

Leaders forming Delta alliance

Region's water rights seen at risk

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Sacramento-area government and business leaders are trying to work together to protect the region's water supply as plans move forward to restore the Delta.

Their goals include maintaining sufficient water for future growth and protecting water quality.

The Regional Water Authority, a joint-powers authority representing 20 local water providers and associated agencies, has taken the lead in developing a set of common principles for local jurisdictions and interest groups to consider adopting. The authority hopes to guard local interests by getting more people educated about, and engaged in, plans for the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The plan has focused largely on building a canal or tunnel to send water to users in Central and Southern California while protecting native fish. Voters killed a similar effort, the Peripheral Canal, in 1982 amid acrimony between Northern and Southern California.

The hope is that by getting more people to agree on a common message, the region will wield greater political clout.

"We're trying to get people, beyond just the water managers in

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the region, to understand the potential impacts of all the activities revolving around fixing the water supply problems in the Delta," said John Woodling, the authority's executive director.

The Sacramento City Council was the first elected body to take action when it recently voted unanimously to adopt a handful of principles developed by the authority in collaboration with water agency members and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments.

Now those same principles will be circulated to other jurisdictions in the six-county region. The Placer County Board of Supervisors is set to consider the matter as early as Tuesday.

Woodling hopes to have two dozen bodies — councils, boards, chambers and other groups — "added to this concept in the next two to three months."

While a regional coalition may be formed as a result, Woodling said it's too early to tell what will come out of the effort.

"We want to let form follow function, to see what people can agree we need to do," he said.

The goal is to get a broader, collective voice that includes community groups, environmental groups, business groups and labor.

AKT Development Corp. chairman Angelo Tsakopoulos helped sponsor a recent fundraiser for Restore the Delta, an organization that opposes a peripheral canal. The event, held Aug. 25 at the home of retired developer Alex Spanos in Stockton, raised more than \$640,000 for Restore the Delta to continue its advocacy work on behalf of Delta fisheries and communities.

Delta principles

The Sacramento City Council voted unanimously in August to support a regional coalition based on principles such as:

- Water rights priorities and area-of-origin assurances must be recognized and protected to ensure reliable supplies for all water users and environmental needs in our region.
- Stakeholders in the Sacramento region must be fully included in and consulted on all aspects of development of a Delta solution and other state and federal water policies that affect the region.
- A Delta solution and other state or federal actions must honor and not reduce or preempt the authority and responsibilities of cities, counties and other local agencies.
- The Sacramento region will support a Delta solution that requires the beneficiaries of any actions associated with a Delta solution to fully fund the costs of such actions and does not shift negative economic, environmental or societal impacts to areas in our region.

Tsakopoulos, also a developer, said he supports a solution that benefits all Californians.

"Northern California is blessed with water for farming, development, the existing people and for future development," he said, adding that his company looks to find ways to benefit the entire state.

"The people that live south of the Delta, they are Californians," he said. "My grandkids live south of the Tehachapis. We're all brothers. We need to find a way that everybody is taken care of. ... Twenty-five million people depend on water from the Delta. We should not try to stop that."

Woodling agreed that it's not the north

state versus the south.

"It's not us or them," he said. "We're really asking for just consideration in how things get done."

The biggest business concern, Woodling said, is whether the region will have water available for future growth.

"We think it's a call to arms at this point for our region to better defend our water rights," said Dennis Rogers, senior vice president at the North State Building Industry Association.

Rogers said the BIA is "very supportive of the efforts of the RWA and member agencies." A loss of water could hinder future development, he said.

The BIA is most concerned that the region will lose water or have to pay more for it. Any Delta solution should not be "to the detriment of our quality of life, business health and environmental health," he said.

While local water agencies support a solution to the state's water supply, Woodling said the water authority wants to make sure the region does not pay for a solution that does not help it.

Various proposals for fees were floated in the Legislature last year, including Senate Bill 34, which would have created a water resources investment program and fund. Woodling said he expects fee proposals to surface again in 2012.

Fees "would likely be assessed on the water agencies," Woodling said, adding that water agencies would in turn pass those costs on to water users, businesses included.

And business come to the region because of its supply of high quality water.

He cited Nippon Shokken USA Inc., which announced plans in March to move

its headquarters from Torrence to West Sacramento.

The Japanese food producer conducted a statewide search before purchasing 10 acres in West Sacramento to build a \$16 million operation that will employ 100 people initially.

The company said it decided on West Sacramento because it had the quality water supply and infrastructure necessary for the plant.

"To the extent any solutions affect our quality and quantity of water, it could deter businesses from coming here," Woodling said.

The perception already exists that Sacramento's water supply is inadequate, he said. Early this year, despite the fact that Sacramento is located on two major rivers, the region landed at No. 8 on Forbes list of "America's 10 Thirstiest Cities," since "most of the water is promised to the rest of the state."

Much is at risk, Woodling said.

For example, in 2000 the city of Sacramento and 39 local partners developed the Water Forum Agreement, a ground-breaking pact to protect the American River — the Sacramento River's second-largest tributary — and provide for future local water needs.

"Any change in how upstream supplies are impacted could undermine our solution," Woodling said. "Our local and regional agreement could be affected."

For now, the Regional Water Authority is helping to brief local jurisdictions and interest groups about Delta planning activities, and encouraging participation in the statewide planning efforts.

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