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# **\*\*CANCELLATION NOTICE \*\***

THE **JANUARY 11TH 2023**  
EASTERN SAN JOAQUIN  
GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY  
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING  
HAS BEEN CANCELED

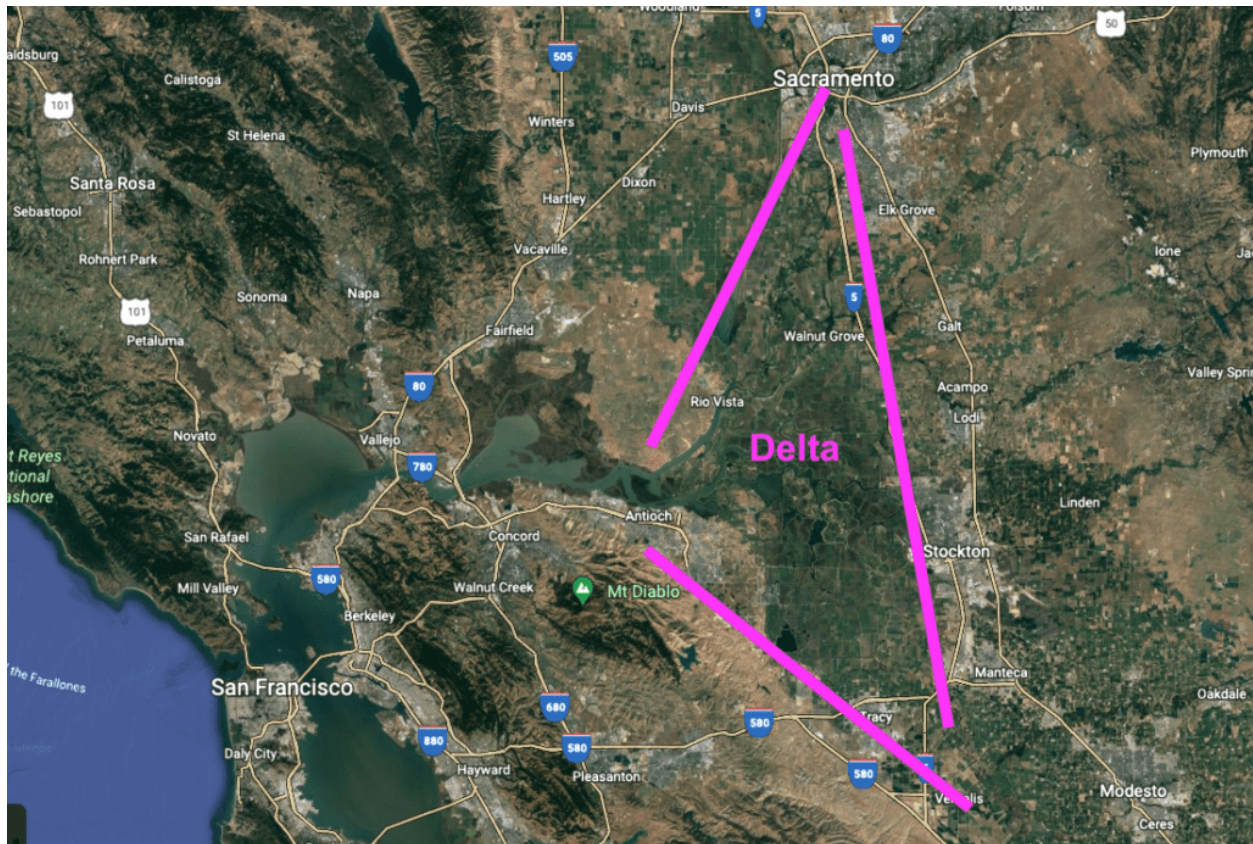
The next regularly scheduled Eastern San Joaquin  
Groundwater Authority Steering Committee Meeting  
is scheduled for:

**FEBRUARY 8TH 2023**  
**8:30 – 10:00 am**  
**Robert Cabral Agricultural Center**

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## Retiring Delta Watermaster advises “pray for rain” but “plan for drought”

Sjwater.org, 01/06/23



*The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the confluence of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. It is a complex ecosystem covering more than 1,000 square miles. GOOGLE EARTH*

It may be raining now but Michael George, Watermaster for the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta, urged his colleagues at the State Water Resources Control Board to always be planning for drought.

