

# The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

## Mercury News editorial: Water plan's leaky as a sieve

### Mercury News Editorial

Posted: 05/08/2011 08:00:00 PM PDT

It took the National Academy of Sciences to cut through the political rhetoric of California's water debate and get to the heart of the matter: The prestigious panel of scientists on Thursday blasted the Bay-Delta Conservation Plan to spend \$13 billion for new aqueducts that in theory would restore the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta ecosystem.

Scientists said the plan was riddled with holes, flaws and inconsistencies, according to Bay Area News Group reporter Mike Taugher -- in effect, a water grab by agribusiness and Southern California water users at the expense of the Delta's health.

Furthermore, the scientists say the plan ignores the potential to reduce demand for Delta water by pursuing more efficient water use. To which we can only say: "Duh."

The impetus for the report came from Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who called for the study in part because of farmers in the Central Valley. Pressing for the review, Feinstein wrote, "The National Academy of Sciences "... is the only body whose views will be respected by all the relevant parties as a truly independent voice." Her request came with an attached letter from Stewart Resnick, the Southern California billionaire who owns some of the state's largest farming operations.

She was right about the academy's credibility. Now it's time for Resnick and Central Valley farmers to reaffirm their faith in the academy and start working on a better solution to the state's long-term water problems.

We have argued for years that the controversial aqueduct proposed to deliver water from the Delta wouldn't be necessary if farmers worked a little harder to conserve water. They are supporting a

water plan that calls for urban users to reduce their consumption by 20 percent while asking nothing of agriculture. Ag has implemented new technologies that have resulted in substantial savings in recent years, but it still gulps 80 percent of the water used by Californians. If farmers could conserve just an additional 10 percent of that water, the state's supply problems would disappear.

Silicon Valley has a huge stake in this debate. The Delta, only 50 miles northeast of San Jose, provides more than half of the valley's water supply. Its ecological health is critical for safe drinking water, and the supply is essential to sustaining economic growth.

One thing everyone agrees on is that the Delta, the largest estuary west of the Mississippi, is a mess. Salmon runs are in serious decline, and the Delta smelt is endangered. To make matters worse, much of the levee system protecting the Delta is in serious disrepair. A major earthquake could wipe out much of the valley's water supply in a matter of minutes.

California's first obligation is to repair the levees and preserve the health of the Delta for future generations. The \$13 billion boondoggle was a result of compromises to win support for a bond measure, but last year leaders realized voters would not stomach the volume of pork packed into the plan. Now, with the scientists' report in hand, they need to craft a science-based plan that restores the health of the Delta.



**DIRECTV has  
more of what you  
want to watch!**

**NO  
EQUIPMENT  
TO BUY!  
NO STARTUP  
COSTS!**

**Switch today!**

**1-888-778-0985**

Offer ends 2/29/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™