

## Chapter 5. Conveyance — Delta — Table of Contents

Chapter 5. Conveyance — Delta.....	5-1
The Delta — A Brief Overview .....	5-1
Infrastructure Changes to Delta Conveyance — A Brief History.....	5-1
Current Diversion and Future Impacts on the Delta Ecosystem — A Brief Overview .....	5-2
The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) — Achieving the Coequal Goals Ecosystem Restoration and Water Supply Reliability .....	5-3
Brief History and Purpose of the BDCP .....	5-3
Delta Ecosystem Restoration and Protection — The Conservation Plan.....	5-3
BDCP — Taking Conveyance a New Direction.....	5-4
Water Supply Reliability.....	5-4
Potential Benefits .....	5-5
Potential Costs .....	5-6
Dual Conveyance — Implementation Costs and Funding Sources .....	5-6
Major Implementation Issues.....	5-6
Climate Change.....	5-6
Adaptation.....	5-7
Mitigation.....	5-7
Recommendations.....	5-7
References.....	5-8
References Cited.....	5-8
Additional References.....	5-8

## Figures

PLACEHOLDER Figure 5-1 Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.....	5-1
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# Chapter 5. Conveyance — Delta

## The Delta — A Brief Overview

The Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta is the confluence point of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers as water is naturally conveyed westward from upstream water basins to the bays connected to the Pacific Ocean (Figure 5-1). In its natural state, the Delta was a vast marsh and floodplain dissected by meandering channels and sloughs. Even in today’s highly altered environment, the Delta remains a critical ecosystem and dynamic habitat that is home to hundreds of aquatic and terrestrial species, including many species endemic to the area and a number that are designated as threatened or endangered by the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

### PLACEHOLDER Figure 5-1 Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta

[Any draft tables, figures, and boxes that accompany this text for the public review draft are included at the end of this chapter.]

The Delta is also a centerpiece of California’s water system. The conveyance of water through the Delta supplies water for more than 25 million Californians. The water conveyed through the Delta also supports farms and ranches stretching from the north Delta to California-Mexico border, which collectively produce nearly half of the nation’s domestically grown fresh produce and supports a \$27 billion agricultural industry. In addition to being a key recreational destination, the Delta supports extensive infrastructure of statewide importance, such as aqueducts, natural gas pipelines, electricity transmission lines, railroads, shipping channels, and highways.

## Infrastructure Changes to Delta Conveyance — A Brief History

Concerted efforts to control and redirect the flow of water through the Delta began as early as the 1850s. Early water supply diversion projects included the construction of the network of levees that facilitated the conveyance of water for agriculture and human consumption uses. The straightening, widening, and dredging of channels similarly increased shipping access to the Central Valley and improved downstream water conveyance for flood control.

California’s post-World War II growth resulted in the planning and construction of two large-scale water projects with an emphasis on conveying water to develop and sustain California’s agricultural economy and urban growth. The Central Valley Project (CVP), which was initiated in 1933 and is operated and maintained by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), is comprised of 20 dams and reservoirs with a combined storage capacity of more than 11 million acre-feet, 11 power plants, and more than 500 miles of major canals and aqueducts. The CVP provides sufficient water to irrigate one-third of California’s agricultural land and to meet the municipal and industrial needs of close to 1 million households annually.

The State Water Project (SWP), which was initially authorized by voters in 1960 and is operated and maintained by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), is a complex system comprised of 20 pumping plants, five hydroelectric power plants, 34 storage reservoirs and lakes with combined storage capacity of approximately 5.8 million acre-feet, and approximately 700 miles of pipelines and canals. The SWP provides water for more than 20 million Californians, about 660,000 acres of irrigated

1 farmland, and distributes water under contract to 29 urban and agricultural water suppliers (SWP  
2 contractors).

3 The Delta is a critical component of both water projects, which rely on the Delta conveyance system to  
4 provide water at their diversion facilities in the south Delta for use in the San Francisco Bay Area, the  
5 Central Valley, and Southern California. Other agencies and facilities, such as the Contra Costa Water  
6 District, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the City of Stockton, and the Folsom South Canal also  
7 rely on the Delta as a source of supply or as a transportation corridor for their water supply facilities.

## 8 **Current Diversion and Future Impacts on the Delta Ecosystem — A** 9 **Brief Overview**

10 Once a vast marsh and floodplain dissected by meandering channels and sloughs, the Delta provided a  
11 dynamic habitat for a rich diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants. The Delta of today has been altered by the  
12 construction of levees and reservoirs and dredged waterways to support farming and urban development,  
13 as well as to provide flood protection on lands that historically supported marshes and floodplains. The  
14 water flow in the Delta is also affected by the movement of water for operations of the SWP and CVP.

