

New Water Policy “Kid” On the Block

Welcoming the California Bay-Delta Authority

by Frances Spivy-Weber

The California Bay-Delta Authority was born in fall, 2002 when the California legislature passed, and the governor signed, a law setting up a structure to implement the 30-year program to restore fisheries in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, enhance the levee system in the Delta, and improve the State Water Project’s delivery of high quality water to 22 million urban and agricultural water users throughout California. This program is important to the Mono Lake Committee because its success will help protect Mono Lake from the threat of increased water diversions in the future. Success can also reinforce the idea that there is enough water for the California environment and economy, if everyone works together to use water more efficiently.

Formerly known as CalFed, the Authority is more than a name change. While the California Bay-Delta Authority will, like CalFed, hold state and federal agencies accountable to the 30-year plan laid out in the Record of Decision (signed August 28, 2000), as the Authority, the program will become real—able to act as an agency and execute its own contracts—but real with a difference. The Authority is pledged to think regionally, a strong theme in many parts of California water policy these days. The Authority will use science both to plan investments in water projects and to evaluate how well the public is being served by those investments. The Authority’s power will lie not in control of agency or stakeholder actions, but in use of its very public oversight of work plans and budgets and its multi-agency, multi-stakeholder constituencies to let the legislature, the media, and local interests of all stripes know how well the state is doing to meet the water needs of California now and in the future.

With the passage of Proposition 50 last November, the Authority will have oversight over much of the funding that State government will spend on water projects in the next several years.

The Authority has fourteen voting members from California: six state officials (Secretaries of Resources, Cal-EPA, Department of Food and Agriculture and Directors of the Departments of Water Resources, Fish and Game, and Health Services); one member of the Bay-Delta Public Advisory Committee (on which Mono Lake Committee Board member Martha Davis and I both sit); five regional public members appointed by the Governor with Senate concurrence; and two at-large public members appointed by the Senate President pro tem and the Speaker of the Assembly. The five regions are Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, San Francisco Bay, Sacramento Valley, San Joaquin Valley, and Southern California. There are four non-voting ex officio state members: Chair and Vice Chair of Senate Agriculture and Water Committee and Chair and Vice Chair of Assembly Water Parks and Wildlife Committee.

Six federal officials (Secretary of Interior, Regional Director of the Bureau of Reclamation, CA/NV Operations Manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Regional Administrator for the National Marine Fisheries Service, Regional Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Sacramento District Engineer of the Corps of Engineers) are also eligible to vote in the Authority.

In the closing hours of the 2002 Congress, Senator Feinstein got a two-sentence bill passed. The first sentence authorizes the Secretary of Interior and other federal agencies to participate in the Bay-Delta Program through fiscal year 2005. (Thank you Mono Lake

Committee members for signing letters in September to Senator Feinstein. She heard you ... sort of.) However, the flawed second sentence allows the Federal agencies to pick and choose the Authority projects they would fund—a recipe for confusion in a collaborative process. Many environmental groups, including the Mono Lake Committee, were able to keep the bill from a vote in the House. Undoubtedly new 2003 legislation will reinforce the importance of being sure early expenditures are focused on making the current water system work better before expanding it or creating something new.

People will be the key to making the Authority work, and as this *Newsletter* goes to press, the Mono Lake Committee is working with others to find and support the right people to serve on the Authority. The Mono Lake Committee is looking for leaders who understand the importance of having water for people *and* the environment, people who will find solutions that meet the real water needs of California without transferring problems to other areas. The Committee wants Authority appointees who can motivate federal and state agencies, the legislature, Congress, and the public to look for innovative ways to stretch water supplies so there is more than enough water to meet the needs of the future. ❖

Fran is the Committee’s Co-Executive Director. She and her husband Michael have gotten a crash refresher course in shoveling snow this winter.