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California's water belongs to all of us

By Randy Record and John Coleman

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It doesn't make headlines or lead the evening news. You won't see it on a bumper sticker or splashed on a billboard. But right now, in communities all over the state, people are working together to resolve one of California's biggest challenges: our water future.

As leaders of two local water agencies — one in Southern California and one in Northern California — we see signs of that cooperation every day. Water agencies from Siskiyou County to San Diego are advancing local projects to upgrade pipelines and reservoirs. On a regular basis, they are joining forces at the regional level to plan and construct water recycling facilities and treatment plants, invest in conservation and protect water quality.

And the collaboration does not end there. As leaders of the state's largest water association, we see water managers from every region of the state working to resolve long-term water supply and ecosystem problems in the Sacramento- San Joaquin Delta — an area vital to our economy and environment.

Whether your community is blessed with abundant local water supplies or situated at the end of a long aqueduct, we care about the same thing: a secure water supply system. That means looking decades into the future and taking steps now to ensure a reliable water supply system.

The record shows that Californians have been making steady progress. Water managers are working to stretch every drop, diversify their water supply sources, protect water quality and plan for uncertainties in a changing climate. But there is more to be done, particularly when it comes to improving the statewide system of pipelines, canals and reservoirs that allows us to capture water for use in dry times.

That system has allowed us to prosper, but it needs to be modernized to improve water supply delivery and reduce environmental impacts.

This is where a statewide perspective is critical. Resolving long-term water supply and ecosystem problems in the delta is not a matter of one region vs. another. It's about recognizing that the status quo is not working for the state as a whole and finding solutions that work for all Californians.

We can't perpetuate the notion that our natural resources "belong" to a particular region, or that one region's economy or quality of life is more deserving of water than another's. We cannot be satisfied with actions that shift the problem from one region to another or that preserve the status quo.

In our state's long and colorful water history, the most significant and lasting progress has been made when leaders articulate a broader vision and encourage others to look for mutually beneficial solutions, compromise where necessary and act in the best interest of the state as a whole.

That must happen again if we are to succeed today. The Brown administration has made a firm commitment to the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, a collaborative process to develop a long-term solution to the delta's water reliability and ecosystem problems. Though specific elements of the plan are still being refined and studied, the process is stressing the need for comprehensive approaches that put the needs of the entire state first. That is good.

Members of the Association of California Water Agencies have long called for such an approach. We have also identified principles that must be part of any delta solution to protect, and where possible advance, the interests of all Californians.

These include protecting delta interests and respecting existing water rights, including those of water users upstream of



Highway 12 and the Rio Vista Bridge span the Sacramento River in this southwest view of the delta with the city of Rio Vista on the right and Brannon Island on the left Aerial photographs of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta taken November 11, 2008. Manny Crisostomo / The Sacramento Bee - The Sacramento Bee - Manny Crisostomo

the delta. We must also develop local surface and groundwater storage projects and other programs to assure that all regions of the state have adequate water supply security. Water use efficiency and other local strategies that maximize water supply reliability must also be pursued.

True solutions to our biggest problems come when we act as one state. It's time to move on solutions that improve water supply security for the entire state.

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