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Viewpoints: Despite wet winter, state needs to move ahead with Delta plan

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Mother Nature has smiled upon California this spring, with a bounty of rainfall and snowpack that pulls the state back from the brink of a water emergency that could match the budget crisis.

This fortunate turn of events gives us yet another opportunity to restore our Golden State and put in place long-term solutions to responsibly manage our water resources. While Gov. Jerry Brown rightly declared the drought is over, no one should be lulled into thinking that the water crisis has ended.

There is danger in complacency. The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and future water supply reliability are still in jeopardy. Fortunately, the state has a plan to fix these problems: The Delta Vision Strategic Plan, released in 2008, along with the enacted legislation of 2009, provide a comprehensive, integrated and linked set of actions that can restore the beleaguered Delta and ensure a reliable water supply for California.

The challenge now is for the state to move forward expeditiously, with a laserlike focus, to implement the strategic plan – not piecemeal, but as intended and required to get results.

The recommendations as stated in the Delta Vision Strategic Plan are:

- Make the co-equal goals of water supply reliability and ecosystem restoration the legal foundation of Delta and water policy.
- Recognize and enhance the unique cultural, recreational and agricultural values of the Delta as an evolving place.
- Restore the Delta ecosystem as the heart of a healthy estuary.
- Promote statewide water conservation, efficiency and sustainable use.
- Build facilities to improve the existing water conveyance system and expand statewide storage; operate both to achieve the co-equal goals.
- Reduce risks to people, property and state interests in the Delta by effective emergency preparedness, appropriate land uses and strategic levee investments.
- Establish a new governance structure with the authority, responsibility, accountability, science support and secure funding to achieve these goals.

The good news is that significant progress is being made and that state officials – the Delta Stewardship Council, California Natural Resources Agency, State Water Resources Control

Board, California Water Commission, Delta Protection Council, and Delta Conservancy – are dedicated to moving forward with solutions.

The bad news is that there's no time to waste. Work needs to be accelerated with a sense of urgency. Only the governor and Legislature can bring that kind of priority attention to this challenge. However, public attention and dialogue can greatly aid that dynamic.

The Delta Vision Foundation was established by the former members of the Governor's Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force to provide reliable information to policymakers, stakeholders and the public about the status of progress in fixing the state's water problems.

In 2009, the Delta Vision Foundation developed the first "report card" to assess progress in shaping policy, thereby establishing itself as a citizens performance and accountability catalyst to make sure the state continues to advance efforts on restoring the Delta and ensuring water supply reliability for all regions of California. The next report card will be released in mid-June, aided by three new directors: Mike Chrisman, former secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, A.G. Kawamura, former secretary of the Department of Food and Agriculture; and Linda Adams, acting secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Of importance, this analysis will be informed by outreach to gather input from stakeholders and the public.

Securing the state's water future will require hard work and a mending of wasteful ways. It will require optimizing efficient water use in every way possible and constructing new facilities for conveyance and storage to capture water when it is truly surplus to the environment, as experienced this year. And all of this will need to be accomplished while protecting and restoring the Delta ecosystem while reducing risks to people, property and the economy.

It can be done. We have a plan, and we know what is possible when Californians are committed to making something happen.

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Sunne Wright McPeak is president of the Delta Vision Foundation.

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