

History of the LWVC Water Position

The League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) has studied and advocated for water issues since the late 1950s. We first studied Water about the same time the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) began developing the State Water Project (SWP). The LWVC Water Position was first adopted in 1959 and amended several times, the last in 1979.

The League did not oppose the SWP but over the years we amended the position to reflect changing conditions and concerns over water management in California. One footnote, the 1979 update included a question about a peripheral canal (PC) around the Delta, originally planned for the SWP. We could not reach consensus on the PC but we have taken action on subsequent proposals to bypass the Delta by using the entire Water Position. (See LWVC letter of April 16, 2020.)

Our Water Position has strong protections for the environment and covers many aspects governing water resources. The position emphasizes:

- Planning and management of water resources,**
- Water quality control,**
- Surface and groundwater supplies,**
- Fiscal objectives,**
- Conservation,**
- Protection of the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta and San Francisco Bay Estuary Ecosystem.**

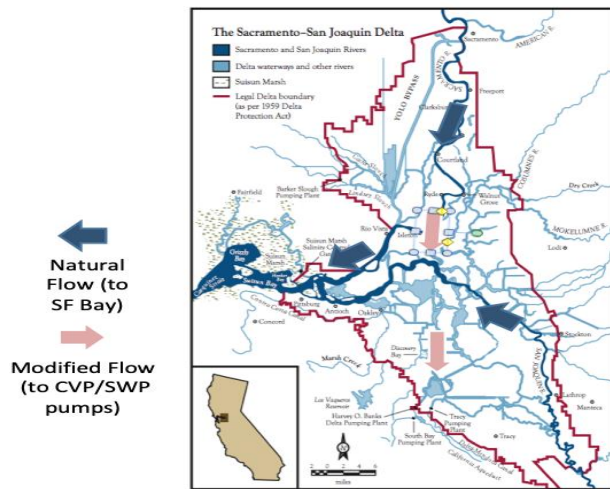
Protection of the Bay-Delta Estuary has been a key to our work in water. I'd like to talk a minute about the difficulty of protecting the estuary. Historically 40% of California's runoff drained through the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta and San Francisco Bay to the ocean. The drainage pattern created the Bay-Delta Estuary, the largest one on the west coast.

The Bay-Delta Estuary is an area where fresh and saltwater mix and is one of the most productive ecosystems in the world BUT it is also the switching ground for exports of water for the federal Central Valley Project (CVP) and the State Water Project (SWP). These projects serve agricultural and municipal users in the Bay Area, Central Valley, and southern California down to San Diego.

Over last 100 plus years, diverters for the Central Valley Project, the State Water Project, and numerous diverters up and down the Sacramento/San Joaquin Rivers and tributaries have resulted in only

about ½ of original flow being left in the system. During droughts, this can drop to 40% and some rivers drop to 20% of natural flow. The alteration of the natural regime in the system has left the Estuary in jeopardy.

This close-up of the Delta illustrates the problems that California has been struggling with for over 30 years: Quantity of freshwater taken out of the system and the Delta plumbing—the huge Delta pumps in the South Delta. The result has been very damaging to fish and wildlife.



Blue arrows. Blue arrows show the natural flow to the SF Bay. Migrating salmon and steelhead spawn in freshwater rivers and streams and return to the ocean for their adult life. These fish need a strong freshwater outflow for the migrating signal to return to the ocean (shown by the blue arrows), so if ½ or more of the freshwater is taken out of the system, it harms the salmon and steelhead.

Pink arrows. Pink arrows show the modified flow to the CVP/SWP pumps. The powerful pumps in the south Delta pull fish into the Delta where they lose the migrating signal and are stranded. The result is endangered species listing for the Winter run and Spring run salmon and the Delta smelt: others also are in danger of being listed.

The League acknowledges that the State's water distribution system has helped to make California one of the world's most successful economies, but the benefits have been unequal. The environment has suffered. Disadvantaged communities have suffered. And now, poor water quality in the Bay-Delta Estuary is creating public health challenges because of the impact of harmful algal blooms.

To save the Bay-Delta ecosystem, we believe it is imperative to reduce reliance on Delta exports and to return more freshwater to the system. To paraphrase from our LWVC letter of March 25, 2021, we believe that sacrifices will be necessary from all diverters from the Bay-Delta system. In order to contribute more freshwater, we encourage all diverters to explore groundwater banking, enhanced conservation projects for both municipal and agricultural users, improved local supplies, watershed management, water recycling, and other innovative approaches to water management.

The following is a partial list of some of our past and present League actions:

- **Engaged in the State Water Board Bay-Delta Hearings;**
- **Helped negotiate the Urban Water Conservation MOU;**
- **Supported the Central Valley Project Improvement Act;**
- **Participated in the CALFED Bay-Delta Advisory Council**
- **Supported the San Francisco Estuary Project;**
- **Lobbied for legislation that supported our water position;**
- **Monitored the Bay-Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP)—followed closely by Meg Giberson;**
- **Engaged locally in Groundwater Management Plans;**
- **Developed check lists for Privatization of Water, Desalination, and Water Conveyance;**
- **Monitored Colorado River issues—special sub-committee.**