay Area, or is it principally focused on improving the reliability of water supplies to Southern California?

Is the Delta Vision Strategic Plan sufficiently transparent to reveal the true environmental and socio-economic costs to the Delta/Estuary and the Bay Area communities that rely on it?

Have state planners communicated sufficiently and effectively with local governments, ABAG and its partner regional agencies and counterpart regional planning agencies outside of the Bay Area portion of the Delta in the design of the strategic plan?

**STAFF RECOMMENDS:**

**THAT the Regional Planning Committee direct staff to:**

1. Review the State's Delta Vision for specific potential impacts with an emphasis on selected topics of interest – e.g. agricultural lands, water supplies, water quality, transportation and energy networks, regional economy, ancillary impacts to areas outside of the Delta.
2. Recommend specific comments on the Delta vision to the ABAG Exec. Board (for referral to the State's Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force).
3. Draft a letter outlining the key features and some potential impacts of the Delta Vision to all affected Bay Area communities.
4. Request a copy of any and all draft or final California Environmental Quality Act and National Environmental Policy Act documentation prepared for the state's Delta Vision Strategic Plan, and for other related state plans and programs listed on page 2 of this memorandum.
5. Provide the RPC with update relative to the Draft Delta Vision Strategic Plan as appropriate.