

Op/Ed

NOSTALGIC TRIP DOWN DELTA DRIFTS TOO FAR FROM THE FACTS

By **Randy Fiorini**

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Editorial Contributor

Ah, the good old days! They always look better, if slightly out of focus, in the rear-view mirror.

San Joaquin County supervisors Larry Ruhstahler and Ken Vogel's recent nostalgic comparison of the Delta 50 to 100 years ago with the Delta today does not accurately address the facts ("Exports fuel Delta's problems," Jan. 1, The Record). The supervisors suggest that the source of the decline is due to increased water transfers over the last several decades.

The fact is most scientists who have studied conditions in the Delta inform us that a multitude of changes have occurred in the past 50 to 100 years that have contributed to the decline in the Delta, and they must all be addressed.

They include:

» Invasive species - Increasing dominance of exotic species in the Delta's ecosystem by invasive plants, fish and other organisms have transformed the Delta from a largely native ecosystem into one dominated by foreign species, where native fish are struggling.

» Population growth - California has experienced explosive population growth since 1950. With this has come significant negative impacts on the Delta caused by increased wastewater discharges; increased urban stormwater runoff carrying harmful pollutants; and increasing numbers of people and buildings behind levees intended only to protect farmland.

» Habitat and food supply - The 1,000 miles of levees in the Delta serve to protect people and property from flooding. Channelization of the Delta has provided the reclamation of land into productive farming over many years and since the 1940s has provided a conduit for moving water from the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers to the export pumps in the southern Delta. Unfortunately, channelizing the Delta has also greatly diminished the shallow water habitat and negatively impacted the food supply many native fish species need to thrive. Restoring shallow water habitat has become a very contentious issue because it may require converting farmland to flooded habitat.

» Sea-level rise and climate change - Not even sea-level rise is unchanged. During the last century alone, historical data indicate water levels crept 8 inches higher at the Golden Gate.

Climate scientists forecast greater changes ahead, as the oceans rise 4 1/2 feet or more over the coming century.

The Delta today is neither a fully-functioning healthy estuary, nor is it a reliable diversion point for water supplies.

That's where the Delta Stewardship Council and the Delta Plan come in. By law, the Council is charged with developing a plan that achieves the coequal goals of creating a reliable water supply for California and restoring the Delta ecosystem, while recognizing the Delta as an evolving place.

Two key components of the plan will address many of the supervisors' concerns:

- » The plan calls on the California State Water Resources Control Board to set flow standards for the Delta that will ensure proper flows to maintain the Delta ecosystem;
- » Completion of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, which will create a balance between the needs of the ecosystem with the needs for a reliable water supply with infrastructure to protect species and capture peak flows.

If we truly want to revitalize the Delta we need to address all of the sources of the Delta's decline, rather than simply point fingers or assert that the only actions needed are adjustments in someone else's behavior. Rather than continue business as usual and wax nostalgic for a status quo that never really was, we need to plan for a future that will not be like the past. Change is one thing we can count on.

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