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# Delta half-steps won't fill water needs

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**By THOMAS P. EVANS and RANDY RECORD**

This was supposed to be the year of some big water decisions in the California Legislature. The impact of these decisions could determine the quality, cost and reliability of water supplies for residents throughout western Riverside County.

The plan was to put together a historic legislative package to address serious state water supply shortfalls caused by worsening environmental conditions in Northern California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, a key water supply source for the Inland Empire and 25 million Californians throughout the state. Western and Eastern Municipal water districts, as member agencies of Metropolitan Water District, import significant amounts of water through the delta for local use. With legislators scheduled to leave Sacramento for the year on Sept. 11, deliberations have yet to begin on a formal proposal to fix problems impacting the delta.

**Little time**

Time is running out for making long-overdue decisions on water supply reliability for our state. There are many challenges facing the Legislature and all of California these days, but if the economy doesn't have a reliable water supply for the future, we're all in trouble.

The good news is that there is a solid foundation for a lasting solution -- the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. This is a broadly supported master plan to improve the ecosystem and water system in the delta through the cooperative efforts of state and federal water and wildlife agencies, along with Metropolitan, other water districts and some environmental groups.

The ecosystem proposal initially calls for tens of thousands of acres of habitat restoration. Water system reliability requires a new conveyance system to move water supplies around or under the delta.

Water districts that would draw supplies from this canal stand ready to invest billions of dollars to make the conservation plan a reality. The Legislature, however, needs to find public funds to match these investments for the entire restoration program to happen.

**Few fixes**

The Democratic leadership in the state Assembly and Senate released a draft delta legislative package Aug. 4. Among its problems and omissions, the package does not provide public funding for habitat restoration in the estuary. It also contains other obstacles to successful implementation of the conservation plan. The result would be no fix to the water system or ecosystem. This is unacceptable. Water districts, business leaders and other stakeholders are beginning to advise the Legislature on how to do this right. Your voice could help. Fixing the delta is essential to our community's future.

The goal is to make our traditional supply reliable once again, along with restoring this vital estuary. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan is good for the environment and the state economy. A delta legislative package that embraces this plan and identifies a finance strategy is what we need, and now.

Thomas P. Evans and Randy Record represent Western Municipal Water District and Eastern Municipal Water District, respectively, on the board of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.