

# Opinion: California at pivotal point regarding water

By Ken Salazar and David J. Hayes

California's water hub – the San Francisco Bay-Delta – can no longer do it all. Years of drought, worsening water pollution, rising water demands and the disappearance of wildlife and habitat have left the Bay-Delta in a state of environmental collapse. As a result, a multibillion-dollar agricultural economy, coastal fishing fleets and the 25 million Californians who rely on the Delta for clean drinking water are at severe risk.

This is the deciding moment for California's water future. We can either complete the much-needed long-term California Bay-Delta Conservation Plan on which the Obama administration, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, water users and other partners have made significant progress, or fall back into an endless cycle of conflict, litigation and paralysis.

While the conservation plan is still a work in progress, its essential elements are simple.

First, scientists and policymakers alike have concluded that California's economic and environmental health can no longer tolerate exclusive reliance on a 50-year-old system of pumping water directly through the Delta – a system that reverses river flows, causes direct harm to fisheries, leads to unreliable water supplies and leaves many Californians at risk of losing clean water supplies if there were an earthquake.

Therefore, rather than simply pumping water from north to south through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, there is an emerging consensus that we should reduce pressure on the system by also moving water around the Delta through a water conveyance system, such as a canal or a tunnel.

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