

VENTURA COUNTY STAR

Opinion

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Editorial

Ventura County needs reliable water deliveries

If there is one thing Ventura County requires, it is water. And not just a hit-or-miss supply, but reliable deliveries for residents, institutions, business and industry.

So we are encouraged to see California officials pushing forward with a revised plan for the system that conveys imported water to Ventura County — and, just as they did under an earlier version of the project, officials continue to emphasize that reliability is a top priority.

Ventura County's eastern region relies exclusively on water transported here from great distances, and much of the rest of the county is heavily dependent on it, too. Disruption of that supply, such as due to damage from a major earthquake, would be catastrophic for this region and the state overall.

To make deliveries more reliable and stable, Gov. Jerry Brown and others have championed the "twin tunnels" project, calling for construction of two 30-mile tunnels.

The tunnels would carry water from the Sacramento River and route it below the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to pumping plants that supply the California Aqueduct. The purpose is to supply water to 25 million residents and 3 million acres of farmland in Central and Southern California.

Last week, the Brown administration issued an updated plan for a revised version of the project, after federal agencies expressed hesitation over a 50-year environmental permit for the original, larger project which had been proposed. Gov. Brown argued that the project was necessary to restore the Delta's ecosystem as well as stabilize water deliveries.

“Water agencies and other water users are prepared to foot the bill because more reliable deliveries of water are extremely important to all.”

The new proposal, called the "California Water Fix," is still viewed as a significant improvement over the current situation because, even though it's not as large as the first proposal, it nevertheless would bring more reliability in water deliveries.

And while it wouldn't increase the normal amount of water for Ventura County and Southern California, it could result in higher delivery levels during future droughts, officials say. It would do that by improving the system's ability to transport more water south of the Delta during wet years so it can be stored for use during dry years.

So the revised proposal is an improvement over the status quo. It is a concept we can support.

As The Star reported Tuesday, state officials say the revised documents issued last week may signal that California is nearing the end of an eight-year planning process that so far has cost more than \$200 million. Construction could begin by 2018 and would cost more than \$15 billion.

Water agencies are prepared to foot the bill because more reliable deliveries of water are extremely important to all. We agree.

Although the smaller proposal would involve natural-habitat restoration in only a fraction of the acreage envisioned under the earlier plan, that shift is linked to the hesitation shown by federal natural-resources officials regarding the 50-year environmental permission initially sought.

So while the revised plan may not be the ideal, it's sensible and it's a real improvement over the existing situation. It is commendable to see agencies and state leaders moving forward on this crucial issue. We call upon them to continue in that proper direction.

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