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Major water bond proposed in the Capitol

By **John Howard** | 08/27/09 12:00 AM PST

A plan to get voter approval on $11.7 billion in new water projects that include reservoirs, Delta environmental protections and even a massive canal is under consideration in the Capitol, the latest in a series of proposals targeting California's water problems.

The plan - not yet in the form of a bill - would place a bond issue before voters in November 2010. It is being pushed by Assemblymember Anna Caballero, D-Salinas.

Lawmakers in both parties and the governor have been attempting to negotiate a water package that includes new storage and greater deliveries of water into the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta east of San Francisco and to the San Joaquin Valley and Central California. They also are considering the construction of a canal to carry water from the Sacramento River in the north around the Delta to the California Aqueduct, which would move the water southward.

Some environmentalists oppose the proposal as harmful to the Delta, and Delta interests are fearful of being frozen out of the discussions.

The Delta, a vast estuary under court-ordered environmental protections, is crucial to the negotiations because most of the state's drinking comes through the delta.

The notion of going to the ballot for voter-approved borrowing is controversial, partly because the state's weak economy may not be conducive to a bond sale and partly because lawmakers are hesitant to take on more state debt. Supporters of the storage projects and canal, including the public water agencies, believe a fee schedule is more efficient and politically feasible than borrowing.

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