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ENVIRONMENTAL CAUCUS PRESENTS UNIQUE ALTERNATIVE TO THE DELTA STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

The Environmental Water Caucus (EWC), a group of 27 environmental, environmental justice and native American tribes, presented a ground-breaking series of proposals to the Delta Stewardship Council, the newly-formed state agency that is charged with finding a balance between water reliability and Bay-Delta environmental recovery.

The caucus provided a series of recommendations on water that included an aggressive statewide water conservation program that can reduce water use by 8 million acre feet annually, the retirement of toxic farmlands that use almost 4 million acre feet of water per year, and paired their recommendations with a reduction of Delta pumping that will help restore the Bay-Delta ecology and fisheries. The Caucus recommendations have been boosted by the State Water Resources Control Board's recent report which concluded that more water must be allowed to flow through the Bay-Delta in order to protect the health and public resources of this critically important watershed.

The recommendations by the Caucus were presented as an alternative to the pending proposals by another group, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). That plan will construct either a tunnel under the Bay-Delta or a canal around the Delta. Dr. Mark Rockwell, representing the fishing community for EWC said, "This BDCP plan will continue the destructive water extractions from the Delta and block any hope of recovery for fisheries and the Delta environment. We have to find a new way to manage water that does not involve reliance on the Delta. The recently published EWC report, California Water Solutions Now, accomplishes this goal."

For many years, environmentalists have worked continuously to increase the amount of water flowing through the Delta and to San Francisco Bay in order to restore and protect the health of the estuary. Large water contractors south of the Delta have fought just as incessantly to increase the amount of water pumped through the Delta in order to irrigate farms and accommodate a growing population. It's a classic California water battle and seems to have no end. David Nesmith, EWC coordinator, says, "This battle for water must end if we are to ever achieve a balance between the State's need for water, and our desire to have a healthy environment and save our fisheries."

Nick Di Croce, long time water advocate and EWC consultant says, "The Environmental Water Caucus has presented this alternative proposal that stresses water use reductions and avoids the multiple billions of dollars that would be needed to construct a major tunnel or canal through the Delta. It is a non-structural alternative (no surface storage or new Delta conveyance) that can meet the needs of our growing population at least until 2050."

Using the Strategic Goals and Recommendations from the Environmental Water Caucus' report, the Caucus showed in their presentation how the actions called for in the report will save or reduce enough water consumption to allow the Delta exports to be reduced, in keeping with the State Water Board's report on Delta flows. "In the same way that California can no longer just continue to build highways to accommodate our population growth, we must find different kinds of technological and societal solutions to protect our most valuable, limited and life-giving resource: water", said Michael Jackson, EWC steering committee member.

The Caucus closed their proposal by challenging the Delta Stewardship Council to analyze their proposal as one of the alternatives to be considered in the future Delta Plan. Additionally, they proposed a council workgroup to further develop the recommendations in the EWC report, and to bring together people from all sides to discuss how this can be implemented.

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