

# VENTURA COUNTY STAR

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## COMMENTARY

## Why we need Delta water tunnels

The Calleguas Municipal Water District Board of Directors was pleased to read the April 10 commentary by John Laird, state secretary for natural resources, on the California WaterFix proposal to build new intakes and tunnels to safeguard and stabilize water deliveries from the northern Sierra and Sacramento Delta.

Ventura County has a larger stake in this project than any other urban area in California, because we are so dependent on this water supply to sustain our homes and businesses. Without it, most of the 630,000 residents of southern Ventura County would be living elsewhere. Some historical perspective and recent events underscore this issue.

In 1953, as southern Ventura County groundwater levels were plummeting and water quality deteriorating, Calleguas was formed by voters to secure a reliable water supply. There simply wasn't enough local water to meet the rising demands of people and agriculture.

After nearly a decade-long search, the fledgling Calleguas district ultimately annexed to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California to gain access to its existing Colorado River and planned Feather River supplies via the State Water Project. Make no mistake, this action was taken out of dire necessity as local water resources were

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stretched well beyond sustainable levels.

With deliveries of Colorado River and State Water Project water beginning in 1963 and 1972, respectively, residents and businesses in southern Ventura County enjoyed a reliable, affordable supply of high-quality water through the turn of the century. Because Calleguas has limited access to Colorado River supplies, for over 45 years virtually all of its imported water has originated from the State Water Project.

Despite local investments in conservation, water recycling and groundwater desalination, today the state project provides three-quarters of the supply for three-quarters of the county's population. Unfortunately, in recent years the state supplies have become severely strained due to a growing statewide population, hot and dry weather, and legal restrictions on pumping from the Delta.

Consequently, securing our State Water Project supply is of the utmost concern for Calleguas, and California WaterFix would do just that, through increased operational flexibility for pumping systems in the Delta, which receives about 50 percent of all stormwater runoff in the state. This year has

been a dramatic case study of the severely flawed method in which water is moved through the Delta and the genuine need for a more efficient system.

On March 15, the Sacramento River, driven by high stormwater flows, roared south of the city of Sacramento at a peak of nearly 80,000 cubic feet per second (imagine four 2,500-square-foot homes filled with water floating by every second of every minute of every hour all day). This flow would have filled 720 Rose Bowls in a single day — enough to meet the annual water needs of 300,000 families.

Unfortunately, during this past winter as reservoirs north of the Delta have filled and even spilled excess water, reservoirs south of the Delta remain more than half empty. A vast majority of this winter's stormwater flow, estimated at 4 million acre-feet — equivalent to roughly a 45-year supply for Calleguas' service area — flowed into the Pacific Ocean under the Golden Gate Bridge.

Why? Because the way we currently pump water from the Delta is potentially harmful to one particularly sensitive species of fish: the Delta smelt. As stated by Sen. Dianne Feinstein in a March 24 letter to President Barack Obama on this matter, there is a "fundamental problem with our water system: a dogmatic adherence to a rigid set of

operating criteria that continues to handcuff our ability to rebuild our reserves." We couldn't agree more.

Could all of this water have been pumped if California WaterFix facilities were in place? Certainly not. Long-standing Delta water quality and outflow requirements limit the amount of water that can be exported and will continue to do so in the future. If WaterFix facilities had been in place, however, more stormwater could have been pumped south without risk to endangered species, and depleted reservoirs south of the Delta would be nearly full. These reserves would provide a much larger water cushion for Central and Southern California if the drought persists through 2017 and beyond.

We applaud the more than 30 Ventura County cities, organizations and agencies that have joined Calleguas in support of California WaterFix. For those who have yet to express support, we strongly encourage you to do so, as it is in the best interests of this region, its residents and businesses.

We can and must do better, particularly when Mother Nature provides, and California WaterFix is a key component of our shared water supply future.

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