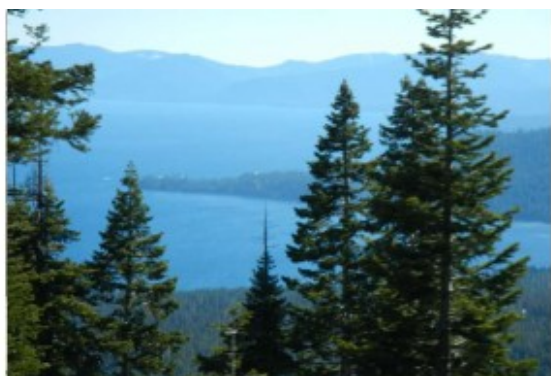


Editorial: Time is now for responsible water bond

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Another two years of stalling will not ensure a reliable long-term supply of water for California. The state cannot afford to let ideological battles stifle progress once again on addressing the state's water issues. Legislators should revamp a proposed water bond to pare the cost, scrape out the political pork and concentrate any new spending on the state's most pressing water needs.

The Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee last week took up the water bond issues, discussing a set of principles for designing a realistic bond measure. Legislators realize that the \$11.14 billion water bond proposal from 2009 has little chance of voter approval without significant changes that shrink the cost and excise the frivolous spending.



Lake Tahoe in past versions of the water bond would be a beneficiary. Photo/LTN

The measure is now slated for the 2014 ballot, but legislators have twice postponed putting the bond before voters, fearing that Californians would reject its hefty price tag. And the

fact that legislators inflated the measure's cost with a variety of pork projects only irritated voters. Taxpayers have little interest in footing the bill for self-serving political handouts that some legislators demanded in order to support the bond.

The state, however, has water needs that require prompt attention, and those should be the focus of a slimmer water bond. The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta's environmental and physical challenges, for example, threaten the state's primary water system, which ships water from Northern California through the delta to the rest of the state. The state has periodically had to curtail water deliveries to protect endangered delta fish, and the delta depends on more than a thousand miles of aging levees in danger of collapse in an earthquake.

The delta's ills put at risk the water exports that serve two-thirds of the state's population and irrigate millions of acres of farmland. Gov. Jerry Brown supports a plan to channel the exports around the delta, thus separating the state's water from the estuary's environmental challenges. Water users would pay most of that cost, but the plan also requires money to restore delta habitat and address the ecological issues in return for more reliable water exports.

The state also needs additional capacity to catch and store water for later use, in reservoirs and groundwater basins. Long-term forecasts predict the state will see more winter rain and less snow, so the state will be less able to rely on mountain snowpacks to store water until the hot summer months.

Any feasible long-term approach also requires increased conservation and recycling, pollution cleanup and other steps – all of which cost money. But the Legislature could trim the size of a new water bond by redirecting some existing water bond funds. The legislative analyst reported in February that the state had more than \$5 billion in unspent natural

resources bond money, mostly from two previous water bonds. Legislators should put those funds toward the most urgent water priorities.

California needs to move past old political battles to ensure a healthy water supply for its future. Legislators will not serve that goal by failing to craft a feasible water bond once again.