“The Delta mantra: we pray for rain; we’re getting it. We plan for drought; it will be back,” George said during his final report before the Water Board on Jan. 4.

George, also an experienced water lawyer, retired Jan. 5 as Delta Watermaster after completing two four-year terms in the position.

The well-liked and respected George said he is retiring in part to make way for an expert in data management, as that is what he sees as the next frontier for the Watermaster’s office.

In his final report, George listed a host of “to dos” for his successor including restoring the state’s aging levee system. In fact, the current string of storms had already broken levees in several places around the Sacramento area, flooding sections of Highway 99.

George emphasized the theme of collaboration between agencies as a guiding philosophy from his tenure.

For example, his office helped construct a master plan to address deterioration in the South Delta. People who had been working on the problem were siloed, he said, and had to be brought into conversation.

George held that door open for others in the water world as well.

“I respected the fact that he made himself available to understand the wide range of perspectives in Delta water use, highlighted by the time he spent an entire day with valley farmers touring the Delta and exchanging ideas and perspectives in way that was productive and not agenda driven,” said Dan Vink, former General Manager for the Lower Tule Irrigation District in Tulare County and now a consultant with Six-33 Solutions LLC.

The Watermaster office also worked on the Delta Drought Response Pilot Program, which began in 2022 and helps outline steps the region can take during a drought. A draft report on the program has been completed and will be released by George’s successor.

Another high point from his tenure was eliminating the chronic failure to file water usage reports on time. When he assumed control of the office, less than 30% of licensees were providing timely reports on their water usage.

“That’s an amount of delinquency that you almost can’t deal with,” George said.

The office developed a “post and push” communication strategy, posting more on its website to encourage people to rely on it for information and creating email distribution lists to directly contact water users in the Delta. The office tried to practice “regulatory humility,” which George described as helping people understand the importance of providing accurate and timely data, rather than forcing people to comply with regulations. The office also clarified the water rights system by developing a protocol for understanding water rights, identifying mistakes, and overcoming attempts to “bamboozle” the system, he said.

George also pointed to ongoing projects that his successor must take over. In particular, the office must continue to analyze data about water diversion and evapotranspiration, as understanding potential connections could help conserve water in the Delta. The office must embrace data analysis and machine learning as it moves into the future, he added. “We’ve got to plan for drought,” George said. “We cannot treat every drought as though it’s an emergency.”

He proposed adding several new positions to the office and moving it out from the umbrella of the executive division.

George added that the region is at an inflection point, as he believes water rights will change in the coming years. Though the system has always been imperfect, people have resisted change for fear of a revised system creating fresh issues. But George said that people must recognize that the current system is an “engine of systemic racism.”

“The most valuable resource in the system was allocated to old white guys like me,” he said. “We ossified a system of allocating the most valuable water rights at a time when it was a public resource but only allocated to a few. So, we’re going to have to change.”

The office of the Delta Watermaster was created in 2009 and is an independent officer of the state appointed to a four-year term by the Water Board. The position reports jointly to the Water Board and the Delta Stewardship Council.

The Watermaster administers water rights within the delta and the Suisun Marsh and advises the Water Board and Stewardship Council on rights, water quality and operations in the Delta.

The Water Board is in the process of working on George’s replacement and will have an announcement in the next few weeks, according to a spokesperson.

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## Congressman Raises Concerns Regarding Tunnel Project

TheRiverBankNews.com, 01/03/23



This file photo shows where the Old River and the San Joaquin River channels meet near Lathrop. Photo Courtesy Department Of Water Resources

Not building the controversial Delta tunnel means Southern California and Bay Area cities would need to invest in desalination plants and groundwater recharge of brackish water that could impact the visual pleasantries of coastal scenery.

