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New Plan Offers an Effective, Affordable Package of California Water Supply and Bay-Delta Fisheries Solutions

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (January 16, 2013) Investing in a broad portfolio of Bay-Delta water solutions can save Californians billions of dollars in costs while increasing water supply and strengthening protections for the ailing delta ecosystem and its fisheries, according to a new proposal released today by business and conservation groups in advance of the draft Bay Delta Conservation Plan expected next month. The Bay-Delta is the largest estuary in the West and a critical source of water supply for more than 22 million Californians.

This is the kind of fresh approach that is needed to protect the Bay-Delta environment, state taxpayers, and meet California s water needs, said **Congressman George Miller (D Concord)**. I know how powerful it can be when thoughtful environmentalists, business leaders and urban water agencies reach common ground on the water solutions that are so critical to our state s future.

The proposal, *A Portfolio-Based Conceptual Alternative for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan*, offers a more effective and affordable package of solutions to address the complex water challenges facing the delta today. The alternative plan proposes focusing on a smaller, less expensive new water conveyance tunnel in the delta, and investing the cost savings in water recycling and conservation to meet the long-term water needs of cities and farms. Additional savings could be used to shore up the delta s aging levees and to increase water storage south of the delta. Collectively, this package of solutions would cost billions of dollars less than the $18 billion price tag for the current draft Bay Delta Conservation Plan that is narrowly focused on a much larger set of twin tunnels and habitat restoration.

A group of conservation and business groups, including **The Bay Institute**, the **Contra Costa Council**, **Defenders of Wildlife**, **Environmental Entrepreneurs**, the **Planning and Conservation League** and the **Natural Resources Defense Council**, sent a letter urging U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Secretary John Laird, Deputy Secretary Jerry Meral and Commissioner Michael Connor to consider seriously this alternative as they move forward to finalize the plan for the future of the delta. Separately, **San Diego Mayor Bob Filner** and a group of urban water agencies, including **Contra Costa Water District**, **East Bay Municipal Utility District**, **Alameda County Water District**, **San Francisco Public Utilities Commission**, **San Diego County Water Authority** and **Otay Water District** also sent a joint letter in support of careful analysis of this new proposal.

By reducing the size and cost of a delta facility and habitat restoration, the proposal shows that billions of dollars could be saved and invested in a range of proven, cost-effective regional water solutions, including:

- **Dramatically increasing local water recycling and conservation:** Boosts water supply overall and improves the reliability of water in dry years by investing in local solutions south of the delta.
- **Reinforcing delta levees:** Reduces vulnerability to earthquakes, sea level rise and climate change impacts.
- **Improving cooperation among water agencies:** Strengthens collaboration among water agencies to maximize the benefits of water recycling and groundwater management to provide new water supplies at lower costs.
- **Developing new water storage south of the delta:** Improves our ability to store water in wet years to meet needs in dry years when high delta pumping levels can be most harmful.

The many potential benefits of these investments include more water at a lower cost in comparison with the current draft BDCP plan, a healthier environment, thousands of new jobs in the communities that would pay the majority of costs, greater likelihood of permitting from regulators, greater potential to attract funding partners and reduce pressure for public funding, faster water supply benefits; more local control of water supply, and less reliance on imported water.

The plan recommends restoring 40,000 acres of delta habitat, driven by the best available science to protect native fish and wildlife, over the next 15-20 years. Although ambitious, this restoration program would be a reduction from what is proposed in the current draft BDCP plan, and focused on the near term, which is when habitat restoration needs to occur.

This conceptual alternative also relies on proposed water flow and pumping rules developed by state and federal fisheries agency scientists to protect the delta and its fisheries, based on the best science available today. In these and several other areas, however, additional analysis of costs and benefits is needed to optimize this new approach.

Up to now, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan has focused largely on advancing a massive twin tunnel conveyance facility along with a very large scale habitat restoration effort. This approach could be burdened with large uncertainties, including impacts on imperiled species, uncertainty about future water supplies, open-ended costs to water agencies and the public, as well as heightened political controversy.

Following are statements from conservation and business groups in support of this conceptual alternative for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan:

It is essential we find long-lasting solutions for the Delta, said **Bob Whitley, co-chair Water Task Force at the Contra Costa Council**. The solutions we put on the table must strengthen protections for the delta ecosystem and be financially viable so we can meet the water demands of all within our means.

In the investment community, it is accepted wisdom that a diversified portfolio is a wise strategy to minimize risk and obtain an acceptable return, said **Barry Nelson, senior policy analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council**. The alternative plan set forth today uses a comprehensive approach to show how we can produce improved water supplies and a healthier Bay-Delta at a lower cost. This is the kind of integrated, science-based and economically sound approach that is needed to break the logjam in the delta debate and demonstrate that a healthy environment and a healthy economy go hand in hand.

If this proves out, it will be an affordable end to decades of California water wars, said **Jonas Minton, water policy advisor at the Planning and Conservation League**.

It is imperative that the BDCP succeed and deliver reliable water for California and reliable conservation for our declining Bay Delta fish and wildlife, said **Kim Delfino, California director at Defenders of Wildlife**. We are asking the agencies to analyze this alternative because we believe that the information gained will be critical in picking a winning plan.

It's impossible to solve the Delta's problems without looking outside the Delta to put in place the water management strategies that ensure California uses its finite water resources more wisely, said **Gary Bobker, program director at The Bay Institute**. The beauty of this alternative is that for the first time it links what we do in the Delta to how we manage water throughout the state.

For more information on the alternative plan released today, see the following links:

- Complete alternative proposal: http://bit.ly/13E0xsi
- Letter from business and conservation groups: http://bit.ly/Ut0SKs
- Letter from San Diego Mayor Bob Filner and urban water agencies: http://bit.ly/W0JI8x

- Conceptual alternative portfolio approach illustration: http://bit.ly/W7kB0V
- Current BDCP approach illustration: http://bit.ly/X8nu0C
- NRDC Kate Poole s-blog: http://bit.ly/XeNjwQ
- NRDC Barry Nelson s-blog: http://bit.ly/SLmvbU

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