15 Many other factors have compounded the alteration of the Delta and include:

- 16 • Introduction of invasive non-native fish, wildlife, and plant species.
- 17 • Barriers to fish migration.
- 18 • Changes in Delta water quality constituents.
- 19 • Turbidity and toxicity from both natural and human sources.
- 20 • Unscreened power plant and agricultural diversion.
- 21 • Changed water salinity due primarily to reduced Delta outflow and increased agricultural  
22 runoff.
- 23 • Illegal fish harvesting.
- 24 • Improper fish hatchery management practices.

25 The Delta's future will be affected by increasing land subsidence, heightened seismic risk, and possible  
26 effects of climate change which include rising temperatures, changes in runoff timing, sea level rise, and  
27 changes in storm timing, intensity, and frequency.

28 In this highly altered environment, several fish species have declined to the lowest population numbers in  
29 their recorded histories. In response, federal regulatory actions to protect threatened and endangered fish  
30 species have limited through-Delta conveyance and have made water supplies increasingly variable.

## 31 **The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) — Achieving the Coequal** 32 **Goals Ecosystem Restoration and Water Supply Reliability**

### 33 **Brief History and Purpose of the BDCP**

34 During the past several decades, the increasing demand for the Delta's resources has escalated the conflict  
35 between the needs of water users and the efforts to sustain the estuary's aquatic ecosystem and support  
36 the protection of state and federally threatened or endangered fish. These conflicts have led to a crisis  
37 regarding the ability to protect Delta fisheries, maintain water quality, and meet the needs of both in-Delta

1 and export area agricultural and municipal water users. This situation has resulted in the need to address  
2 these competing beneficial uses and sustainability concerns.

3 The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009 (Delta Reform Act) mandates developing a  
4 comprehensive Delta management plan (Delta Plan) with the coequal goals of (1) protecting, restoring,  
5 and enhancing the Delta ecosystem, and (2) providing a more reliable water supply for California. The  
6 proposed Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is anticipated to be the 50-year comprehensive  
7 conservation strategy component of the Delta Plan.

8 The Delta Reform Act establishes the framework to achieve the coequal goals of providing a more  
9 reliable water supply and restoring and enhancing the Delta ecosystem. The coequal goals will be  
10 achieved in a manner that protects the unique cultural, recreational, natural resource, and agricultural  
11 values of the Delta. The Delta Reform Act creates the Delta Stewardship Council, ensures the Department  
12 of Fish and Wildlife and State Water Resources Control Board identify the water supply needs of the  
13 Delta estuary for use in determining the appropriate water diversion amounts associated with the BDCP,  
14 establishes the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy to implement ecosystem restoration activities  
15 within the Delta, restructures the current Delta Protection Commission, and appropriates funding from  
16 Proposition 84.

17 The Delta Stewardship Council will develop the Delta Plan, which furthers the coequal goals of Delta  
18 restoration and water supply reliability, which includes determining the consistency of the BDCP with  
19 coequal goals.

20 The BDCP is being developed in compliance with the federal ESA, the CESA, and the Natural  
21 Community Conservation Plan (NCCP). The BDCP's comprehensive conservation plan is also  
22 undergoing intensive environmental review in the form of both a state Environmental Impact Report  
23 (EIR) and a federal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIR and EIS will evaluate the  
24 conservation plan's impact on all aspects of the environment and will identify alternatives and mitigation  
25 actions.

## 26 **Delta Ecosystem Restoration and Protection — The Conservation** 27 **Plan**

28 The federal and state ESAs presently regulate the operational impacts of the SWP and CVP on a species-  
29 by-species basis. The BDCP is a joint habitat conservation plan (HCP) and Natural Community  
30 Conservation Plan (NCCP) that seeks to improve the health of the Delta's ecological system using a  
31 comprehensive conservation strategy to address the collective impacts associated with the SWP, CVP,  
32 and certain existing and anticipated future actions within the area covered by the BDCP. The BDCP takes  
33 into account multiple stressors on the ecosystem, the needs of multiple species, and the diverse natural  
34 communities that support them, including species listed under the federal and state ESAs as threatened,  
35 endangered, or candidates for listing, inclusive of habitat, if any, designated for these species.

