

As The Delta Churns

What Next?

As we all know the Delta has become the focal point for both the water debate and fishery restoration efforts. We have been through years of various federal and state efforts supposedly focused to bring back balance in the system – CVPIA, CALFED, POD working group, Delta Vision, PPIC, BDCP, etc. To date, what we have as a result is the Delta ecosystem in a state of collapse, closed salmon seasons, CV Steelhead nearing extinction, most pelagic species in the Delta either listed under ESA and/or CESA, and the invasive Black Bass thriving. Is there any wonder why few fishery or environmental groups have any trust that anything new will provide different results? Can good science actually become the leading element for change, or will politics and money continue to drive the decision process?

Well, because of the recent legislation passed in November, 2009, we have another opportunity for change – The Delta Stewardship Council. SB 1 established the framework to achieve the co-equal goals of providing a more reliable water supply and restoring and enhancing the Delta ecosystem. This council consists of 7 members, 4 appointed by the Governor, one each by the state Senate and Assembly, and the final member is the Chair of the Delta Protection Commission. Here is the website for further information on the Council and its members: <http://www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/>. Here are its main tasks: **1)** Develop a Delta Plan by January 1, 2012, that furthers the co-equal goals, **2)** Develop performance measures for assessment and tracking of progress and changes for fisheries, the ecosystem & water supply, **3)** Determine if a state or local agency's project is consistent with the Delta Plan, **4)** Determine consistency of the BDCP with the co-equal goals.

I attended the first meeting of the Council on April 1, 2010, and the first impression I had was the number of suits and ties in the room. It was apparent the water user community will be engaged, but the NCCFFF was the only fishing group present, and there were a couple of other environmental groups in the audience. Phil Isenberg was voted Chair, who was the chair of the Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force. He spoke on this subject last year at our Conservation Network meeting in Sacramento. The Council has inherited the staff and science program of CALFED, and will certainly be using the Delta Vision document as a foundation for future work. It is clear that we have both an opportunity as well as a threat. It's an opportunity to provide input to this body that can be helpful to making decisions that will greatly impact the future of the Delta and our fisheries. It is a threat because this body has both the responsibility for and power to decide the future of the Delta ecosystem.

This Council is supposed to be an independent body, but few believe that is totally true. DWR and the Governor, along with the state's federal partners will have much influence in the process. That said, the council is still tasked with the co-equal goals, and I feel it will be up to the NCCFFF and other groups to hold them to this end goal. We must

actively engage in this process and consistently remind them of the environmental responsibility they hold. It is only my impression, but I do feel that the era of power politics may be past, and the recognition that continued declines of the fisheries simply cannot continue. Certainly, this may not be true for water users, but the Council seems acutely aware of their responsibility and the need to achieve the co-equal goals.

Make no mistake, the suits and ties will push as hard as they can for increased diversions from the Delta or Sacramento River, and many legislators will do the same. It is our responsibility to keep a counter pressure on this effort, make sure science not politics is driving the decision making, and to remind the Council that the environment is equally as important as water supply. There is no doubt, change is coming. The Delta will not be the same 20 years from now. The question is, "Will the Delta be a functional and supportive ecosystem for the resident and migrating species that use it?" Can we really have a balance between water supply and the ecosystem? We know for sure we cannot trust the Council alone to answer these questions. We must be involved if there is any hope for a positive outcome, a restored Delta ecosystem, and a water system that supports people and our fisheries, both in the Delta and its tributaries.

If you are interested in participating in some way in this effort please contact me, summerhillfarmpv@aol.com, 530 432-0100.

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