

Gov. Brown confirms change in water tunnels plan

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Gov. Jerry Brown confirmed Saturday that his administration has changed its permitting approach for his controversial plan to build a pair of massive tunnels to divert water around the Delta to the south.

Brown said he is no longer seeking a difficult, 50-year permit for the controversial project, instead pursuing approvals covering a shorter period of time.

With a longer permit, water users had anticipated relying on pumping rules that could not easily be changed for decades. But Brown described the change to the \$25 billion project as a “technical point.”

“To get a 50-year permit would set the ground rules for 50 years, and some environmentalists were worried (about) what happens in 30 years if the scientific predictions turn out to be wrong,” he said. “Now we’re getting a permit in a way that will allow subsequent developments to dictate whatever the solutions that science would suggest.”

Brown said, “It’s kind of a technical point ... Somehow it satisfies the federal fish and other authorities, so that’s good with me.”

The decision to move away from a 50-year permit was [first reported by the Los Angeles Times](#) .

Brown’s remarks came as he redoubled his defense of the agriculture industry’s water usage at an appearance in Colusa County.

Brown, dressed in boots and a checked shirt, lingered for several hours at a Western Days event, guest-judging a Dutch oven cook-off.

Farmers have come under criticism for their use of water – 80 percent of all water used by people in California – since Brown announced an unprecedented water-use reduction order this month. That order largely spared farmers, who have already been pummeled in California’s drought by diminished state and federal water allocations.

“I think people are ... grateful that I’ve tried to be clear about agriculture, because this idea that it’s 80 percent is not true,” Brown told reporters.

The figure excludes roughly 50 percent of all water in California dedicated for environmental purposes, a point farmers have mounted a public relations campaign to drive home.

Brown said, “I think farmers and people in rural areas are glad that somebody understands what’s really going on.”

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, most “environmental water” occurs in rivers far from agricultural and urban areas, and when pressed on the statistic, Brown acknowledged it “depends upon how you look at it.”

He said, “A lot of people can’t grow their crops; they’re fallowing land. So the question is, ‘How do we best allocate the water?’ ... It’s a complex thing, and I think we, you know, we’re going to do the best we can.”

Brown, a fourth-term Democrat, has generations-long family ties to Colusa County. Although the area is heavily Republican – and unkind to Brown in elections – he has become a familiar presence here.

As Brown sampled potatoes, stews and meats, former Colusa County Supervisor Tom Indrieri thanked him for appointing John Loudon, a Republican, to the county board last year.

Indrieri said of Brown, "He does at least listen to us."

Brown expected to remain in the county overnight, on land his family owns west of Williams. Brown is planning to build a house on the property.

Brown and his wife, Anne Gust Brown, put a primitive wood cabin on the land last year, and they planned to meet with a contractor to restore an old outhouse.

Brown joked of the outhouse, "We're going to make it elegant."

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