

Delta Plan Is Headed Toward the ~~Finish~~ Starting Line

By Charles Gardiner, Executive Director

“A comprehensive management plan for the Delta is now within reach.” Those are the words spoken by Delta Stewardship Council Chairman [Phil Isenberg](#) upon the release of the [Final Draft Delta Plan](#) on November 30th.

The release is a significant step forward in the decades long effort to address the Delta’s challenges. It’s also a major milestone in implementing the [Delta Vision Strategic Plan](#), the granddaddy of Delta planning documents. Released in 2008, the Strategic Plan described a vision and strategy for achieving a sustainable Delta over the next 50 to 100 years through implementation of 85 integrated, linked actions to achieve the [Two Co-Equal Goals](#) of ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability. With legislation passed in 2009 to establish new governance and ratify the Two Co-equal Goals as official state policy for the Delta, the state has set a new direction for resolving the estuary’s problems while protecting and enhancing the Delta as an evolving place.

The Delta Plan, as it stands now, establishes the broad state framework for a sustainable Delta and is a considerable accomplishment. However, much work is still needed to ensure progress and action to achieve the Two Co-Equal Goals. For example, it’s essential that the Delta Stewardship Council establish a specific **performance management framework** to guide actions by federal, state, regional, and local agencies and stakeholders, and measure progress in all areas. In addition, the DSC and the California Natural Resources Agency must establish an effective **State Action Team** to coordinate and accelerate near-term actions and pilot projects.

Finally, and most importantly, the Governor’s Administration, the Legislature, and stakeholders must begin meaningful, realistic discussions of **appropriate funding and financing** for water system, ecosystem, and economic development investments over the next 20 years; even the best-laid plan will languish on the shelf until that issue is resolved.

The Final Draft Plan will be completed in the spring of 2013, after public comments on the [Recirculated Draft Environmental Impact Report and Draft Rulemaking Package](#) have been submitted and incorporated. Meantime, the Delta Stewardship Council should be congratulated for its efforts to construct a workable plan, and as Chair Isenberg put it, “two years of arduous study and challenging compromise.” Given the Delta’s critical condition, it’s now time to put it in action.