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CALFED Announces Plan for Bay-Delta

SACRAMENTO – The CALFED Bay-Delta Program today released its draft plan for restoring ecological health in the Bay-Delta, providing a reliable water supply for all uses, and improving water quality in California.

The plan – or "draft preferred program alternative" -- is the result of four years of unprecedented collaboration among state and federal agencies and stakeholders, offering improvements to water suppliers, agriculture, business and the environment. The plan is outlined in a multi-volume Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact State/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR). The release of the EIS/EIR begins a 90-day public comment period, concluding Sept. 23, 1999.

Beginning August 18, the public will have the opportunity to comment on the plan in 15 public hearings held around the state. Copies of the EIS/EIR and appendices are posted on the CALFED web site at <http://calfed.ca.gov>. It is also available on CD-ROM and as a print version.

Following the public hearings, the public comments will be processed and refinements made to the draft program plan. A final preferred program plan and EIS/EIR is expected in June 2000, when implementation will commence. The plan is expected to take 30 years to enact and cost in excess of \$10 billion.

The plan proposes strategies for improvements in four inter-related problem areas: ecosystem health, water quality, levee system integrity, and water supply reliability. It is comprised of near-term actions and studies setting the groundwork for actions in the future.

The Ecosystem Restoration Strategy focuses on rehabilitation, protection or restoration of ecological processes that create and maintain habitats needed by fish, wildlife and plant species dependent on the Delta and its tributary systems.

The objective of the Water Quality Strategy is to provide good water quality for all beneficial uses, protecting public health and the environment.

The Levee System Improvement Strategy will take action to improve and protect the integrity of the Delta levee system.

Through the Water Management Strategy, the program will ensure water supply reliability by increasing the utility of available water supplies; improving access to existing or new water supplies for environmental, urban and agricultural beneficial uses; improving flexibility of water supply management and demand to reduce conflicts among beneficial uses. The strategy will use several tools traditionally used in California water management to achieve these goals: water conservation, water recycling, water transfers, watershed management, and water quality control measures; surface and groundwater storage and conjunctive use; and operational strategies.

An innovative application of the Water Management Strategy will be an Environmental Water Account (EWA). It is believed that flexible management of water can achieve fishery and environmental benefits more efficiently than a purely regulatory approach. The EWA will consist of assets such as water, money, water storage and conveyance that environmental water managers can use for the benefit of fish just as traditional water managers now use such assets for the benefit of other water users.

The strategies are carried out through actions drawn from CALFED's eight program elements: Long-term Levee Protection, Water Quality, Ecosystem Restoration, Water Use Efficiency, Water Transfers, Watershed Management, Storage and Conveyance. The strategies and program elements are inter-related: actions in one area will solve problems in more than one resource area.

The development and construction of new groundwater and/or surface storage will be linked with aggressive

implementation of water conservation, recycling, and a protective water transfer market. During Stage 1, CALFED will evaluate and determine the appropriate mix of surface water and groundwater storage, identify acceptable projects and initiate permitting and construction if program linkages and conditions are satisfied.

CALFED will depend on the existing Delta conveyance system with some modifications, evaluate its effectiveness, and add additional conveyance and/or other water management actions if necessary to achieve CALFED goals and objectives.

The draft plan relies on adaptive management. As actions are implemented, the system will be carefully monitored. Subsequent actions can then be modified to take into account what is learned about how the system responds, new technology and scientific advances.

It is envisioned that the plan will be implemented in three stages. Actions in Stage 1– the first seven years – will be those for which there is strong scientific understanding and justification. Other early actions will be designed to test hypotheses and conceptual models.

The evening hearings will be held:

- Wednesday, August 18, Stockton
- Thursday, August 19, San Bernardino
- Tuesday, August 24, Los Angeles
- Wednesday, August 25, Salinas
- Thursday, August 26, Oakland
- Tuesday, August 31, Pasadena
- Wednesday, September 1, San Diego
- Thursday, September 2, Costa Mesa
- Tuesday, September 7, San Jose
- Wednesday, September 8, Antioch
- Thursday, September 9, Santa Rosa
- Tuesday, September 14, Visalia
- Wednesday, September 15, Chico
- Tuesday, September 21, Redding
- Wednesday, September 22, Sacramento

The CALFED Program began work on developing a long-term plan for fixing the Bay-Delta in May 1995. In cooperation with environmental, urban and agricultural interests, CALFED developed three potential alternative solutions, which were released in a draft programmatic EIS/EIR in March 1998. The several thousand comments on the three alternatives helped shape the draft plan released today.