

What You Can Do To Help

Study the Issues: We encourage you to learn more about the Delta, its problems, possible solutions and its important role as a supply of water in the Coachella Valley.

Get Involved: Efforts to find solutions can be adversely affected by partisan politics or special interests. Lawmakers and others in positions that can make a difference need to know how important this issue is to you.

Conserve Water: By using less water, you reduce the Coachella Valley's dependency upon imported water and help the region become more self-sufficient and less likely to be affected by what happens elsewhere.



The California Delta

California's two largest rivers converge near the capital to form the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. This is the largest estuary on the west coast of the Americas, and encompasses close to 750,000 acres—nearly 1,175 square miles.

The Delta is 450 miles north of Coachella Valley—a drive of at least seven hours—yet what happens there has tremendous impact on quality of life here. Much is wrong in the Delta. If solutions are not found, Coachella Valley will suffer the consequences along with the rest of California.

Two crucial conveyance systems—the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project—rely upon water that is pumped from the Delta into the California Aqueduct and several canals and other waterways.

Twenty-three million people depend on the Delta for at least some of their water.

Millions of acres of farmland are irrigated statewide with water taken from the Delta, which has thriving agriculture of its own.

The Delta is a popular destination for fishing and boating enthusiasts, naturalists and others who enjoy its unique features.

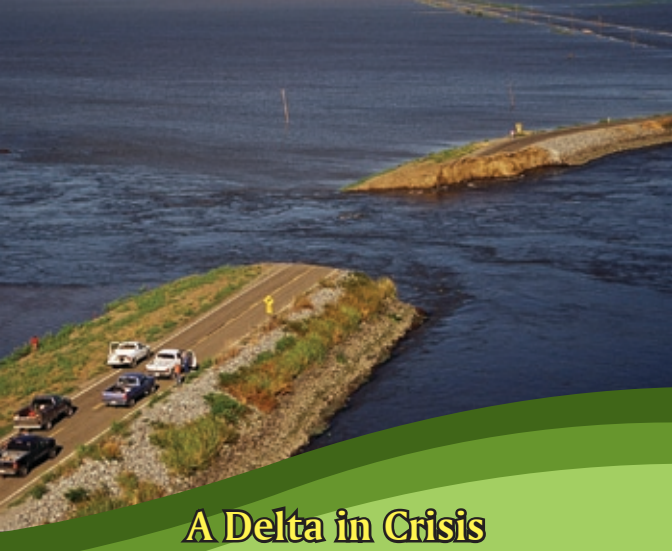
The California Delta is as close as your next glass of water in The Coachella Valley

COACHELLA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT

Post Office Box 1058
Coachella, California 92236
Telephone: (760) 398-2651
Fax: (760) 398-3711
Email: cvwdmail@cvwd.org
Website: www.cvwd.org

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Photos by Dale Kolke, California DWR
& Robert Keeran, CVWD*





The Valley Must Import Water

Although Coachella Valley is blessed with a vast aquifer, the region has relied upon imported water to protect and replenish groundwater supplies since the late 1940s, when the Coachella Canal brought Colorado River water to the region's farmlands.

Deliveries of State Water Project water—through a unique exchange agreement for Colorado River water with the Metropolitan Water District—began in 1973. Since then, more than two million acre-feet of water has been used to replenish groundwater.

The entitlements of the Coachella Valley Water District and nearby Desert Water Agency—if combined—would rank third among the 29 State Water Contractors.

To keep pace with demand by residential and business consumers, the agencies seek to add to entitlements whenever possible, although these do not guarantee deliveries.

State Water Project average reliability has gone from 68% to 63% in two years. Delta-related issues reduced most deliveries to only 35% of entitlements in 2008.

A Delta in Crisis

The reliability of Coachella Valley's supply of State Water Project water is in jeopardy.

More than 1,100 miles of earthen levees protect farm "islands" and other land from flooding. Most were built 130 years ago by dredging sloughs and are little more than unstable piles of dirt subject to collapse.

Due to subsidence and soil erosion, the islands are dropping further below rising sea levels. Climate changes mean less snow pack, more immediate runoff during rainy season and higher water levels at those times. All contribute to levee instability.

There is fear that a major earthquake will cause numerous levees to break, allowing brackish water to contaminate fresh water for a decade or longer, making it unsuitable as drinking water and for other purposes. Those who have studied the issue report such an event would be a catastrophe for the state on a scale equal to or exceeding the effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and surrounding areas.

The Delta's problems are not limited to geography, however, and already contribute significantly to the statewide water crisis and the dire economic consequences.

A Tiny Fish, Big Problems

Delta rivers are major commercial routes, and its natural and man-made waterways extend for 1,000 miles. The region is home to more than 750 species of wildlife and plants—some are unique to the Delta and others are protected by state and federal endangered species laws.

Delta water quality is adversely affected by agricultural and urban by-products. The introduction of non-native invasion species, accidentally or for sports fishing, has further damaged the Delta's ecosystem.

The native Delta smelt is on federal and state threatened species lists. While several factors likely contributed to its demise, the only action so far has been the ruling by a federal judge that because some guidelines associated with the "taking" of the fish were not followed, the pumping of water from the Delta has to be reduced significantly.

As a result of this legal decision, drought and other issues, Coachella Valley is among regions seriously affected by the reduced availability of imported Delta water.

Without solutions, the area's development and growth could be adversely impacted by the lack of a reliable, sustainable supply of State Water Project water in the near future.

Looking for Answers

Delta stakeholders represent very diverse interests and haven't yet reached consensus on a list of priorities or responsibilities.

Previous attempts to find solutions to the Delta's myriad of problems are viewed by many as a failure because of piecemeal approaches, which led to spending a lot of money but garnered very few results.

A governor-appointed Blue Ribbon panel has recently identified major problems—including land subsidence, seismicity, rises in sea level, climate changes, exotic species and ecosystem changes, population growth and urbanization. All could adversely affect current and future water supplies.

Panel research continues and a long list of possible solutions is being developed. This will require cooperation among water providers, land developers, agriculture, lawmakers, environmentalists and other special-interest groups

There exists a growing consensus among stakeholders that fixing the state Delta and solving the state's water crisis must receive equal attention. Solutions to one crisis will never be found by ignoring the other.