



Agriculture and Cities to Lose Water Under Bay-Delta Plan

By Cary Keaten, SID General Manager

In September 2023, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) released its proposed Bay-Delta Plan for the Sacramento Basin. Following this, in October 2024, the State Water Board issued a Plan of Implementation for the broader Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta Plan. Spanning over 6,000 pages of proposals, analysis, and data, the Plan is extraordinarily complex. At stake is Lake Berryessa's 200,000 Acre-Foot annual water supply for Solano County-Wide Customers.

In response, Solano water agencies, including the Solano Irrigation District (SID) and the Suisun-Solano Water Authority, have undertaken extensive analysis and review, involving consultants, in-house staff, attorneys, legal briefs, and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) comments. The day after the latest deadline to provide comments to the State, I compiled six comment letters from the Solano water agencies addressing the October 2024 document, totaling 162 pages of legal-oriented feedback. Similarly, the September 2023 document demanded hundreds of hours of effort from elected officials, staff, consultants, and legal experts, all of whom submitted letters and participated in State Water Board workshops. These efforts represent the culmination of an eight-year campaign to safeguard Solano County's critical water resource: the Solano Project or Lake Berryessa.

What's at Stake

The State Water Board has proposed reallocating water resources from agencies, including special districts and cities, to increase water flows into the San Francisco Bay-Delta. This reallocation aims to enhance salmon populations. Its implications vary significantly across agencies.

For the Solano Project, the proposal redirects water based on annual hydrological conditions, ostensibly to lower temperatures in the Sacramento River. However, no evidence demonstrates how releasing water from Lake Berryessa into Putah Creek, Cache Slough, and eventually the Sacramento River would achieve this goal. Instead, portions of the October 2024 document suggest that the releases are intended to preserve water storage in reservoirs like the State Water Project's (SWP) Lake Oroville and the Central Valley Project's (CVP) Lake Shasta for other state-wide water uses. For example, "...if more water was needed, other water right holders [Solano Project] would also need to bypass flows, reducing the need for the Projects [the CVP and SWP] to release previously stored water.

To quantify the potential impact, we developed a mathematical model based on 20 years of historical data. The analysis revealed that in "Dry" and "Critically Dry" water years—





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representing about 40% of California’s hydrological conditions—the Solano Project would receive zero allocation. While agricultural users may adapt through crop adjustments, groundwater supplementation, or land fallowing (at significant economic risk), urban areas lack such flexibility. A city cannot “fallow” itself for a year. For example, Suisun City relies entirely on Solano Project water, while Vacaville’s water portfolio includes Solano Project, State Water Project water, and groundwater. The proposed Plan would severely impact Suisun City, while Vacaville would fare somewhat better. Nevertheless, without Solano Project water, urban growth across Solano County would halt, forcing some cities to downsize.

Socioeconomic and Agricultural Diversity

Solano County is socioeconomically diverse, with large census blocks classified as disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged. Its agricultural economy is equally varied, encompassing high-value crops like vineyards and tomatoes alongside lower-value uses like grazing. Regardless of these differences, the proposed Bay-Delta Plan imposes significant burdens on both urban and agricultural users.

Short-Term Agreements and Long-Term Challenges

To delay the imposition of the Bay-Delta Plan, Solano County and other Sacramento watershed agencies are seeking to enter into short-term Agreements for Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (HRL). These agree-

ments provide an eight-year window to implement measures aimed at increasing salmon populations. While these agreements offer a temporary reprieve, I have concerns about achieving long-term success.

The core challenge lies in addressing not just the technical and logical aspects of water management but also the underlying social dynamics driving the State’s policy decisions.

The State Water Board’s Evolving Mission

The State Water Board’s mission is to “preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses.” Over time, its focus has shifted toward prioritizing environmental objectives, particularly in the context of climate change. This shift has significant implications:

- 1. Climate Change Priorities:** The proposed Bay-Delta Plan centers on increasing water flow into the Bay-Delta as a climate change strategy, often at the expense of other uses.
- 2. Personal Missions and Values:** Many policymakers and staff are driven by personal missions and values that align with environmental objectives, sometimes to the detriment of urban and agricultural users. For example, a state staff member once suggested that Lake Berryessa could supply Solano cities only if agricultural use were eliminated—clearly reflecting value-based judgments.

3. Partisan Politics: Climate change has become a deeply polarizing issue in politics. Unfortunately, bringing up an issue that could be classified as “climate change” often force individuals to “choose a side,” regardless of their intent, leading to unintended polarization.

A Path Forward — In summary, California’s water policy challenges are as much social as they are technical. While temporary solutions may be achieved through initiatives like the Agreements for Healthy Rivers and Landscapes, long-term success will require addressing the broader social and political dynamics that shape California’s water policy. These efforts must also include careful consideration of the economic impacts of the decisions being made.

