

Questions and Answers About the Bay Delta Conservation Plan

1. What is the purpose of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan?

The purpose of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is to provide for the conservation of endangered species and their habitats in the Delta in a way that also will provide sufficient and reliable water supplies. The BDCP is being developed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the California Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act (NCCPA) and will undergo extensive environmental analysis that will include opportunities for public review and comment.

2. Why is the Delta important to California?

The Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta is a vitally important ecosystem that is home to hundreds of aquatic and terrestrial species, many of which are unique to the area and several of which are threatened or endangered. Fresh water reaching the Delta is the core of California’s water system, conveying high quality water to 25 million people throughout the Bay Area, the Central Valley, and Southern California. Delta-conveyed water supports farms and ranches from the north Delta to the Mexican border that are a source of financial stability for the state and that produce roughly half of the nation’s domestically grown fresh produce. In addition, the Delta is a key recreational destination and supports extensive infrastructure of statewide importance.

3. Why is a conservation plan needed in the Delta?

The Delta remains a center of controversy in a long-standing conflict over how best to use and conserve its resources. Several fish species have experienced the lowest population numbers in their recorded history; levees, and the Delta infrastructure they protect, are at greater risk as lands subside and sea level rises; water supplies are increasingly unreliable; a federal court last year ordered a massive reduction in water supplies—up to nearly one-third—from the state’s two largest water delivery systems; and mandatory water rationing is under discussion in much of the state. A conservation plan will address these issues by providing for an ecosystem-based approach that will help to restore and conserve fish and wildlife species in the Delta while providing sufficient and reliable water supplies.

4. How will a conservation plan improve the Delta specifically?

The BDCP planning process provides opportunity for a broad range of participants to work together in developing a conservation program that will accommodate the needs of people and endangered fish and wildlife species alike.

The BDCP will:

- Identify and implement conservation strategies to improve the overall ecological health of the Delta;
- Identify and implement ecologically-friendly ways to move fresh water through and/or around the Delta;

- Address toxic pollutants, invasive species and impairments to water quality; and
- Provide a framework to implement the plan over time.

5. What species will be addressed by the BDCP?

“Covered Species” identified in the BDCP are those that are threatened or endangered in the Delta and potentially affected by certain water and energy projects. Initially, the BDCP will focus on the following aquatic species, but also will consider terrestrial (land-based) species in the future.

- Delta smelt
- Longfin smelt
- Winter-run Chinook salmon
- Spring-run Chinook salmon
- Fall-run and late fall-run Chinook salmon
- Central Valley steelhead
- Green sturgeon
- White sturgeon
- Sacramento splittail

6. What activities will be covered by the BDCP?

An objective of the BDCP is to obtain long-term (50-year) permits to operate water and energy projects, both existing and new. “Covered Activities” are those activities that support water supply and power generation, including water conveyance (pipes, canals and pumps) and facility maintenance and improvements.

7. How did the BDCP get started and what has been accomplished to-date?

The BDCP Steering Committee was formed in late 2006, and a Planning Agreement signed shortly thereafter. Throughout 2007, the Steering Committee evaluated different conceptual approaches to the development of the BDCP, focusing primarily on water conveyance and ecosystem restoration opportunities. Ten conservation strategies were analyzed based on biological, planning and other criteria, then narrowed to four conservation options.

In late 2007, the Steering Committee published “Points of Agreement for Continuing Into the Planning Process” which outlined basic approaches for developing the elements of the BDCP. The Steering Committee agreed that the most promising approach for achieving both BDCP conservation and water supply goals would be to develop and analyze more environmentally-friendly ways to move water through and/or around the Delta, and then to develop corresponding conservation strategies.

8. What will the BDCP Steering Committee work on during 2008?

- Developing biological goals and objectives;

- Identifying existing ecological conditions;
- Identifying habitat restoration and conservation actions;
- Analyzing different water conveyance approaches;
- Selecting appropriate methods for scientific analysis;
- Addressing in-Delta water quality;
- Creating an organizational structure for plan implementation; and
- Developing an adaptive management and monitoring program.

9. When will the BDCP be completed?

The basic overall conservation strategy for the BDCP is scheduled to be available by the end of 2008, with a draft of the full plan available by the middle of 2009. A draft Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) on the BDCP will be available for public review by the end of 2009. The BDCP Steering Committee anticipates that the BDCP will be approved, and a permit decision will be made, by the end of 2010.

10. Who is preparing the BDCP?

The BDCP is being prepared through a voluntary collaboration of state, federal and local water agencies, state and federal fish agencies, environmental organizations, and other interested parties. They have formed the BDCP Steering Committee, which consists of 23 organizations. For a complete listing, visit www.resources.ca.gov/bdcp/.

11. How can the public get involved in development of the BDCP?

The BDCP process is open and transparent. The Steering Committee has emphasized the need to obtain input from diverse public and private interests. The BDCP will meet the public participation requirements of the NCCPA, NEPA, CEQA, and ESA as well as the expectations of Environmental Justice policies. Through NEPA and CEQA, an extensive environmental analysis will be conducted, including opportunities for public review and comment. Interested parties have access to the BDCP process through a variety of venues, including the project Web site (www.resources.ca.gov/bdcp/), public meetings, informational materials, and community presentations. All Steering Committee and technical workgroup meetings are open to the public. For more information about the EIR/EIS, visit www.water.ca.gov/.