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Thursday, June 11, 2009

Assembly, Senate pass water bills

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Capital Press

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SACRAMENTO - California's legislature has advanced 10 bills that address the aspects of Delta management laid out last year by a governor-appointed task force.

Former members of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force have described 16 bills as relevant to all or parts of the group's recommendations.

Six of them passed the Senate last week, while four more passed the Assembly. They address such subjects as water conservation and recycling, Delta governance and efficiency of urban water use.

The task force completed its final strategic plan on management of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in October of last year.

In March, the task force members regrouped to form the Delta Vision Foundation, with the aim of nudging the governor and legislators into action. The group calls the legislature's current crop of delta-related bills insufficient to meet the challenges of delta management.

"There is not yet a comprehensive piece of legislation addressing the delta ecosystem," Isenberg said. "That needs to be put on the table. When you have a lot of individual bills floating around, one thing that happens is all of them ... tend to conflict with each other."

The group also described a lack of broad understanding among lawmakers of the Delta ecosystem as "disappointing." Despite the merits of the bills in play - including three broad-scope initiatives that address most of the strategic plan's goals - there remains a need for "strong legislative leadership" to craft a suite of legislation that would integrate ecosystem restoration with sustained water deliveries, the group says.

The bill that most comprehensively attacks Delta issues is SB12 by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto. It would create the Delta Ecosystem and Water Council, which would write a Delta management plan by the end of 2010, paying for the effort with fees imposed on water diversions and conveyance.

The other two broad bills are SB229, by Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, and SB457 by Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis. Pavley's bill would rework the California Water Commission. Wolk's would require the Delta Protection Commission to create a "Delta Stewardship Plan" to achieve Delta Vision's primary goals.

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