

Browns Valley Irrigation District

Post Office Box 6, Browns Valley, CA 95918

Business Office:

530/743-5703

FAX:

530/743-0445

Water Operations Office:

530/742-6044

DELTA VISION STATEMENT

**August 25, 2008
Chico, California**

My name is Walter Cotter and I am the General Manager of Browns Valley Irrigation District, which is commonly known as BVID. BVID is located in Yuba County, north of the Yuba River in the area where the foothills descend to the Valley floor. BVID covers over 55,000 acres and serves water to rice farmers, rural residences and duck clubs that provide extensive habitat for migrating birds. BVID was formed in 1888 and is one of California's oldest irrigation districts.

BVID appreciates Delta Vision's focus on making all areas of the state as self-sufficient as possible in their water supplies. BVID has been essentially self-sufficient since it was formed. In 1890, BVID established the oldest appropriative water right on the North Fork of the Yuba River and implemented that right by building miles and miles of ditches and flumes to convey water from high on the Yuba River down to BVID's service area. This diversion not only allowed BVID to supply a developing community of farms and rural residences, but also supported one of the world's first hydroelectric generation plants, which PG&E's predecessor built in 1896. When BVID needed more water than its 1890 water right could supply, BVID developed the Collins Lake project, which includes a Dam and a 57,000-acre-foot reservoir on Dry Creek, a tributary of the lower Yuba River. BVID's voters approved a special tax on themselves to repay the debt that BVID accepted in order to finance the Collins Lake project. These local projects have made BVID self-sufficient.

BVID continues to invest in improvements that enhance our self-sufficiency and even allow us to help other regions. Beginning in 1990, BVID invested \$1.3 million dollars in a water conservation project that involved changing the point of diversion of its 1890 water right and building pipelines all over the district. This project has allowed BVID to fully serve its customers and develop a 3,100 acre-foot per year conserved water supply that it has transferred in many years. BVID has transferred that water to, among others, the Department of Water Resources's Drought Water Bank and Santa Clara Valley Water District to help them make up shortages in their service areas. We believe that it is these sorts of cooperative arrangements that show how California can meet its water demands in the future because it is clear that, unlike the Sacramento Valley, other regions of the state can never be fully self-sufficient.

Because BVID has been very innovative in developing local solutions, including water conservation solutions, we find very disturbing, Delta Vision's discussion of the idea that Sacramento Valley water users will be required to reallocate water without compensation to promote the Delta. The draft Delta Vision strategic plan says, on page 91:

“This Strategic Plan expects that water required to support and revitalize the Delta will not be purchased but will be provided within California’s systems of water rights and the constitutional principles of reasonable use and public trust.”

Whatever legal labels you put on such statements, it is clear that what they mean is that Delta Vision contemplates that Sacramento Valley water users may be required to devote water resources that they developed with local funding and through local efforts to improve the Delta. There is, however, nothing in the Delta Vision strategic plan that shows that Sacramento Valley water users have caused the Delta’s problems. I found one statement in the strategic plan to be particularly interesting. On page 46, the draft strategic plan says:

“Estuarine ecosystems like the historic Delta are complex, highly variable systems of many interrelated components. Each must be present and fully capable of providing its function to sustain the ecosystem as a whole. Major disruptions of this ecosystem complex – and each of its parts – have led to the systemic failures confronting California today.”

It makes sense that the Delta’s estuarine species are having problems when much of the Delta’s estuarine habitat has been eliminated or altered. Sacramento Valley water users, however, did not make those alterations to the Delta. We did not build the Delta levees, which eliminated open-water and brackish habitat. Sacramento Valley water users do not cause water to flow backwards in Delta channels. That effect is caused by export projects, which do not serve water to us. In fact, many Sacramento Valley water projects probably already benefit the Delta. For instance, BVID built its Collins Lake project on Dry Creek, which, as its name implies, was historically dry in the summer and fall. Now BVID releases water down that creek in summer and fall. This extra water undoubtedly has little impact on the Delta, but it probably doesn’t hurt.

It is particularly strange to see how the Delta Vision strategic plan promotes the Delta’s special value as a place in light of the things that the strategic plan says about Sacramento Valley water uses. The Delta definitely is unique, but so is the Sacramento Valley, which has a history and economy that cannot be ignored. Reallocating our water supplies, or driving up the cost of those supplies substantially, will severely impact our economy. Rice is the dominant crop in the Sacramento Valley because that is one of the few crops that the soils in many places will support. We cannot just switch to crops that other people might prefer. In order to grow rice, relatively low-priced water supplies are necessary. Luckily, we have those supplies because we have built local water projects. Those supplies therefore support the economies of historic communities like Marysville, Yuba City and regions like the foothills of the Gold Rush, where the revolutionary Pelton wheel was invented and gave birth to California’s hydroelectric industry.

BVID recognizes that the Delta Vision Task Force has a difficult job, but we strongly believe that you need to focus on what is actually causing the Delta’s problems and be very careful not to cause very serious unintended consequences by proposing to reallocate water supplies from the Sacramento Valley.