

Panel discusses upcoming state and local water issues

By Jason McAlister

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Local and state leaders held a panel discussion to discuss the future of the state's water supply and its relationship to Yolo County at a Davis meeting Monday night.

About 100 people attended the public forum, titled "Enough to Go Around — Sustainable Water Policy for California and Yolo County," filling a room at the Stephens Branch Library.

Water officials discussed the ongoing drought's impacts on reservoir levels, state bond measures to pay for diverting needed water in the coming decades, sharing water for multiple strategies for environmental and agricultural practices as well as potential effects of the Bay Delta Conservation Project to divert water through tunnels from the delta to Southern California.

State Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, discussed her focus on state water bond measures that could end up on upcoming ballots. Wolk said she thinks an existing \$11.4 billion water bond on the November ballot is too expensive.

She has proposed the less costly Senate Bill 848 — a \$6.8 billion bill that would diversify existing water supplies through recycling ground water, address drinking water issues, address ecosystem restoration and levee enhancement in the delta and enhance reservoir storage, among other things.

"I think that ultimately what matters is the consensus on local projects that bear the needs to the local community, and not have the bond be on a controversial issue such as BDCP or the tunnels," she said.

Yolo County Supervisor Jim Provenza encouraged civic dialogue and working together to make the best decisions.

"Decisions we make now will affect us for the next 50 years and beyond," Provenza said.

Provenza gave an example from the Bay Delta project — a portion of which proposes to move water into the Yolo Bypass to mitigate for salmon and other fish species' habitat.

"How does that affect us?" he asked.

A recent agricultural impact study on putting more water in the bypass, he said, could harm rice production in Yolo County to the tune of close to \$10 million.

Provenza added that, by moving water into the bypass only at certain times of the year, losses could be reduced to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

He added that it is important that Yolo County ensure there is no lasting damage to agriculture from the project and that the county is compensated for helping meet the water needs for other parts of the state.

“We think we can work together to balance interests and make everything work,” he said. “We hope to have something worked out with the state government by September.”

Tim O’Halloran, general manager of the Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, gave an assessment of the county’s water supply, which he described as “in good shape” at the moment.

O’Halloran said he is more concerned with the Bay Delta project taking focus away from “protecting the (local water) infrastructure we already have.”

In the short term, O’Halloran said he is concerned with legislation that could cause either threats or opportunities for conjunctive water use of ground water. Locally, he added, conversion to permanent crops “is driving a lot of ground-water thinking.”

Wolk also stated that ground-water management and monitoring will be a major issue over the next six months.

The meeting will be broadcast by Davis Media Access in about two weeks on local Channel 15 and on Saving California Communities’ website at <http://www.savingca.org>.

For a calendar and list of key players and of upcoming decisions regarding the state’s water issues, visit Northstatewater.org.

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