

## EDITORIAL: Delta plan now has realistic restoration goals



Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed to scale back 70% of the acreage that would be restored in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

### MODESTO BEE FILE

Gov. Jerry Brown's plan to fix California's complex plumbing system took yet another twist April 30.

This time, he proposed to scale back 70% of the acreage that would be restored in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, while insisting that the new plan will help revive depleted fisheries and create a healthier environment.

Forgive the skepticism by delta's advocates. Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, and some environmentalists were quick to denounce the effort as breaking the commitment to the long-held notion of coequal goals, that of restoring the delta and establishing a reliable water supply.

They zeroed in on Brown's proposal to construct two hugely controversial and costly tunnels, 40 feet in diameter and 30 miles long, to move water from Northern California to farms and cities to the south. The \$25 billion twin tunnel project is similar to high-speed rail: challenging yet worthwhile.

Brown's latest proposal does include important components.

In a telephone press conference organized by the Brown administration, the state and federal authorities who are responsible for saving the delta pledged to reverse what has been a decades-long decline in its ecological health. Those appointees say they will establish measurable objectives that will chart progress in restoring tragically depleted fisheries.

Brown administration aides didn't specify which restoration projects they might undertake, although they issued a map depicting potential projects, including some in the Yolo Bypass.

Brown's top fisheries and water officials also said they will speed up restoration efforts, separating the environmental work from the plan to improve the state's dysfunctional method of pumping water from the southern end of the delta.

Brown is placing one person in charge of the delta restoration, David Okita, who recently retired as a general manager of the Solano County Water Agency. Okita has significant experience in habitat restoration.

All of this is laudable.

In the past, however, the state proposed to restore 100,000 acres of delta habitat at a cost of \$8 billion over 50 years. Now, the governor proposes to restore roughly 30,000 acres at a cost of \$300 million over a four-year period. On its face, that is a dramatic reduction.

It also appears to be a more pragmatic approach. An \$8 billion commitment would have required legislative and congressional approval, which was optimistic if not unrealistic. Federal authorities criticized the Bay Delta Conservation Plan last year, particularly the notion of a 50-year horizon, given uncertainties brought about by climate change.

"This is a step forward because it's a concrete action," Brown told reporters in Oakland. "It's real. It's happening in the real world. The other was more; it was a desire."

Brown has been working on water since he was governor the first time. Now, he is in the fifth year of his second stint as chief executive. Planning and discussion about the delta and a conveyance has been interminable.

Thursday's announcement could turn out to be important. For now, however, it seems to be a start, one that has been a long time in coming.