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Federal Glover: The governor's water plan is all wet

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For the Contra Costa Times

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DEVELOPMENTS IN California's water wars are moving at breakneck speed and at the center of the legislative whirlwind is East County's backdoor — the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

At the heart of the governor's seriously flawed water plan is the Delta; 1,200 miles of levees, commercial and recreational waterways and a resource that provides water to two-thirds of California.

From the get-go when powerful southern water interests began their strategy meetings three or four years ago, the counties and communities from the Delta were left out of the planning process. Delta advocates, such as Restore the Delta, and environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, Planning and Conservation League, California Sports Fishing Protection Alliance, the Contra Costa Water District and Delta leaders were excluded.

Out of those meetings, the governor appointed the Delta Vision panel to come up with a plan for the Delta that could satisfy the urban and agricultural water users, environmentalists and sportsmen.

Under the governor's guidance, this panel endorsed a new version of the Peripheral Canal, which was voted down in 1982. It now is called an "alternate conveyance system—" which takes water from the

Sacramento River and bypasses the Delta. It would be 50 miles long and as wide as two football fields.

Trying to offset the expected outcry, the Delta Vision Panel adopted the nebulous "coequal goals" of water supply and environmental restoration, similar to the goals of the now-defunct CALFED Bay-Delta Authority.

The Contra Costa Water District, which takes all its water directly from the Delta, wants to safeguard the quality of the water it provides for its customers. The East Bay Municipal Water District, fearing that their Sierra water will be sucked into the debate, is outspoken in its opposition.

"Northern California is going to be served as the turkey at the celebratory dinner" if the water plan passes as written, EBMUD's Randy Kanouse told the Los Angeles Times.

Here are some issues that should make us very wary of the governor's proposal:

1. Of uppermost concern is the marginalization of the people and communities of the Delta. We have been left out of the planning process and negotiations. Assembly member Mariko Yamada (D-Solano) commented that lobbyists had seen the bills before legislators had.

2. The seven-member Delta Stewardship Council that would be created to balance the entire state's water needs and the impact on the Delta environment would only have one member from the Delta, and would be loaded with lots of gubernatorial appointees serving long terms. Equally important, Assembly member Phil Isenberg said there is neither stable funding nor sufficient authority for the council in either bill.

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lose the fight over somebody having authority to do something, then you make sure they don't have any money or staff to do it," said Isenberg. State Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, said backroom deals among legislative leaders and some of the biggest water districts had watered down the bill and included provisions detrimental to the Delta.

3. Everyone agrees that there will be environmental impacts but no one is really sure what those impacts will be. Will diverting fresh water from the Delta produce unintended consequences? How many fish species have to die before there is an order to stop pumping? Will more water for the Central Valley give farmers less incentive to start using more efficient irrigation systems?

4. There is no money to pay for it all. The cost of the project is as high as \$12 billion but that has been lowered in the last few days to about \$9 billion. That's \$9 billion our cash-strapped state doesn't have. According to an EBMUD analysis, the real price tag could balloon to \$78 billion if we add land acquisition, other related infrastructure and mitigation costs. Where in the world do we get that money?

There is hope that the recent involvement of the federal government will calm the choppy waters. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has announced a new federal multiagency effort to develop a plan to take immediate actions to respond to California's drought and the Delta's degradation. According to a press release issued by the Department of Interior, the Federal-State Action Plan on California Water establishes a new Federal Bay-Delta Leadership Committee that will "coordinate with the State of California and interested stakeholders and develop by Dec. 15 a work plan of short-term actions."

A new study by the National Academy of Science could develop long-term goals, such as restoring

the fisheries and providing water to drought-stricken farmers.

Slaking the state's thirst is one of the most critical issues of our time. The governor is right to call the lawmakers back to a special session. However, artificial deadlines and threats make for hasty decisions we may regret. We should welcome the federal government into the dialogue if we move toward a carefully thought out water plan. Why rush it?

Glover is the District 5 supervisor. Reach him at dist5@bos.cccounty.us

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