

Warns that new proposal from state and federal officials leaves too many questions unanswered

June 22, 2012

Washington, D.C. – A dozen northern California lawmakers called on federal officials today to delay the imminent announcement of an expensive and potentially damaging water diversion project until more details of the plan are made available.

“The BDCP remains flawed. The newest proposal puts forth a plan of action without consideration of the consequences, costs, or how it should truly be executed. In essence, it attempts to establish an end result, regardless of the consequences for the people who live in the Delta region,” said Rep. McNerney (D-Stockton).

“I have fought and will continue to fight against any plan that includes a canal that would ship our water to southern California. We rely on maintaining a fresh and healthy Delta to protect our way of life. I will continue to stand with the farmers, small business owners and families who could have their livelihoods destroyed by a canal. A canal would devastate our local economy, costing millions of dollars and countless jobs,” continued Rep. McNerney.

The twelve California Democrats warned that the plan – as described in a recent briefing in Washington and public meeting in Sacramento – “raises far more questions than it answers, and appears to turn the maxim of ‘policy before plumbing’ on its head.” The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) proposal recently developed by state and federal officials would allow for the construction of massive tunnels – capable of draining the Sacramento River at a rate of 15,000 cubic feet per second – but delay any decisions about the uses of the project for as many as fifteen years. The members of Congress wrote that a poorly designed plan for the Bay Delta “could increase water exports from the Bay-Delta estuary — while failing to restore the Bay-Delta ecosystem and rebuild salmon and other California fisheries as required by law.”

Recent reports have described the water diversion project as capable of filling 10 Olympic-size swimming pools with Sacramento River water every minute, but the twelve members of Congress warned that the plan's potentially damaging impacts on northern California cities and counties, the state's economy, and the health of the Bay-Delta estuary are currently impossible to evaluate. The members of Congress called on Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and acting Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank to release "a far more detailed description" of the proposed new framework before Gov. Jerry Brown and Secretary Salazar make any public announcement about the plan. According to recent reports, the Governor and Secretary intend to announce a final BDCP plan this summer.

U.S. Representatives George Miller, Jerry McNerney, Anna Eshoo, Mike Thompson, Doris Matsui, John Garamendi, Mike Honda, Lynn Woolsey, Jackie Speier, Barbara Lee, Zoe Lofgren and Pete Stark wrote to Interior Secretary Salazar and acting Commerce Secretary Blank:

"We ask that you not finalize or formally announce this framework until a far more detailed description is made available for review."

"[w]e do not believe it is wise to commit to massive new water pumping stations and conveyance tunnels while sustainable solutions to the problems of water quality, fish and ecosystem restoration, local impacts, and water flows are made to wait."

"There is too much at stake in the BDCP for the federal government to announce a plan that defers important decisions while an expensive and potentially damaging water diversion project is allowed to proceed."

The full letter is below.

June 22, 2012

The Hon. Ken Salazar

Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington DC

The Hon. Rebecca Blank
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
Washington DC

Dear Secretary Salazar and Acting Secretary Blank:

As you know, we were recently briefed on a proposal to retool the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). It is our understanding that this revised proposal is designed to respond to the warnings from state and federal agencies that earlier versions of the plan would not meet statutory requirements.

However, the new proposal raises far more questions than it answers, and appears to turn the maxim of "policy before plumbing" on its head. We ask that you not finalize or formally announce this framework until a far more detailed description is made available for review.

Since the BDCP process began in 2006, we have warned that a poorly designed plan would cause significant disruptions to northern California and could increase water exports from the Bay-Delta estuary — while failing to restore the Bay-Delta ecosystem and rebuild salmon and other California fisheries as required by law. Our concerns have been echoed by northern California water agencies, flood control districts, cities, counties, the commercial and recreational fishing industries, and conservation groups.

We agree that the BDCP requires a significant overhaul if it is to succeed, and we genuinely appreciate the efforts that your departments and agencies have dedicated to the recent revisions. However, we do not believe it is wise to commit to massive new water pumping stations and conveyance tunnels while sustainable solutions to the problems of water quality, fish and ecosystem restoration, local impacts, and water flows are made to wait. Furthermore, we have not yet seen an explanation of how this "plumbing before policy" approach would be made consistent with applicable state or federal law.

There is too much at stake in the BDCP for the federal government to announce a plan that defers important decisions while an expensive and potentially damaging water diversion project is allowed to proceed.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We look forward to reviewing a detailed proposal and hope to work with you to improve this process further.