

News

DELTA COUNTIES LOOKING FOR COMMON GROUND

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STOCKTON - A nascent alliance of Delta counties began taking shape Tuesday as San Joaquin County policymakers signed onto a statement on water and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta also approved by five counties surrounding the state's largest estuary.

Finding common ground on an issue as contentious as water will give the region more clout as statewide plans for the future of the Delta, which provides water for most of California, take shape, local officials said.

The next step is for the five counties to create a more formal coalition to advocate those common interests.

It's important to come together and speak with one voice, and San Joaquin County has seen rewards by joining other Valley counties on other issues, Supervisor Leroy Ornellas said. "If we can do that here - with this group - we won't be the ones out there by ourselves."

San Joaquin and Yolo counties' boards of supervisors on Tuesday approved resolutions that contained 11 points of agreement about the management of water and the Delta. Supervisors from Sacramento, Contra Costa and Solano counties had approved the same resolution in recent weeks.

By coming together as a region, the Delta counties have a better chance of being heard as the state develops long-term plans for the region through its Delta Vision process, said Mel Lytle, the county's water resource coordinator.

Recently, a task force that is part of that process released recommendations on how to protect the Delta's ecosystem. It also made recommendations to create a new entity to oversee the Delta and build some kind of conveyance system to bring water to pumps that take water across the state.

County officials have been wary of new governance and vehemently opposed to building a canal to bring water around - rather than through - the Delta.

And concerns about the loss of local control to any new entity and support of through-Delta conveyance were in the 11 points in the new resolutions.

Representatives from the five counties put together the resolution when they began meeting in May.

Even within the five counties, views on the Delta and its many parts do differ, Supervisor Larry Ruhstaller said. "As we work together, ... we'll get a more friendly relationship. Or at least a more known relationship."

Other regions - anywhere upstream from the Delta - can find common interests with the Delta counties, too, he said. Wealth and political clout draw water to the south of the state, he said. "If we don't stand together, they're going to peel us like grapes."

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