

A View from the Delta:
People must be included in the Delta's Future

Governor Schwarzenegger's appointed Delta Vision Task Force has completed its 20-months of study and is now sending to the Governor its "vision" plan for the Delta's sustainable management and a strategic plan for the future implementation of that vision.

The panel's vision plan declares its primary co-equal goals to be enhancing "the Delta [as] ecosystem and [as] a reliable water supply." In principle there is nothing objectionable about efforts to improve the Delta's ecosystem and the quality and availability of the water passing through the Delta. However, as the *Bee* article ("Panel: Quenching California's thirst requires a canal – and more," Oct. 18.) states: "At the core of the panel's work is the Delta itself," and unfortunately, the panel's vision for the most part leaves out one of the Delta's most important resources – its people.

We in Save Our Delta's Future find objectionable the Task Force vision plan's failure to include as a primary co-equal goal the Delta as a unique and valued place "for people to live, do business, and maintain economically viable communities." For the many thousands of people, including 14 unincorporated towns, who live and do business (including agriculture) in the Delta, some for several generations, it is "home." We want it recognized and protected as of equal value with the concerns of those interests who want to enhance the Delta as an ecosystem and as a reliable water supply.

We also find objectionable the Task Force's recommendation that "the Delta" be designated as a federally recognized National Heritage Area operated by the U.S. Park Service, within the U. S. Department of Interior, and as a State Recreation Area under the California Park Service. The panel's report declares that these designations do not entail government regulation of land, but that is incorrect. Both NHAs and SRAs have park-like management features with land-use requirements and restrictions that are incompatible with the Delta as a place for people to live and conduct business.

We find objectionable the Task Force's plan to utilize "market structures and incentives" to bring about wholesale changes in the Delta's \$2 billion annual agricultural production. These artificial market structures and incentives would lead to "a sustainable Delta agriculture that produces public benefits ... [such as] wildlife habitat, subsidence reversal, carbon sequestration, flood management, and recreational and tourism opportunities." This amounts to a government-mandated program, pushing farmers to engage in agricultural practices the government dictates, ultimately coercing farmers to sell their land to nature conservancies.

We also find objectionable the panel's vision of returning the Delta's land and hydrological features to their natural state as they existed prior to the building of the levees over 100 years ago. As a result of "restor[ing] extensive interconnected habitats, especially critical land-water interfaces, within the Delta and Delta watershed," islands would be fully or partially inundated, and new "ring levees" would be constructed around populated communities. Residents living outside populated areas would have their homes seized through eminent domain, and destroyed. The restoration work would be carried out by a new government body (the Delta Conservancy), in concert with several other state and federal agencies.

Even more troubling, this proposed restoration plan is largely an open-ended "experiment." The Task Force acknowledges that the vision plan "cannot give

quantitative predictability in ecosystem response,” but will provide an opportunity “from which much can be learned.” While it can give no assurance that endangered Delta species will or can be recovered, it readily acknowledges that the Delta’s escalating invasive species, now numbering about 200, cannot be eliminated. Yet, the restoration work will cost present and future California taxpayers billions of dollars over the next century. The enormity of this experiment is perhaps unprecedented in American history.

We also find objectionable the panel’s recommendation to create a new regional governance structure (called the California Delta Ecosystem and Water Council), with California Coastal Commission-like powers and authority. This regional authority would dictate and supersede local government processes, such as land use planning decisions, levee maintenance and improvements, as well as building standards.

Save Our Delta’s Future respectfully urges Governor Schwarzenegger to embrace the value of Delta residents and businesses by maintaining the Delta as a unique and valued place “for people to live, do business, and maintain economically viable communities.”

Mark Rogerson is a representative of Save Our Delta’s Future, an unincorporated association of people who reside and work in Delta communities on the Sacramento River south of Sacramento.



Mark Rogerson
PO Box 277
Walnut Grove, CA 95690
(916) 776-1751