36 The BDCP aims to enhance the Delta's ecosystem processes and function, including seasonal floodplain  
37 habitat, intertidal and associated subtidal habitat, hydrologic conditions, and salinity within the Delta  
38 estuary including a reduction in the direct loss of fish and other aquatic organisms. Specific problems to  
39 be addressed include the reconnection of floodplains, the development of new tidal marsh habitat, the

1 restoration of river banks to a more natural state, invasive species control, decreasing water toxicity  
2 levels, and aligning water operations to reflect natural seasonal flow patterns better.

3 An overriding goal of the BDCP is to contribute to the recovery of at-risk species in the Delta. The BDCP  
4 seeks to accomplish this goal by identifying specific conservation and management actions, or  
5 conservation measures, to improve habitat conditions within the Delta’s natural communities. The overall  
6 BDCP conservation strategy presently includes 22 conservation measures that are designed to achieve  
7 biological goals and objectives specific to 11 conservation zones comprising the Delta.

## 8 **BDCP — Taking Conveyance a New Direction**

9 Central to the BDCP is the proposal to develop an improved conveyance system, which differs from past  
10 water plans and implements a conveyance strategy that takes into account the continued decline in the  
11 Delta ecosystem. Specifically, the BDCP proposes the creation of dual water conveyance delivery system  
12 comprised of the existing (through-Delta) conveyance and a new conveyance system that will route water  
13 through an isolated facility conveyance system to be exported via the SWP and CVP. As proposed, the  
14 North Delta Diversion would become the primary diversion point and would be subject to water delivery  
15 operation rules. The new facility would help meet the dual, coequal goals of the Delta Plan by providing  
16 for a more reliable supply of water while simultaneously maintaining sufficient bypass flows for state and  
17 federally listed species of concern.

## 18 **Water Supply Reliability**

19 There are many factors that influence water supply reliability. The distribution of precipitation and water  
20 demand in California is unbalanced because most of the state’s precipitation falls in the north and a  
21 substantial amount of the state’s water demand is south and west of the Delta. This includes irrigation  
22 water for southern Central Valley agriculture, and municipal and industrial uses in Southern California  
23 and the Bay Area. Additionally, federal and state mandated regulatory actions to protect threatened and  
24 endangered species in the Delta have further limited the levels of through-Delta water conveyance, which  
25 makes available water supplies even more unreliable.

26 To compound these challenges further, the Delta is not a static ecological system and fundamental  
27 changes are certain to occur. The anticipated effects of climate change indicate elevated sea levels, altered  
28 annual and inter-annual hydrological cycles, changed salinity, and water temperature regimes in and  
29 around the Delta, and accelerated shifts in species composition and distribution. These changes further  
30 add to the difficulty of resolving the increasingly intensifying conflict between the ecological needs of at-  
31 risk Delta species and natural communities and the need to provide adequate and reliable water supplies  
32 for people, communities, agriculture, and industry. Anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to these  
33 changes are key underlying drivers associated with implementation of the proposed Bay Delta  
34 Conservation Plan.

35 Existing Delta conveyance does not provide long-term reliability to meet current and projected needs.  
36 Conveyance through the Delta during drought is especially challenging considering the various demands  
37 from agriculture, municipalities, and environmental needs. To improve through-Delta conveyance water  
38 supply reliability, provide greater operational flexibility, and improve ecosystem function, improvements  
39 to existing facilities by updating aging infrastructure, increasing existing capacities, adding redundancy to  
40 the system, constructing additional facilities, and restoration of habitat may be needed.

1 The major issues pertaining to reliability of water supply transferred through the Delta include the  
 2 following items:

- 3 • The health of the Delta ecosystem is paramount considering water-related activities within the  
 4 Delta. Continuing declines in some native species populations migrating through or living in  
 5 the Delta, such as salmon and delta smelt, highlight the increasing influence of the Delta  
 6 ecosystem on water supply reliability. Any activity proposed for Delta conveyance will need to  
 7 consider the restoration and preservation of native habitat.
- 8 • The integrity of more than 385 miles of Project levees and over 730 miles of non-Project levees  
 9 throughout the Delta is continually undermined by such elements as storm events creating  
 10 floods and seawater surges, island subsidence, natural levee erosion, poor quality peat soils  
 11 used to build the original levees, seismic activity, burrowing animals, and sea level rise. These  
 12 vulnerabilities call into question the long-term sustainability of using the Delta as a conveyance  
 13 corridor.
- 14 • DWR’s Delta Risk Management Strategy Phase II report recommends levee standards for the  
 15 Delta to increase through-Delta water supply reliability and reduce risks to water conveyance  
 16 and other values in the Delta overall.
- 17 • Maintaining optimal water quality within the Delta for both drinking water and for native  
 18 species habitat is paramount. Constituents of concern include, but are not limited to, salinity,  
 19 bromide, chloride, organic carbon, nutrients, pathogens, dissolved oxygen, temperature, and  
 20 turbidity. Control of water quality in a tidal estuary with seasonal and yearly fluctuating  
 21 hydrology will require well-understood and fully inclusive strategies. As water quality  
 22 requirements can vary, and at times conflict among users, the challenge will be to agree upon  
 23 the implementation strategy.
- 24 • Maintenance of in-Delta projects for beneficial uses such as recreational boating and  
 25 swimming, sport fishing, shipping, and agriculture, industrial, and drinking water supply will  
 26 be an ongoing management challenge as political and fiscal climates evolve and resources for  
 27 competing priorities become scarcer.

