

BDCP: A 21st Century Strategy

BDCP is a much improved proposal from the peripheral canal, reflecting new scientific realities and regulatory framework to protect the environment

Changing the point of diversion for water exports in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta was first proposed in the early 1960s. Efforts to build what became known as the Peripheral Canal lasted through 1982. State fisheries biologists supported such a canal as a way to eliminate the adverse environmental effects of pumping water from the south Delta. Others sought a canal to help meet increased demand for water supplies.

Today, the BDCP also proposes to change the primary diversion point in the Delta. But the scope, goals, and legal requirements of the BDCP are vastly different than previous efforts, including the Peripheral Canal proposal California voters rejected in 1982.

SPECS, OPERATIONS, AND WATER MANAGEMENT		
	Peripheral Canal	BDCP*
Conveyance	43 miles of above-ground, open channel with approx. 1,000-foot right-of-way width. Turnouts along canal to provide water releases for water quality	35 miles, gravity-based underground tunnels
Conveyance type	Fully isolated, with no through Delta operations	Dual conveyance, allowing for through-Delta operations and more flexibility to maintain in-Delta water quality
Capacity	21,800 cfs	9,000 cfs (tentative)
Number of Intakes	1	3
Number of fish screens	1 (addressing salmon and striped bass only)	3 (advanced technology; comprehensive goal to protect more fish species)
Performance standards for fish screens	Yes	Yes
Potential agricultural land impact (for conveyance only)	Approximately 6,600 acres	Approximately 2,400 acres**
Regulatory Controls	Avoid jeopardy to native endangered species through the Federal Endangered Species Act, policy directive from Natural Resources Agency to restore species, and balance for beneficial uses under the State Water Resources Control Board	Legally conserve and contribute to the recovery of native fish and wildlife species through the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act, and balance for beneficial uses under the State Water Resources Control Board
Habitat conservation planning to ensure that ecological health influences operations over time	No – HCP not added to federal law until 1982	Yes
Natural Community Conservation Planning to sustain and restore species and their habitat	No – state law not enacted until 1991	Yes

Restoration of tidal marsh and floodplains in the Delta is crucial to the success of the BDCP and the recovery of fish and wildlife species. And while scientific understanding of the Delta as an estuary and water supply source has advanced tremendously in the last generation, much remains to learn. The BDCP is structured to monitor, gauge, and adjust accordingly over the long-term to provide wise stewardship of the Delta.

A great deal has changed in the past 50+ years, resulting in a significantly different project than the one mid-century planners originally envisioned. The State of California recognizes threats to the Delta as well as the need to better manage existing resources to meet future demand.

* A final decision on the proposed conveyance facility awaits the completion of regulatory and environmental review and public input consideration.

** Additional acres of agricultural land would be impacted due to disposal of dirt and material during construction. The Peripheral Canal proposal did not quantify such materials in detail.

Goals, Approaches, and New Information

The Peripheral Canal proposal was a broader package approved in 1980 by a political process via the California Legislature.

BDCP is a multi-disciplinary planning process led by state and federal agencies. A generation after the 1980 approach, the emerging BDCP proposal reflects changed circumstances and new information.

BDCP is one part of an overall State water plan to bolster local self-sufficiency, reduce consumption, improve water management, and reduce dependence on the Delta to meet future needs. And while the 1982 Peripheral Canal proposal included wildlife protections and water conservation goals, new laws mandate and elevate the role of both.

SURFACE STORAGE	
THEN	NOW
The Legislature in 1980, by authorizing numerous surface storage facilities along with the canal, assumed a central state role in local projects such as Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County.	Millions of acre-feet of new local and regional reservoirs and groundwater banks (more than 5 million acre-feet for Southern California alone), including Los Vaqueros Reservoir.
ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS/PROTECTIONS	
THEN	NOW
State water project operators were to enter into an agreement with the state Department of Fish and Game to restore and maintain populations of adult fish populations at historical levels.	With numerous native species endangered, BDCP seeks to achieve the recovery of native species and improve the resilience of populations in the face of climate change as part of the permitted goals of the plan.
DELTA RELIANCE	
THEN	NOW
Increased reliance on the Delta to meet future water needs as well as drought year needs.	The 2009 Delta Reform Act mandates reduced statewide reliance on the Delta for water supplies.
WATER CONSERVATION	
THEN	NOW
No state law requiring achievement of specific water use reduction targets.	Improved water use efficiency, water conservation, and sustainable water use are mandated by the SB7X. The Statewide goal is a 20% per capita urban water reduction by 2020.
WATER RIGHTS	
THEN	NOW
Legislation had an accompanying constitutional amendment providing various protections, including a prohibition against the condemnation of water rights in the Delta.	Central Valley water rights are protected. BDCP does not affect the seniority and area of origin protections of Delta and upstream water rights.
SEISMIC, SEA LEVEL RISE, AND SUBSIDENCE RISK	
THEN	NOW
Limited information was available about the risks to water supply of Delta earthquakes, subsidence, climate change, sea level rise and levee instability.	More technical information available to help quantify the seismic, subsidence, climate change, sea level rise and levee instability risks to water supply in the Delta.