

Conservation Corner

"Wicked Problems"

November 2015

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The September 29, 2015 press release by the California Natural Resources Agency titled **"Delta Poses "Wicked" Problems That Must Be Managed"** is a powerful message regarding the status of the Delta and the imperative that bold actions must be taken to avert system collapse. The release states that problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta are so complex as to fit the scientific definition of "wicked"-meaning, they cannot be ignored, defy straightforward characterization, and have no simple solutions. The press release and supporting documents can be found [here](#).

This conclusion was reached by a panel of four expert scientists in a report requested by the California Natural Resources Agency, U.S. Department of the Interior, and NOAA Fisheries. The authors state that the status quo of Delta water management is unsustainable and that the problems cannot be solved in the traditional sense. The authors go on to say managing the water supply alone is complicated, but add in the imperative to sustain the ecological and social values of the Delta and every decision becomes unimaginably complex.

The solution that has been proposed by the State to date is the California WaterFix, a \$15 billion infrastructure proposal now undergoing environmental review. This solution includes construction of the Delta tunnels that I described in the September 2015 issue of *The Leader*, **"A Closer Look at the Delta Tunnels"**.

We are living in a critical time where decisions and bold actions regarding the future of our environment must be taken. From the tone of the Resources Agency press release and the attached report I can only conclude that bold action will be taken. The stakes are too high for the issue to be ignored. If the California WaterFix is the only feasible solution, then I believe that the plan will be implemented.

Rather than simply opposing the plan I believe that our interests would be better served if we get in front of it and provide input that protects our interests. Mere opposition without alternatives will not serve us very well. There have already been a number of changes in the proposed plan due to stakeholder input and there is still time to shape the plan so that our interests are fully considered. "The message from this report is clear," said California Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird. "While different stakeholders express strong differences about project options and proposed habitat restoration, doing nothing is worse than anything on the table. We cannot be distracted from that fact. It should motivate us to find solutions together to the complex problems outlined in this report."