For Solano County, the stakes are high. The county’s homes, livelihoods, and food supply depend on finding equitable and sustainable solutions. Its economy is equally tied to the outcome of these efforts. For instance, the private firm Economic Forensics & Analysis

recently estimated that Solano County could initially face a loss of \$3.2 billion (-10.8%) to \$5.4 billion (-18.2%) from its \$29.6 billion economy in terms of income generated by local businesses.

There is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. Governor Gavin Newsom has emerged as a rare advocate within the administration for a balanced approach to implementing the Bay-Delta Plan. Additionally, the Water Board’s Executive Director and Assistant Director have publicly expressed interest in supporting Solano. While the specifics of their support remain unclear, any move toward exploring alternative temperature control scenarios—ones that preserve Lake Berryessa’s water supply—would be a positive development.

However, the long-term outlook remains uncertain. Without a strong, unifying leader to navigate California through this complex and multifaceted water management challenge, the risks to our region and water resources persist.

Adopted 2025 Solano Irrigation District Operating Budget

By Cammie Morin, Finance Director

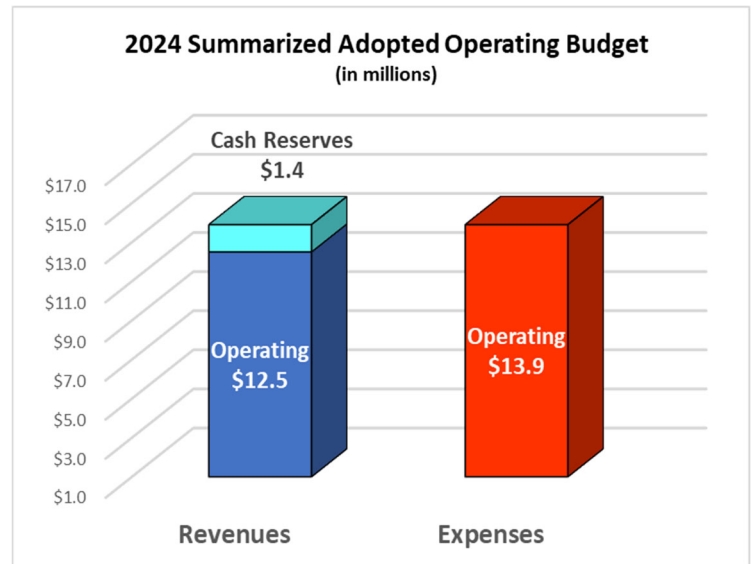
On November 19, 2024, at the regularly scheduled meeting, the Board adopted the 2025 Operating Budget. The 2025 Operating Budget can be found on the District’s website at <https://sidwater.org/294/Finance>

The major 2025 Budget assumptions included;

- (a) 5.0% Cost of Living Increase for all staff members,
- (b) general inflation rate of approximately 3.5% for materials and services, fuel, and PG&E electricity, as compared to costs in 2024, with
- (c) 2025 water rates as set with the January 19, 2021, adoption of the 2021-2025 Financial Plan and Water Rate Study.

The 2021 Financial Plan and Water Rate Study includes a blended 3% inflation rate year over year, and thus the adopted water rates do not reflect the true inflation rate of approximately 9% for materials, supplies, services, and 45% for electricity. With inflation rates greater than anticipated, the 2025 budgeted operating revenues are not sufficient to cover expenses. The 2025 Budget reflects the use of \$1,342,787 from various Operating Cash Reserves, established for this very of situation, to balance the 2025 Budget.

Presented at each Board Meeting and included in the agenda details posted to our website, www.sidwater.org, is a staff report with income statement table presentations, and a narrative analysis of differences between actual revenues and expenses for the current year, as compared to the prior year actual results and the operating budget.



Solano Irrigation District
810 Vaca Valley Parkway, Suite 201
Vacaville, CA 95688



Solano Irrigation District Main Office:
(707) 448-6847 or CustomerService@sidwater.org
Online: www.sidwater.org

Finance Department, Customer Service & Billing

PAYMENT OPTIONS:



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Mail - check payments can be mailed to our office at 810 Vaca Valley Pkwy, Suite 201, Vacaville, CA 95688.



Drop-box - located in the parking lot at 810 Vaca Valley Pkwy, Vacaville, CA 95688. Check payments can be dropped off in the drop box anytime.



Visit our office during office hours: Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm. Checks and cash accepted. If paying by credit card, debit card or electronic check, fees will apply.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR BILL:

Destiny Romero, Accounting Tech
707-455-4005, dromero@sidwater.org

Lucy Garcia, Accounting Clerk
707-455-4003
lgarcia-flores@sidwater.org

Amanda Lim, Senior Staff Accountant
707-455-4002, alim@sidwater.org

Ahmad Salim Aman, Accounting Tech
707-455-4004, aaman@sidwater.org

Clarissa Lu, Senior Staff Accountant
clu@sidwater.org

Cammie Morin, Finance Director
707-455-4008, cmorin@sidwater.org