

Headline: Water crisis looms?; SoCal's supply delivery system in need of reform

Publication: *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*

Date: 10/22/07

By: Will Bigham

POMONA - The combined impact of several setbacks to the region's water supply has created a "perfect storm" in Southern California, a leading water official said Thursday.

To confront the challenges, the state must re-think its water-delivery system to account, mainly for the imminent shutdown of water pumps in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, said Timothy Quinn, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies.

Pumps in the delta will be shut down to protect an endangered fish, the delta smelt, whose numbers are dwindling in part because of the pumps.

The shutdown of delta pumps, combined with historic low rainfall and reduced water supplies to Southern California from the Colorado River and other sources, has created a "crisis situation" for the water industry that Quinn feels is more serious than any water crisis in more than 50 years.

"If you're not really worried right now, I haven't been communicating effectively with you," Quinn said. "This is a crisis situation. I've never seen anything like it in my career, and I'm not sure people in previous careers had seen anything like this."

Quinn spoke to more than 100 water officials, politicians and other government administrators Thursday morning at the Sheraton Suites Fairplex in Pomona, where the Three Valleys Water District held its quarterly "leadership breakfast."

The Association of California Water Agencies represents about 450 water agencies statewide.

Much of the region's crisis, in Quinn's eyes, is the direct result of the pending shutdown of pumps in the delta, which he called the "hub of the system."

On Aug. 31, a federal judge ruled that the pumps that transport the water from north to south must be shut down for about six months each year, during the smelt's spawning season.

Southern California currently receives about 30 percent of its water from the delta. As a result of the court ruling, about 15 percent of the region's yearly water supply will be eliminated, Quinn said.

Quinn said his agency is looking at a number of options for altering the system to transport water from the delta.

Appealing the federal ruling with the hopes of overturning it, Quinn said, is not a realistic or long-term solution to the problem.

Environmental issues "have to be at the top of your priority list," Quinn said. "Most of the problems we're having are driven by the bad interface we have between our system and the environment. We've got to fix that, and become champions of fish restoration."

Other infrastructure problems in the delta, including an aging levee system, also must be addressed, Quinn said.

A special session of the Legislature has been convened to examine the issue of water infrastructure, Quinn said, but a compromise on the issue has not been reached between Republicans and Democrats who disagree on the issue.