## 28 **Potential Benefits**

29 Implementation of the proposed dual conveyance improvements will enable the operational flexibility.  
 30 The use of an alternative conveyance strategy will also allow for the restoration of a more natural flow of  
 31 the waters feeding into and across the Delta east to west toward the Pacific Ocean.

32 Key beneficial effects in the Plan Area:

- 33 • Improve south Delta flows.
- 34 • Restore more than 100,000 acres of natural communities to promote improved ecosystem  
 35 function.
- 36 • Provide increased climate change adaptation in the Plan Area.
- 37 • Reduce north to south flows for exports.
- 38 • Reduce other stressors such as stranding, invasive aquatic species, localized predation, and low  
 39 dissolved oxygen.
- 40 • No changes in water temperatures; no biologically meaningful changes in salinity.

41 Net beneficial effects on aquatic species:

- 42 • Increase suitable habitat such as restored tidal and channel margin habitat.
- 43 • Increase food sources and availability from restored habitat.

- 1       • Decreased entrainment.
- 2       • Reduced entry into interior Delta.
- 3       • Reduced predation.
- 4       • Reduced illegal harvest.

## 5       **Potential Costs**

### 6       Dual Conveyance — Implementation Costs and Funding Sources

7       A detailed discussion of the estimated costs associated with the implementation of the BDCP over the  
8       proposed 50-year term of the conservation plan is in Chapter 8 of the proposed Bay Delta Conservation  
9       Plan at <http://baydeltaconservationplan.com/>.

## 10      **Major Implementation Issues**

11      While conservation plans like the BDCP are meant to be beneficial to the environment, specific actions in  
12      the plan can have an impact on natural and human environments. These impacts must be evaluated and  
13      actions identified to mitigate them. State and federal environmental laws require a review of potential  
14      impacts of the BDCP before it is approved and implemented.

15      The BDCP Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) was prepared in  
16      compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental  
17      Policy Act (NEPA).

18      The term “mitigation” is specifically applied in the EIR/ EIS as measures used to reduce environmental  
19      impacts after considering all of the environmental commitments described for each resource. Additional  
20      mitigation options and opportunities are being discussed with lead and cooperating agencies. The  
21      significant and unavoidable impacts listed in the April 2013 Consultant Administrative Draft EIR/EIS  
22      may be reduced to a less-than-significant level by the time of the Public Draft EIR/EIS is issued.

### 23      Climate Change

24      Northern California is expected to experience changes to the physical environment as a result of climate  
25      change. It is expected that climate change will result in more precipitation falling as rain rather than snow,  
26      leading to reduced snowpack, earlier snowmelt, and reduced river flows and reservoir storage in summer,  
27      causing changes to the seasonal timing of flows in rivers. Air temperatures will continue to rise, which  
28      will increase water temperatures. Accelerated rates of relative sea level rise will increase the intrusion of  
29      seawater into the upper estuary and when combined with an increase in coastal storms, storm surge, and  
30      river runoff will increase shoreline flooding and erosion. Sea level rise will continue to threaten  
31      infrastructure, increase flooding at the mouths of rivers, place additional stress on levees in the Delta, and  
32      will intensify the difficulty of managing the Delta as the heart of the state’s water supply system.

