In April 2015, the Brown and Obama administrations proposed a revised path to protecting water supplies that are imported from Northern California while restoring the declining ecosystem of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The state-federal proposal identifies a new, preferred alternative within the Delta environmental review process that advances water system improvements as a stand-alone project while phasing in habitat restoration in a separate, but coordinated fashion.

Protecting Water Supplies: A New Permitting Approach
Under the new proposal, state and federal agencies continue to work on a proposal to build three new water intakes on the Sacramento River. The water supply would be protected by construction of a modern 34-mile pipeline system transporting water from the intakes to the existing state and federal aqueducts in the southern Delta. Under the previous plan, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP), this modernization project would have been permitted in conjunction with habitat restoration (Endangered Species Act, Section 10). Under the new state-federal proposal, California WaterFix and California EcoRestore, these water improvements would proceed as a stand-alone project under the same permitting mechanism as for the existing State Water Project and Central Valley Project (ESA, Section 7). Participating public water agencies would underwrite habitat restoration connected to construction mitigation. Scientific uncertainty about the future Delta and the impacts of climate change are the primary rationales to propose separate, but coordinated paths for water system and ecosystem improvements.

Restoring the Delta: A Focus on the Near Term
BDCP, the previous plan, had proposed a 50-year restoration strategy for the Delta. The revised state-federal proposal reflects a more phased approach. Accelerated restoration actions totaling 30,000 acres are proposed in the coming decade to gauge their effectiveness. Subsequent actions would be based on the proven merits of restoration. Beyond habitat related to mitigation for water system improvements, all other restoration efforts would not be linked with water projects or permits. Given considerable research and scientific promise on the benefits of floodplain restoration for migrating fish species such as salmon, a continued focus is proposed for the Yolo Bypass adjacent to the Delta. Initial tidal wetland projects would be closely monitored for their effects on food production and fish populations to determine their benefit and where additional tidal restoration should occur.

For more information, visit
www.californiawaterfix.com      www.resources.ca.gov/ecorestore
http://resources.ca.gov/california_water_action_plan
Resolving Delta Challenges: Metropolitan’s Six Benchmarks

Facing reliability challenges with its State Water Project supplies, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California in 2007 established six benchmarks on what a long-term solution must achieve. The benchmarks are an instructive way to evaluate proposals that seek to provide water supplies and restore the Delta. The benchmarks in summary:

- Restore and protect State Water Project deliveries
- Improve export water quality
- Promote flexible pumping operations in a dynamic Delta environment
- Enhance Delta ecosystem fishery habitat
- Reduce seismic risks
- Reduce climate change risk

Next Steps

State and federal agencies plan to recirculate modifications of the environmental documents for public review and comment in 2015. The state’s revised proposal will be incorporated into this process.

Steps include:

- Incorporating the revised state/federal proposal within the existing draft environmental documents
- Releasing and recirculating a revised environmental analysis
- Receiving public comment
- Reviewing comments by state/federal agencies
- Publishing a Record of Decision/Notice of Decision by state/federal agencies