

VENTURA COUNTY STAR

Opinion

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Editorial

It's crucial that Delta water plan moves forward

Ventura County is caught in a vulnerable position because of risks to the water supply for most of the county's 835,000 residents and businesses.

A long-range proposal has been offered to reduce that vulnerability, but it requires careful examination. Thus, The Star supports the public process now underway to study and flesh out the proposal known as the Bay Delta Conservation Plan.

News reports about the plan describe it as a "twin tunnels" concept backed by Gov. Jerry Brown to move water to Southern California from the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta. That's true, but the plan is more than that.

Environmental considerations are prominent in this proposal, which has the "co-equal" goals of making our water supply more reliable and restoring the ecosystem of the estuary where the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers meet, east of San

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Francisco Bay.

So the ongoing public examination of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan should go forward with vigor. An environmental review process is now being conducted, and cost estimates will come out in the future. Only later will final decisions be made on whether to build it.

Already, critics are trying to defeat the plan. However, at this juncture we see no viable, practical alternative to it in terms of both environmental restoration and the continuation of relatively normal life as we know it in South-

Ventura County is in a similar situation to other Southern California counties in our reliance on water that comes from distant points. However, we are vulnerable in a unique way. Unlike nearby counties, we get no water from the Colorado River, and our import-dependent residents are virtually 100 percent reliant on water from the Delta.

And the Delta is at risk. An earthquake, flood or other catastrophe could damage the fragile, aging levees in the Delta region, which could dry up Ventura County's imported water supply for an extended period. That would leave Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks with no water at all, and would dramatically squeeze the water supply in other communities. The effect would be disastrous to normal life, businesses, jobs and the local economy.

The board of the Calleguas Municipal Water District, which serves most of the county's residents and businesses, issued a resolution in November expressing the board's and the district's support for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan process.

The board's resolution stated, "The U.S. Geological Survey has warned there is a 63 percent probability that a magnitude 6.7 or larger earthquake will hit the Bay Area in the next 30 years, which could trigger levee breaks throughout the Delta, allowing saltwater from the San Francisco Bay to rush in and contaminate the freshwater moving through the Delta, drastically reducing or eliminating the availability of Ventura County's only imported water supply for many years."

The Calleguas board said it is "irrefutable" that the Delta's levees, waterways and other infrastructure need upgrades and repairs — not so we can take more water from the Delta but just to make the supply more reliable.

We agree. For that reason, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan process must go forward.

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