### 33      Adaptation

34      Both the increase in winter runoff and more intense storm events that are anticipated with climate change  
35      may require larger conveyance capacity and reservoir storage to manage water successfully for flood risk  
36      reduction and water supply reliability. Delta conveyance improvements can provide additional resiliency  
37      for minimizing these impacts while providing more flexibility in managing water supplies and reducing



1 flood risk, while achieving the coequal goals. Expected climate change adaptation benefits of Delta  
 2 conveyance improvements include:

- 3 • Enhanced ecosystem services through restoration of wetlands, floodplains, and riparian habitats  
 4 will restore ecosystem services that benefit humans as well as ecosystems.
- 5 • Increased protection of upland habitat and structures from flooding and storm surges due to sea  
 6 level rise.
- 7 • Improved floodplain connections to rivers to restore the ability of floodplains to absorb flood  
 8 flows and to provide a water reservoir to help aquatic species withstand droughts.
- 9 • Increased resilience to invasive species from creation of seasonally inundated floodplains by  
 10 increasing numbers and health of native species and excluding invasive species.
- 11 • Increased habitat variability helping to support species diversity by providing a mosaic of  
 12 habitats that can be used by different species that have evolved to use specific habitats.
- 13 • Increased habitat complexity from wetland restoration, which will include networks of channels  
 14 within marshes that are used by fish for foraging, refuge, and movement in and out of the  
 15 marsh.
- 16 • Increased habitat patch size and connectivity through the protection and restoration of a variety  
 17 of natural communities. Increasing patch size will tend to increase population sizes of native  
 18 species, which provides more resiliency against a changing climate.
- 19 • Additional flexibility in managing water supplies under more frequent dry conditions and  
 20 periods of prolonged drought.

## 21 **Mitigation**

22 Despite the overall positive benefits of the BDCP Conservation Strategies, implementation will result in  
 23 some negative impacts. For example, there are tradeoffs between BDCP environmental benefits with its  
 24 negative impacts on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from construction as well as potential indirect  
 25 project effects from growth and development. As stated in the EIR/EIS, BDCP will develop a GHG  
 26 Mitigation Program prior to the commencement of any construction or other physical activities associated  
 27 with water facilities and operations that would generate GHG emissions. The GHG Mitigation Program  
 28 will consist of feasible options that, taken together, will reduce construction-related GHG emissions to net  
 29 zero (i.e., emissions will be reduced to the maximum extent feasible and any remaining emissions from  
 30 the project will be offset elsewhere by emissions reductions of equal amount). The BDCP proponents will  
 31 determine the nature and form of the components of the GHG Mitigation Program after consultation with  
 32 the various local air control agencies.

33 As a part of ongoing operations of the Delta conveyance, improving conveyance system efficiency could  
 34 reduce energy use in pumping plants, power supply, and water diversion, which contributes to GHG  
 35 reduction for climate change mitigation. Furthermore, promoting water conservation, efficiency, and  
 36 sustainable use will also reduce energy use for GHG reduction that is beneficial for climate change  
 37 mitigation.

## 38 **Recommendations**

39 As one of California's most invaluable natural resources, the Delta has been stretched to the breaking  
 40 point. The Delta ecosystem is in steep decline, which jeopardizes the native fish and wildlife species,  
 41 threatened reliable water supplies for millions of Californians, and puts the state's broader economy at

1 serious risk. In order to reach the coequal goals necessary to successfully improved Delta conveyance, the  
 2 following recommendations include:

- 3 1. Legally acknowledge the coequal status of restoring the Delta ecosystem and creating a more  
 4 reliable water supply for California.
- 5 2. Recognize and enhance the unique cultural, recreational, and agricultural values of the Delta as  
 6 an evolving place.
- 7 3. Restore the Delta ecosystem as the heart of a healthy estuary.
- 8 4. Promote water conservation, efficiency, and sustainable use.
- 9 5. Build facilities to improve the existing water conveyance system and expand statewide storage,  
 10 and operate both to achieve the coequal goal.
- 11 6. Reduce risks to people, property, and state interests in the Delta by effective emergency prepar-  
 12 edness, appropriate land uses, and strategic levee investments.
- 13 7. The California Urban Water Management Planning Act requires urban water suppliers to adopt  
 14 water management plans every 5 years and submit to DWR. In these plans, urban water suppli-  
 15 ers must assess whether their current and planned water supplies will be enough to meet the  
 16 water demands during the next 20 years. DWR is required to review local water management  
 17 plans and report on the status of these plans.
- 18 8. The Water Conservation Act of 2009 includes distinct requirements related to both urban and  
 19 agricultural water use. DWR is required to report on progress toward meeting urban per capita  
 20 water use goals.
- 21 9. Through its Agricultural Water Management Planning and Implementation Program, DWR  
 22 helps water districts develop agricultural water management plans and implement cost-effective  
 23 efficient water management practices.
- 24 10. DWR will participate in workshops and technical discussions about managing for extreme  
 25 drought and floods.

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Figure 5-1 Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta



