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For Immediate Release

State Releases Bay Delta Conservation Plan Public Draft

BAKERSFIELD - A cooperative effort to improve water supply reliability throughout much of California and restore ecosystems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) reached an important milestone today as the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) released the public draft of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP). The Kern County Water Agency (Agency) has been a key participant in the development of the BDCP.

“The BDCP is our best chance to improve California’s water supply reliability and the health of the Delta, but comes with a large price tag. The Agency and its Member Units will need to confirm affordability, water yield and related assurances,” said Agency Board of Directors President Ted Page.

The BDCP is set to be published along with an associated Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register on Friday, December 13, 2013. It is a habitat conservation plan that is designed to do more than just mitigate environmental impacts; it would actually contribute to the recovery of many of the Delta’s endangered species while improving water supplies for the State Water Project (SWP) and Central Valley Project (CVP). The BDCP includes habitat restoration and invasive species control, as well as plans for the construction of two tunnels capable of moving water through the Delta in a way that decreases the impacts on threatened and endangered fish, and increases the efficiency of the SWP and CVP. After nearly seven years of investigations, scientists know more than ever before about the ecosystems in the Delta, and this plan is the most detailed description of how to implement large-scale ecological and water conveyance improvements in the Delta.

It is expected that the BDCP will create more than 100,000 acres of natural habitat in the Delta while also allowing DWR to significantly improve water allocations to the 29 SWP contractors (Contractors). In 2013, the SWP contractors received only 35 percent of contracted amounts. Due to regulatory water losses in the Delta, an estimated 800,000 acre-feet of SWP and CVP water supplies flowed out into the ocean. If the BDCP had been in place, some or all of that water could have been pumped into San Luis Reservoir for use by the Contractors. SWP allocations could have been as high as 50 percent. “There is a possibility that the BDCP could relieve water supply shortages. This year the initial SWP allocation is just 5 percent, yet SWP contractors are contractually obligated to pay 100 percent for its entire SWP allocation of water. The Kern County Water Agency is committed to thoroughly examining this BDCP draft to fully understand whether it can mitigate the current unbalanced ratio of cost to water supplies for water districts in our area,” said Page.

The benefits of the BDCP are broader than just improved water supply reliability and habitat creation. Statewide, over the 50-year life of the BDCP, it is estimated that construction of the tunnels and creation of natural habitat will produce more than 136,000 full-time equivalent jobs in construction, operations and maintenance. The bulk of these jobs would be needed in the first 10 years of the BDCP implementation.

Although the release of this plan is an important milestone, there is much work remaining to be done. The publication of the plan in the Federal Register will begin a 120-day comment period in which the public can voice their opinions about the plan. If permits for the plan are granted and the decision is made to go ahead with the plan, it will likely mean 10 years of design and construction before water flows through the twin tunnels. Still, today we are closer than ever before to a solution to California’s water woes. For additional details on the BDCP, visit: www.BayDeltaConservationPlan.com.

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