That is the bottom line buried in the no-project alternative of the Army Corps of Engineers' latest 691-page Environmental Impact Study on the proposed Delta tunnel study released in late December.

The report determined building the tunnel will have major impacts on San Joaquin County as well as the Northern San Joaquin Valley including agricultural, local water supply, air quality, endangered species, and essential fish habitat.

The tunnel — if built — could have domino impacts beyond the actual project.

That's because courts and the state will be pressed to seek to replace water that is now used for environmental purposes, keep salt water at bay, and sustain ecological systems before being diverting into the California Aqueduct northwest of Tracy.

By diverting the water into a tunnel south of Sacramento to bypass the Delta to reach the pumping station it would result in higher saltwater intrusion farther east in the Delta especially during droughts.

The most likely target to replace the water are the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced river watersheds that are key to the economic vitality of Northern San Joaquin Valley urban areas and farming as well as regional ecological systems.

The Army Corps of Engineers has declined to hold any in-person hearings for feedback on the study whose comment period ends Feb. 14, 2002.

That fact has drawn a sharp rebuke from Congressman Josh Harder.

"Six weeks of public comment on a project that will impact us for hundreds of years is unacceptable and another demonstration of Sacramento putting itself first and the Valley last," Harder said in a statement released on Dec. 28. "Today, I'm calling on the Army Corps to reverse its decision and hold a real, in-person public hearing before the end of January so they can hear directly from Valley farmers and families about what this disastrous project would mean to all of us."

Besides the lack of in-person input, Harder has a dim view of the project that will divert water near Freeport into a tunnel to reach the pumping plants near Tracy to head further south and into the Bay Area.

"Building the Delta Tunnel will crush our farmers, endanger our environment, and put our whole community at risk," Harder said. "I refuse to let that happen. Everyone in the Valley knows the Delta Tunnel is a terrible idea and a greedy water grab. Now, we have a report that makes those facts clear as day."

Harder along with fellow Congress members Jerry McNerney and John Garamendi in July introduced an amendment to prohibit the Army Corps of Engineers from issuing a Clean Water Act permit for the California Delta Conveyance Project.

Their argument is the tunnel would rob the Delta of the benefit of Sacramento River water that currently flows through it on the way to the pumps at the head of the California Aqueduct northwest of Tracy.

That would impact not just the quality of water but it would reduce the volume which in turn can raise water temperatures than can be fatal to fish as it robs water of dissolved oxygen. At the same time less water in the Delta means salt water would push farther to the east toward Stockton, Lathrop, and Manteca.



Potential fallout for San Joaquin County, which has the largest land mass within the Delta region, include:

- \*Extensive damage to the Delta ecological system.
- \*Negative impact on fish including the endangered Chinook salmon.
- \*Long-range issues with saltwater intrusion impacting water supplies the cities of Lathrop, Tracy, Manteca, and Stockton take from the underground aquifer that is impacting when fresh water levels above and below the surface in the Delta drop.
- \*The quality and sustainability of Delta recreational opportunities.
- \*Tens of thousands of acres of farmland, some of the richest agricultural ground in the world, could go out of production.
- \*Domestic water supplies would be impacted.

The state's Delta tunnel plan benefits the massive Metropolitan Water District in Southern California, several East Bay cities as well as billionaire and corporate farmers in West Kern County.

Originally it was rolled out as a twin tunnel plan with the idea of protecting Delta water supplies for Southern California in the event that earthquakes collapsed Delta levees. It has since been scaled back to one tunnel.

The justification has morphed into one where the project is now justified to combat anticipated rises in sea level not by protecting the Delta from intrusion with a seawall or such but by diverting water to users in the south state taken from Northern California via a tunnel.

As such it would rob the Delta of water flows that for centuries has helped sustain fish and the Delta's unique ecological system that serves as the biggest estuary along the Pacific Flyway.

The no-project alternative essentially states coastal users would have no choice but to invest in desalination plants.

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