



Bay+Delta+Water : Better Together

A Conference on Fresh Water in Our Bay-Delta Estuary

"We used to have a bar room brawl about water; I am encouraged by the collaboration that is taking place in this room between Bay and Delta elected officials. This is important."

*- Congressman
George Miller*



Post-Conference Report

December 2014



photo: Chris "Maven" Austin, Maven's Notebook



BACKGROUND

On Wednesday, September 24, 2014, over 175 elected officials, agency leaders, and community advocates from the San Francisco Bay and Delta regions convened in Antioch to discuss the important role that fresh water plays in the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary. Presented by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the Delta Counties Coalition, and Friends of the San Francisco Estuary, this half-day conference focused on collaboration among the 12 Bay and Delta counties as the key to help identify shared solutions to issues related to the current lack of adequate freshwater flows and resulting impacts to public health, ecosystems, recreation, and the economy.

Speakers included keynote speaker Congressman George Miller, Bay and Delta elected officials, and recognized water policy and science experts. The conference concluded with a facilitated discussion in which the attendees, including 32 elected officials and representatives, were divided into small groups to identify their top three priorities for moving forward on freshwater flows and other water-related issues.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Summarize the event for those who did not attend;
- Synthesize recommendations gathered at the conference;
- Analyze recommendations and identify priorities for short-term and long-term action.

Conference Objectives

- Develop an effective regional voice for adequate freshwater flows
- Provide a forum to discuss ways to increase cohesive regional representation and influence decision-making power in current planning efforts
- Increase understanding that the Bay and Delta are one estuary, and what affects one part of the estuary impacts the whole system
- Increase appreciation for the importance of freshwater flows to the environmental, economic, and social health of the Bay-Delta region

Desired Outcome

Increased regional collaboration and representation to influence current planning efforts.

“There is broad scientific agreement that existing Delta outflow conditions are insufficient for protecting the aquatic ecosystem and multiple fish species”

*- U.S.
Environmental
Protection
Agency
comment letter
July 3, 2013*



Congressman George Miller delivers his keynote address

The importance of freshwater flows has gained more prominence over the last two years as cities and counties in the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary have adopted resolutions describing the need for freshwater flows and a healthy estuary. As of the date of this report, ABAG, seven counties, one city, and two water districts have adopted resolutions.

PROCESS

The Bay+Delta+Water conference engaged participants from every part of the Bay and Delta, including local elected officials, representatives of California legislators, staff of water agencies and districts, regulatory and non-regulatory agency staff, and citizen advocates. In laying the groundwork for the event, Friends of the San Francisco Estuary stressed the importance of collaboration and a focus on the potential for collective action rather than on divisive aspects of the freshwater flows issue.

The conference yielded rich material from both speakers and attendees, providing multiple sources of information for determining next steps. Collected material includes the following:

- Video and audio of event (conference video posted online)
- Transcription of video/audio files
- Small group discussion worksheets

(posted online at <http://friendsofsfestuary.weebly.com/small-group-discussion-worksheets.html>)

- Follow-up conversations with Steering Committee members and others

These sources were reviewed for key comments and recommendations, attached as appendices:

Attachment A: Final Press Release

Attachment B: Recommended actions suggested by conference speakers

Attachment C: Recommended actions from small group discussion worksheets

Attachment D: Recommended actions suggested by Steering Committee members and others in post-conference debrief

Attachment E: Conference Presentations and Materials

WHY FRESHWATER FLOWS?

"One of the important things about this system, the title we have—Bay+Delta+Water—is you can't look at any one of these elements in isolation. Everything is connected in this system, and the thing that connects it is water. Water itself forms a connection between the ocean and the mountains. The flow of water is carrying nutrients, sediments, pollution; and while going downhill, the flow is also creating habitats, different types of habitats, and it's creating connections through the corridors between those habitats. And by doing both of those things, by moving materials through the system and creating these different kinds of habitats, it is driving the function of this vast watershed and this vast ecosystem..."

"From year to year, the amount of water that would have flowed into the Delta (if there were no dams or diversions) varies a lot. This is a characteristic of our watershed. So there's a lot of variation, and you tend to get these dry years. The fisheries and the productivity of the system are depressed under those dry conditions, but of course those dry conditions only happen sometimes. And they're ultimately followed by better conditions when we have more flow going through the system. But one of the things you can see really clearly, is the Bay is seeing a lot more dry years. These are man-made drought conditions that have reduced the resilience of this system. There are fewer opportunities where conditions are good so that the system can bounce back. And so we've reduced the opportunities for the system to be able to bounce back because we're not providing those good conditions, at least with regard to flow..."

"In the last decade plus, these species [the six formerly most common fish species in the Delta] have all collapsed. They no longer have the resilience to respond to good conditions and as we've seen those good conditions are not being provided to them. So we've reduced the resilience of this system and if we want to restore it we have to restore that resilience...The system is completely connected; we have depressed the resilience of the system, and that's going to make our work harder as we try to improve the management of the system."

- Tina Swanson, "Why Do We Need Freshwater Flows" presentation (excerpts)

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

From feedback provided by attendees and organizers, the Bay+Delta+Water conference successfully provided a platform for folks from the Bay and Delta regions to learn more about the issue of freshwater flows and related issues, and to discuss ways to collectively address these issues. The information presented was new to some attendees and familiar to others, but attendees reported feeling inspired to take action and to continue to collaborate. Some participants have subsequently contacted Friends of the San Francisco Estuary to suggest specific actions to build on the momentum of the conference. These suggestions, captured in Attachment D, will also help inform next steps. The conference organizers also welcome additional input on an ongoing basis.

The following priorities came out of the conference as **key recommendations** to increase awareness of and advocacy for improved freshwater flows.

Priorities from Speakers (Attachment B):

- Collaboration and Coalition-Building
- Educating the Public on Freshwater Flows and Related Impacts
- Balancing the Demand/Supply Equation
- Explore Relationship between Economic and Environmental Health
- Tackling Other Stressors (e.g. Invasive Aquatic Species) in Addition to Freshwater Flows
- Educating Congress and the Legislature
- Specific Actions:
 - Participate in the State Board process
 - Request the Governor convene a working group of the 12 Bay and Delta counties
 - Duplicate this meeting in every county and city around the Bay
 - Plan the next trip to Sacramento

Priorities from Group Discussion Worksheets (Attachment C):

- Develop and Implement Strategies, Methods, and Incentives to Reduce Demand
- Develop and Implement Technologies and Innovative Methods to Produce "New" Supply
- Educate Children and Adults on Freshwater Flows and the Water Cycle
- Ensure Adequate Financing
- Update/Revise/Enforce Regulations
- Restore Habitat
- Build Coalition
- Assign an Economic Value to Environmental Health

Priorities/Suggested Actions from Post-Conference Conversations (Attachment D):

- Replicate or build on conference with similar events in the South Bay and elsewhere
- Develop study to link freshwater flows, estuary health, and regional economic health
- Advocate for flows through a focus on and increased involvement in the State Board process
- Discrete task to energize elected officials and attendees
- Convene a work group of Bay/Delta counties and the Governor

Summary:

Friends of the San Francisco Estuary will use these recommendations to inform our work for the next year and beyond. We urge conference attendees and others to join us in implementing these priorities. Contact us and learn more: <http://friendsofsfestuary.weebly.com>

"We need your help to continue to foster communication between people of the Bay and those of the Delta. It is one interconnected system and we must see ourselves collectively as one people supporting one system for our collective benefit."

- Contra Costa County Supervisor Mary Nejedly Piepho



conference photos: Austin Perez, Bay Planning Coalition