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EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON MONDAY, MARCH 16 AT 9:30 A.M.
3/16/98

CALFED UNVEILS OPTIONS FOR BAY-DELTA FIX

SACRAMENTO--The ongoing effort to combine Californian's desires for long-term water supply certainty with environmental restoration efforts reached another milestone today with the release of three alternatives to "fix" the Bay-Delta, the largest and most complex estuary on the West Coast. The preferred alternative will be selected late summer of this year after a round of statewide public hearings and workshops has been completed.

"Since the signing of the Bay-Delta Accord in December 1994, an unprecedented coalition of state and federal agencies, together with concerned stakeholders, has worked tirelessly to develop a long-term "fix" that suits California's economic and environmental needs," said Governor Pete Wilson. "Now that we have the answers before us, I suggest the time has come to speed up our efforts. For we still have plenty of work ahead if we are to meet a deadline by year's end."

The public has until June 1 to comment on the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Report, major milestones in the selection later this year of a final long-term plan for restoring the ecological health and improving the management of water in the Bay-Delta System for the benefit of farms, fish and wildlife, and city use. The Bay-Delta is an intricate web of waterways created at the junction of the San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, and the watershed that feeds them. It supplies drinking water for more than 22 million Californians, is a source of irrigation for California's \$24 billion farm industry, and is home to the largest estuary on the west coasts of North and South America, containing plants and animals found nowhere else on the planet.

CALFED, a federal-state partnership, has been developing a long-term plan for fixing the Bay-Delta in cooperation with environmental, urban, and agricultural interests. After extensive public and technical review, CALFED has identified three potential alternative solutions, each of which comprehensively addresses the four main problems with the Bay-Delta system: ecosystem degradation, water supply reliability, water quality and levee system integrity.

"CALFED is a model for the kind of state-federal partnership we need to embrace if we are to develop lasting solutions to complex environmental issues," said Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior. "The Bay-Delta is on par with the Florida Everglades and Chesapeake Bay in terms of important ecological resources. We must meet the challenges it faces for the good of California and the nation."

The main difference among the alternatives is how each would move and store water within the Bay-Delta system. All three alternatives were evaluated by technical staff and public working committees against such criteria as benefits to water quality, impact on fish and wildlife, total cost and operational flexibility. A preferred alternative will not be selected until the summer of 1998, after all public comments have been received and considered.

"The time is now to act," said Douglas Wheeler, California Secretary for Resources. "In fact, the California Water Plan Update, just released, forecasts that our state will fall dramatically short of having an adequate water supply by 2020 unless a variety of progressive measures are taken. To this end, we need to be committed to the CALFED process as a major part of addressing these very difficult water supply issues."

"The historic Bay-Delta Accord broke the gridlock on water policy in California, and began the hard work of finding a consensus-based, long-lasting Bay-Delta solution," said Carol M. Browner, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Such a solution must guarantee a healthy environment and meet the needs of California's farmers and families."

"CALFED's collaborative approach is the best hope for a sustainable solution that addresses water quality

objectives in the Bay-Delta and supports the state's long-term water needs," said California's Secretary for Environmental Protection Peter M. Rooney.

"California's trillion dollar economy depends on a healthy environment and a safe, reliable and adequate water supply," said Commerce Secretary William Daley. "The CALFED process is an unprecedented effort to address these two vital needs. All involved, from stakeholders to agency representatives, are to be commended for working together to get us to this point. It is now up to all of us to finish the job," Daley added.

The draft environmental report and its 11 appendices consist of more than 2,400 pages of technical information, various studies and analyses, and related information. (See last page of release for ordering information.) For those who want to see detailed information without the technical appendices, CALFED's Phase II Interim Report documents CALFED's work during Phase II, including underlying assumptions, various alternatives that were formulated, the current alternatives, and the strengths and weaknesses associated with each alternative, along with other information. This document was designed for the general reader so that everyone could provide informed, focused comment. Also available are a layperson's guide to CALFED, an executive summary, and other related materials.

An orientation session on the draft documents will be held in Sacramento on April 3 and will kick off a series of 12 public hearings throughout the state to receive comments on the draft programmatic EIS/EIR.

"We've worked very hard over the past three years to come up with some feasible, affordable and equitable solutions to the Bay-Delta system conflicts," said Lester Snow, Executive Director of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. "Now it's up to the public to weigh in on the trade-offs we've identified and tell us what they think is important for California's future. CALFED's success is important not just for today, but for generations to come."

The draft environmental document released today represents three years of effort that commenced after the signing of the Bay-Delta Accord on December 15, 1994, which was intended to provide a reprieve from ongoing disputes over water issues for a period of three years. The Accord was recently extended for an additional year in order to provide CALFED and stakeholders the additional time needed to complete the draft and undergo environmental review.

The public provided ideas and comments that guided the development of the draft alternatives throughout the process. The draft evaluates systemwide impacts of the CALFED-Bay Delta Program on a range of issues including water supplies, fishery resources, vegetation and wildlife, agricultural economics and land use, recreation, and regional social and economic factors.

Selection of the preferred alternative is scheduled for the summer, after all public input has been obtained. Certification of the final EIS/EIR is expected to occur in late 1998.

The orientation and hearings are as follows:

Orientation Session:

April 3 in Sacramento; Sacramento Convention Center; 9:00 a.m. to noon

Public Hearings (all start at 7:00 p.m.):

April 21; Holiday Inn, 3400 Shelby Street, Ontario

April 22; Ramada Inn, 324 East Shaw Avenue, Fresno

April 23; Oakland Masonic Center, 3903 Broadway, Oakland

April 28; Fire Training Center, 1845 North Ontario, Burbank

April 29; Kern Agricultural Pavilion, 501 South Mount Vernon, Bakersfield

April 30; Pacific Cultural Center, 1307 Seabright, Santa Cruz

May 5; University High School, 4771 Campus Drive, Irvine

May 6; Jean Harvie Center, 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove

May 7; Chico Community Center, 545 Vallombrosa Avenue, Chico

May 12; Encinitas City Council Chambers, 505 South Vulcan Avenue, Encinitas

May 13; Marina Center, 340 Marina Center, Pittsburg

May 14; The Doubletree, 1830 Hilltop Drive, Redding

The complete draft [programmatic EIS/EIR](#) is available in hard copy. The Phase II Interim Report, and Executive

Summary may also be accessed on the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's Internet site at: <http://calfed.ca.gov>, or requested in hard copy. To order material, call CALFED toll-free at (800) 900-3587. Written comments on the draft should be addressed to Mr. Rick Breitenbach, CALFED Bay-Delta Program, 1416 9th Street, Suite 1155, Sacramento, CA 95814.