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5. **WATER: Gov. Schwarzenegger orders emergency actions for delta; pushes dams, canal funding package** (07/19/2007)

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Faced with an increasingly dire situation regarding a deepening drought in the southern half of the state, water supply constraints in the north, and continued threats to the environmental health and economic viability of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger this week ordered water officials to take immediate actions to fix problems in the delta.

At the same time, the Republican governor used every opportunity to promote a proposed \$5.9 billion issue of state bonds that would pay for construction of dams, reservoirs and underground water storage. As much as \$1 billion of the funds would go to delta restoration programs, which nearly everyone agrees is only the start of spending for the troubled system.

There is far less agreement about the need for dams and canals or water pipelines.

Schwarzenegger's plans for "water conveyance" to move Sacramento River water into the state's aqueduct system for export to Southern California without directly affecting delta water supplies are considered the latest version of a controversial "peripheral canal" proposal that was defeated by voters in the 1980s. The governor, however, rejected old arguments against such a canal in light of current and future needs as the state's population is projected to grow to between 50 million and 60 million persons by 2050.

"We don't have enough water," he said Monday during a news conference at the site of the San Luis Reservoir -- now drawn down to just 25 percent of capacity as a result of the shutdown of state water pumps in June to prevent obliteration of the protected delta smelt ([Land Letter](#), June 7).

"Already we are hearing that farmers are taking fields out of production because they don't have enough water. Water districts around the state are asking people to cut their water usage by 10 percent, and there are two districts in Sonoma and Santa Cruz counties that have implemented mandatory water rationing," Schwarzenegger said. "If we have another dry season like this, I would say that it will be catastrophic. It will be a disaster."

The next day, Schwarzenegger carried his water campaign to Twitchell Island, one of the many delta islands that rely on an increasingly vulnerable levee system to keep salty water from spilling onto farmlands. He directed the Department of Water Resources to immediately embark on a \$120 million emergency program in advance of a long-term program for delta health expected to be crafted by a blue



Calif. Governor Schwarzenegger appeared at a Twitchell Island event this week to inspect the threatened ecosystem and announce actions the administration will put into effect immediately to help the vulnerable delta region. Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor.

ribbon task force later this year.

Among the elements of the short-term program, which would be funded from existing revenue sources:

- Preventing the spread of invasive aquatic species, such as the quagga mussels already seen proliferating in Southern California after their discovery in Lake Mead at the Nevada border earlier this year ([Land Letter](#), Feb. 22).
- Improving research on the delta smelt.
- Installing fish screens at several water diversion points in the delta, including Twitchell and Sherman islands, where water is drawn for agricultural irrigation.
- Restoring delta habitats in tidal wetlands and spawning grounds for smelt, salmon and other fish.
- Improving water flow patterns in the central delta.
- Enhancing emergency response and levee failure plans, and stockpiling materials needed to repair levees should they fail.

In the longer term, the governor called for further actions to be funded by a \$1 million appropriation from the water bond package he is hoping will be approved by the Legislature this session for a public referendum by late 2008. These range from helping local water districts prepare for emergencies to setting up a carbon sequestration pilot on the delta islands. He cited climate change as just one of the many threats to the viability of the state's water supply.

DWR Director Lester Snow drew a further connection between the delta programs and the need for more water infrastructure. "What does fixing the delta mean?" he asked. "It really means restoring the ecosystem, but just as importantly, restoring the reliability of the water supply that fuels the economy of the state of California."

The interim projects are important, Snow added. "But those are meaningless, they're Band-Aid approaches unless they are tied to a long-term fix to the delta."

Voices of support, dissent

As he has in the past, Schwarzenegger invited a broad array of environmental activists, local officials and union representatives to lend their support for his program. Ann Hayden of Environmental Defense stated, "We all agree that the delta is broken and actions need to be taken now if there is any chance of preventing further loss of this critically important resource that the state so greatly depends upon."

Nonetheless, Hayden pressed the governor and lawmakers to devote more attention to ecosystem and fisheries health and perhaps less on building infrastructure. "Such actions include addressing the impacts that inadequate freshwater flows and high rates of export pumping are having on key species," she said.

Geared more toward infrastructure was Richard Fiorini, a director of the Turlock Irrigation District and president of the Association of California Water Agencies. "We need a bold, comprehensive plan that includes improved delta conveyance, more surface water storage, and expanded water use efficiency programs," Fiorini said. "Conservation alone, while extraordinarily important, will not solve the delta's problems."

Others emphasized the economic development aspects of the governor's proposed spending plan. Bob Balgenorth, president of the State Building Trades association of construction unions, cited an extremely high unemployment rate in the Central Valley. Balgenorth said the governor's plan "will generate enough jobs to employ all of those 70,000 people who are unemployed, plus bring in new men and women, young men and women, to become apprentices and begin a career in construction, a good paying career with health, pension and good wages."

Not everyone is pleased with the governor's plans for construction as a cure. Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, campaign director of the Restore the Delta group, charged him with siding with developers and corporations rather than delta farmers or residents "who simply care about what kind of environment their children will inherit."