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Viewpoints: Only strong leadership will help us address the Delta's challenges

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Special to The Bee

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In the ongoing quest to solve California's water problems, discussions focus on various challenges and solutions while highlighting the dire circumstances of the state's unpredictable and unsustainable [water supply](#).

But for all the well-intentioned talk, there is little action.

Meanwhile, the [Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta](#), the heart of the state's water system, is in critical condition due to deteriorating environmental conditions, an aging levee system, and the growing threats of urbanization and [climate change](#). Simply put, the Delta cannot be sustained as we know and use it

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The Delta Vision Foundation's 2012 Delta Vision Report Card, grading the state's top policymakers on progress to implement Delta solutions, points out the lack of action and calls on those responsible for solving the Delta's problems to get a move on.

The annual evaluation, released last week, gave low marks on progress while acknowledging the hurdles the state faces. Based on information gathered from elected officials' staff, agency executives and staff, stakeholders, and the public, the report card gave a D-minus for near-term actions to address urgent risks to the Delta and for efforts to stabilize its ecosystem and water supply reliability.

These marks are too close for comfort to a failing grade that, if not improved upon, reflect a



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downward trend that could cripple the state's infrastructure in the event of a catastrophic flood or an earthquake. It is highly probable that California will experience one or the other – or both – at some point.

The Delta's challenges are linked, and cannot be addressed by any single action. But it is clear that strong and coordinated leadership is needed among the governor's administration, the Legislature, state and federal agencies and the many stakeholders engaged with Delta issues.

Last year's report card stressed the urgency for action and the essential importance of leadership. In 2012, the problem remains unresolved. Decisive direction is needed at all levels for the coordination of action and implementation, no matter which sector's wheelhouse the actual work is in.

That said, there has been some improvement in leadership and coordination over the last year in all agencies, with more shared knowledge and a better understanding of the inherent interconnectedness of the agencies with regard to the Delta. Still, much remains to be done.



Unfortunately, that incremental improvement has not translated into progress, and the array of different plans to fix the Delta has most casual observers scratching their heads.

Various drafts of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, the Delta Stewardship Council Plan, and the Delta Economic Sustainability Plan are in circulation. But the granddaddy of them all, the Delta Vision Strategic Plan, released in 2008, continues to hold the most promise for accomplishing the two co-equal goals of restoring the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem and ensuring a reliable water supply for California.

The report card's grades and recommendations are based on this overarching plan, which provides a linked set of recommendations to ensure a reliable water supply for all Californians while protecting the Delta's extraordinary environmental resources. The current planning activities must sustain and reinforce the linkages as established in 2008.

Despite the state's inability to broker an agreement and implement actions, the report card offers reason for optimism. Leaders and staff across all organizations are working earnestly, and with the best intentions, to make positive contributions. Across all agencies, managers and staff are working to identify and implement the means to achieve the two co-equal goals while protecting and enhancing the Delta as an evolving place. And though credit is due for the effort demonstrated over the past four years, deteriorating conditions in the Delta and the unstable statewide water supply demand more action, much faster. Accordingly, the state must demonstrate more leadership, action, and implementation in the immediate future.

Next year's report card will look forward to more action, more implementation, and more results. California, federal agencies and stakeholders need to be decisive in achieving solutions for the Delta; with every year that goes by, the crisis only deepens.

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Linda S. Adams is the former secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency and is board director of the Delta Vision Foundation. View the Delta Vision Foundation Report Card at www.deltavisionfoundation.org.

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robertdnoll

this piece says we haven't done much and not to worry we will continue in this direction because it's hard. it's almost good news except for tax dollars being wasted

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Mic01

First, calculate how much water flow is needed to sustain the Delta's health.

Next the remainder over that basic flow amount is what can be divided up between all the other people wanting water from the Delta.

And that's all there is. Not hard to sum up but everyone thinks there is an endless amount of water to pump out or divert, and there is not. So all the work to take "just a bit more" should end with each agency getting their percentage.

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Karen Medders

Now here's a fool-proof plan. Problem is the answer is NOT what the ' export stakeholders' and non-compete governmental contractors want to hear.

The answer is simple. Unfortunately, simple never equates to easy.

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