



Western States Water

Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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WATER RESOURCES

California Bay Delta

On December 29, the Bureau of Reclamation signed the record of decision (ROD) for the Delta-Mendota Canal(DMC)/California Aqueduct (CA) Intertie, completing the federal environmental documentation process for the project. The Intertie, which is one of the high priority actions that the Obama Administration set forth in its recent Interim Federal Action Plan for the California Bay Delta, is designed to connect the DMC and CA via a new pipeline and pumping plant in order to improve DMC conveyance capacity, allow for maintenance and repair activities, and provide flexibility to respond to Central Valley and State Water Project emergency operations. Reclamation will now implement a design review in coordination with the California Department of Water Resources so that construction can begin in June 2010. Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said the Intertie has been "extensively studied with several opportunities for public review and comment," and will be online to deliver water as early as the fall of 2011. Please see: http://www.doi.gov/news/09_News_Releases/122909.html. (WSW #1858)

Corps of Engineers/Water Planning Initiative

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is seeking comments on a draft report, issued on December 23, which makes eight recommendations on possible ways to facilitate more collaborative and effective management of the nation's water resources. For each recommendation, the report also includes "proposed actions that could be taken to advance water resources and management." The report is part of the Corps' "Building Strong Collaborative Relationships for a Sustainable Water Resources Future" initiative, which reviewed the water plans of all 50 states to "...identify common water resources needs and opportunities for enhanced collaboration with states and Federal agencies to leverage joint resources for national water planning." The Corps based the report's recommendations on its review of state water plans, interviews with state and federal water officials, three regional conferences, and one national conference attended by a range of water officials and experts. Of note, the report does not contain a description or a summary of the individual state water plans.

The first recommendation states: "Make Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) more understandable and a preferred way to plan and manage public water and related land resources as a system." Proposed actions under this recommendation include, among others, promoting understanding of IWRM and doing demonstration watershed-scale projects. Of note, one proposed action said, "Participants recommended that the Corps be given the role to be an integrator and facilitator of [IWRM]. Broaden the [Corps'] authority to do IWRM and to serve in the role of an integrator; for example, language was provided in the 2008 Water Resources Development Act for the role [the Corps] can play in support of planning in Oklahoma." The report also suggested legislation to expand Section 22 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1974 regarding Planning Assistance to States on a watershed scale.

Second, the report recommends fostering "...continued dialog about a national (not Federal) water vision and [creating] support for drafting a national vision and/or regional vision(s), and supporting policies and strategies." To this end, the report proposes collaborating with the American Water Resources Association to initiate an "outreach effort" to develop a national water vision and policy that would include the formation of a working group consisting of state, federal, tribal, interstate, and other representatives to craft and evaluate draft vision statements. Although the report recognized that "not everyone agrees that a national vision is needed," it said, "...the majority of participants in this initiative recommended development of a national water resources vision, including strategic actions to develop it. The report further quoted a number of sample vision statements that were offered by initiative participants, including the following statement from the Western Governors' Association: "Protect and wisely manage our national water resources for the benefit of present and future generations, including our environment." Of note, the report stated that a vision can be "...developed top down or bottom up, but most favor a bottom-up approach with a wide stakeholder group...."

Third, the report advocates reshaping "...organizational structures and means to improve water resources planning, decision making, and evaluation in ways that build the public will to act for integrated water resources planning and management." It also noted, "A way forward is to streamline and reduce the redundancy

and ambiguity in authorities...under Federal purview and to clarify roles and responsibilities of agencies and level of government. Maybe a consolidated national water agency or a water czar is merited, but it is unclear what the specific new structure should be. Nonetheless, a Federal role may well be to pull together key authorities, decision makers, and resources for better integration and alignment of purpose for water resources management..." Some proposed actions relating to this recommendation include: (1) aligning water resources responsibilities among federal resources agencies; (2) creating groups similar to WestFAST in the Central and Eastern Regions to support interagency and Federal-state coordination and collaboration; and (3) developing "...a vertical National Water Team of Federal, state, regional/interstate, and non-governmental entities to serve as a working group to provide information about watershed-based planning and management, including lessons learned and best practices."

Fourth, the report recommends promoting "...opportunities and mechanisms for collaborative water resources planning and management." To accomplish this goal, it suggests a number of proposed actions that would utilize interstate river basin commissions, identify effective federal interagency efforts, and explore mechanisms to create public-private partnerships, among other things. It also proposes an effort "...to develop regional multipurpose watershed plans, building on bottom-up collaborative efforts basin by basin."

Fifth, the report suggests promoting "...innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms for public water resources solutions, including water infrastructure, at Federal and state levels." Key proposed actions that fall under this recommendation include: (1) developing "a comprehensive water resources investment strategy" that shifts investment from crisis-driven funding toward IWRM; (2) creating a database of federal funding approaches and authorities; (3) funding or sustaining funding for critical programs and strategic opportunities, such as the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) National Streamflow Information Program; (4) promoting legislation that changes the cost-share formula from 50/50 (federal-local sponsor) to 75/25 for watershed-scale and regional planning; (5) working with the Office of Management and Budget to develop joint budgets across Federal agencies for shared goals; and (6) providing funding to implement state water plans based on states having "...a comprehensive watershed/basin-scale plan that puts projects in the context of regional water system needs and ongoing activities."

Sixth, the report proposes increasing the ability of federal, state, and local governments to "anticipate and manage natural and man-made disasters and climate change impacts." Proposed actions range from creating a database that summarizes what the states are doing regarding drought, flood mitigation, and general

emergency planning to providing states with technical planning assistance to develop water plans that integrate "disaster/emergency/drought management plans and water resources plans." The report also suggests having the Federal Emergency Management Agency lead a combined interagency and national team to report on the readiness of Federal and state agencies for watersheds.

Seventh, the Corps recommends basing "...water resources plans and decisions in good science and information and technology sharing and [increasing] scientific and management knowledge and capability at all government levels." A key aspect of this recommendation is the development of a "federal support toolbox" that would include authorities, technical tools, and scientific and management information to help federal agencies support water planning across the nation. According to the report, "An interagency steering group comprised of [the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)], USGS, and the Corps is already working to create a master plan for development of the [toolbox] that enables decisions about what to include in the toolbox and how to construct, manage, and maintain it, steps to develop a [toolbox] of integrated hydrologic and planning/management data at all levels of geography, an inventory of models and analytic methods and metadata and services." The report also suggests that NOAA should lead a working group to secure support and funding for the toolbox and recommends the development of an online link to make the toolbox "available through a common data portal."

The final recommendation says, "Enhance the ability of public officials at all levels to understand and communicate priorities for water resources investments and solutions, and raise awareness and build stewardship for responsible water management." One proposed action suggests that the White House Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) establish an interagency working group known as the Federal Principals Group for a Sustainable Water Future to build upon the report's recommendations and to "...serve as a steering group and endorse an integrated horizontal committee of key representatives across the Federal agencies, hopefully opening membership to include selected state, tribal, and non-governmental representatives."

Once finalized, the report will represent the first phase of the Corps' initiative. The next phase will focus on developing implementation plans and strategies to implement the report's recommendations. The Corps is seeking comments on the report from those groups and individuals that participated in the initiative. WSWC members may contact the WSWC offices to request copies of the report. Comments must be submitted via email to Corps Program Manager Ada Benavides at ada.benavides@usace.army.mil by January 22, 2010. (WSW #1856, #1845, #1839, and #1796)