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Pressured by some state and federal lawmakers, officials announced Tuesday that draft reports underlying the multibillion-dollar Bay Delta Conservation Plan will be available to everyone at the same time.

An agreement reached in September would have given water contractors - which ship Delta water to cities and farms from the Bay Area to San Diego - access to those reports before environmentalists and other interested parties, an advantage that critics said was unfair.

Giving the water contractors first crack could allow them greater editorial influence over the content of the plan, the Legislative Analyst's Office has said.

"Today, we are making it clear that we will, in fact, honor the transparency principle that will provide early opportunity for all parties for access to key technical documents," David Hayes, deputy secretary for the U.S. Department of Interior, said Tuesday.

The stakes are high, Hayes said, and it is important that the process used to write the conservation plan is "beyond reproach."

The conservation plan is a huge effort to restore tens of thousands of acres of wetlands in the Delta, west of Stockton, and to possibly build an $11 billion tunnel to convey water past the estuary instead of through it.

On Oct. 24, five federal representatives signed a letter warning that the agreement, signed the previous month, gave contractors "unprecedented influence" over the process. They called for

the agreement to be rescinded.

Then, just last week, 17 state legislators also expressed alarm.

Tuesday's announcement stops short of scuttling the agreement, though officials said there will be more changes to come after they review new public comments.

In a news release, U.S. Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, called Tuesday's announcement a "very small step forward."

"Having access to documents does not guarantee that the concerns of the Delta communities will be considered," he said.

State Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, said the agreement still provides the water agencies with unprecedented influence. "The fundamental flaws remain," she said.

Merely writing the conservation plan is expected to cost $240 million, a sum that will be paid by the water contractors. Terry Erlewine, general manager of the State Water Contractors, said in a prepared statement that he hoped the "additional layer of transparency" will keep the plan on track.

"Our public water agencies have made some tough compromises in the spirit of progress and collaboration, because the Bay Delta Conservation Plan remains our best chance at fixing the Delta ecosystem and restoring a reliable water supply," he said.