

Advancing BDCP Plus

By Charles Gardiner, Executive Director

Adding to the suggestion list – and controversy – around the issue of conveyance through the Delta, six environmental and business organizations¹ recently wrote to Federal and State agency leaders requesting formal consideration of a [“portfolio-based alternative”](#) in the Bay-Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) process. Seven water agencies² followed with [a letter of support](#) for the alternative.

The letters both describe the approach necessary to achieve real and measurable progress toward the Two Co-Equal Goals and protection of the Delta as an evolving place, as outlined in the 2008 [Delta Vision Strategic Plan](#). The Strategic Plan, authored by the Delta Vision Task Force, became the basis for the historic water package passed by the Legislature in 2009. This portfolio approach reaffirms the recommendation of the Task Force that linked, integrated actions are needed to solve the complex [“wicked problem”](#) of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The portfolio approach also mirrors the BDCP Plus concept that the Delta Vision Foundation recommended in the [2012 Delta Vision Report Card](#), which outlines the key elements of a solution:

Dual Conveyance. Fully isolated conveyance of water around the Delta will not protect the habitat, water quality, and agricultural needs of the Delta. Through-Delta conveyance alone will not provide sufficient protection and restoration of fish and habitat. Neither approach alone will provide sufficient water supply reliability for south of Delta water users. The State and water users must invest simultaneously in facility and levee improvements through and around the Delta to protect fish, people, water quality, and the economy of the Delta, San Joaquin Valley, Bay Area, and Southern California.

More in Wet, Less in Dry. There is near universal agreement that achieving the Two Co-Equal Goals for California requires more flexibility to capture water when it is truly surplus to the needs of the environment, so that diversions can decrease in dry years when it is critically needed for fish.. The State and water users must invest in new facilities and operations to increase this flexibility – surface and groundwater storage, floodplain management, and alternative supplies and reduced demand for dry years. The appropriate size of isolated conveyance facilities is a key part of this strategy—likely in the 5,000 to 6,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) range to optimize cost efficiencies with a “big gulp, little sip” strategy.

Habitat Restoration. Restoring habitat and food web productivity is an essential element of achieving the Two Co-Equal Goals. Immediate, near-term, and intermediate targets are needed to guide implementation and measure effectiveness of floodplain and wetlands restoration efforts and other measures to improve productivity in the Delta.

Delta Hydrology and Water Quality. Freshwater and tidal flows have substantial impacts on water supply reliability, ecosystem restoration, and the protection and enhancement of the Delta as place. Physical changes and operational modifications to manage salinity and improve fish migration such as barriers, gates, island restoration, and flow management must be part of efforts to achieve the Two Co-Equal Goals.

Linkages and Assurance. The DVF BDCP Plus is a critical element of fixing the Delta and achieving the Two Co-Equal Goals while protecting and enhancing the Delta as place. However, these goals cannot be

¹ The Bay Institute, Contra Costa Council, Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Entrepreneurs, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Planning and Conservation League.

² Alameda County Water District, City of San Diego, Contra Costa Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Otay Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, and San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

achieved without linkages and assurances incorporated into policies, project approvals, mitigation, permits, bond covenants, contracts, and operating procedures. Requirements and incentives must be developed and implemented to assure dual conveyance investments, more-in-wet and less-in-dry operations, effective and productive restoration actions, and improved Delta hydrology and water quality.

These five immediate steps to advance the Two Co-Equal goals are consistent with the recommendations in Delta Vision Strategic Plan:

1. **Invest in immediate through-Delta conveyance improvements and habitat restoration.**
Projects are ready to go, and the State must accelerate approvals and funding.
2. **Evaluate a portfolio approach of linked actions to achieve more-in-wet, less-in-dry.** Conduct a thorough analysis of new conveyance coupled with increased storage, water use efficiency, and alternate and interruptible supplies.
3. **Optimize dual conveyance (including facility size) to maximize investment efficiency.**
Determine the appropriate size for isolated conveyance, along with through-Delta investments and more-in-wet, less-in-dry strategies.
4. **Continue pilot studies and investigations to improve Delta hydrology and water quality.**
Reinvigorate physical and operational improvement that protect fish and improve water quality.
5. **Commit to assurances, requirements, and incentives to ensure linked progress and results.**

The recent portfolio alternative is an important addition to the discussion of Delta solutions. It ties directly to the vision, goals, strategies, and actions outlined in the Delta Vision Strategic Plan and the concept of BDCP Plus. With some near-term investment, additional analysis and refinement and assurances, it could form the core of an acceptable, workable solution that can move the State and stakeholders closer to achieving the Two Co-Equal Goals. And progress is a concept that everyone can agree on.