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Delta Stewardship Council sees two key people move on

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[From page A3](#) | August 20, 2012 | [Leave Comment](#)

The seven-member Delta Stewardship Council is now a six-member band. Gov. Jerry Brown announced the appointment of Felicia Marcus to the State Water Resources Control Board on May 10 for a four-year term beginning July 2.

The remaining six council members are Chairperson Phil Isenberg, Vice Chair Randy Fiorini, Don Nottoli, Gloria Gray, Patrick Johnston and Hank Nordhoff.

Executive Officer Joe Grindstaff announced his retirement at the May 24 council meeting. Council members accepted his resignation with appreciation for his service and authorized recruitment for his replacement. Grindstaff said he would remain at his station until his successor was in place and would facilitate the changeover.

Felicia Marcus

Felicia Marcus, from Emeryville, served as a member of the Delta Stewardship Council for nearly two years. Gov. Schwarzenegger appointed her on July 30, 2010 to replace Richard Roos-Collins, one of the original council members. Of the seven members of the Delta Stewardship Council, the chairperson is fulltime and the others are designated one-third time. The chairperson's salary was set at \$142,956, and the others at \$40,669. Johnston declined his pay, and Nordhoff asked for only \$5,000.

Roos-Collins, from Berkeley, was appointed to the Delta Stewardship Council by Gov. Schwarzenegger on March 19, 2010. He served until his resignation on July 2, 2010. At the time, Roos-Collins was director of legal services at the San Francisco-based Natural Heritage Institute, a nonprofit environmental law firm. Several environmental groups had questioned his ability to remain impartial on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan to the Senate Rules Committee. In his resignation letter he said, "It has become clear that the political controversy related to the confirmation of my appointment will affect the council's capacity to timely implement the Delta Reform Act."

He is now the principal in the Water and Power Law Group in Berkeley and Adjunct Professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law.

The Delta Stewardship Council had been meeting for four months when Marcus joined. She came prepared and was an active and encouraging member, often pushing for decisions to be made rather than delayed. "I don't want to be just a potted plant," was one of her favorite phrases.

She came with a history of environmental activism both inside and outside government, and a reputation for working with people from different points of view. "If you can accomplish things by negotiating, it's better to do that because it's much more effective," she said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Sept. 2, 1990, when she had been appointed by Mayor Tom Bradley to the city's Environmental Quality Board.

Marcus earned a Master's degree in Public Policy at Harvard University and an environmental law degree at the New York University School of Law. She was licensed to practice law in California in 1983 and practiced public interest law. She became a commissioner on the Los Angeles Board of Public Works in 1989, serving as president in her final two years, 1991-93. She was administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9, from 1993 to 2001.

Region 9 is comprised of Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, the Pacific Islands subject to U.S. law, and approximately 140 Tribal Nations.

From 2001 to 2008, she was executive vice president and chief operating officer at the Trust for Public Land, headquartered in San Francisco. Since 2008, she was western director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. On Marcus's last day at the Delta Stewardship Council, June 28, staff provided cake and coffee for an informal farewell reception.

Isenberg said afterward, "No other council member has been both a federal administrator and a local water agency official. Tie this experience to her commitment to solving problems — not just arguing about them — and you understand why she is so effective, and why Gov. Brown decided to appoint her to the Water Resources Control Board. The public will benefit from her service on the Water Board, and the council looks forward to working with her in the years to come."

The State Water Resources Control Board has joint authority over water allocation and water quality protection. The Delta Stewardship Council oversees policy-level coordination of Delta-related activities of state and federal agencies and will oversee implementation of the Delta Plan when it is adopted.

In an e-mail announcing her resignation as western director for Natural Resources Defense Council, Marcus said, "The Governor has appointed me to the State Water Resources Control Board. I'm delighted to have been given this opportunity to serve in government again, especially focused on water and especially at a time when critical decisions will be made on both water quality and water supply matters ... I hope to be a constructive force and to make a difference for the better, which is an opportunity that I can't pass up."

The Water Board position is fulltime and requires Senate confirmation. Compensation is \$128,109.

Delta Stewardship Council's Public Information Officer Eric Alvarez said the Council members do not anticipate that Gov. Brown will appoint a replacement for Marcus in the near future and are planning to continue their work with six members for now.

Joe Grindstaff

As the former director of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, appointed in 2006 by Gov. Schwarzenegger, Joe Grindstaff managed the transition to CALFED's successor, the Delta Stewardship Council. It was his last tour of duty before ending a 30-year career in water.

At the first Delta Stewardship Council meeting on April 1, 2010, he was appointed interim executive officer. He accepted the position of executive officer on Sept. 23, 2010.

At the meeting last May 23, he stated, "At our first board meeting on April 1, 2010, I indicated my intention to step down from state service. The Chair and Vice Chair requested I stay until the Delta Plan was completed, and the council agreed. Now that the completion of the Delta Plan is in sight, I have formally notified the council of my intent to resign and retire as executive officer of the Delta Stewardship Council, hopefully as of this September."

Since Grindstaff has been working in Sacramento, he has commuted on weekends to his home in Hemet, 80 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles, in Riverside County. He said he looks forward to spending time with his wife, Shirley, children and grandchildren.

Starting life in Texas, Grindstaff learned early to adapt to changing circumstances with a father who was a military pilot and moved the family frequently. As the eldest of 10 children, he learned to manage a mixture of personalities.

Thinking he would become a lawyer, Grindstaff went to Brigham Young University for a degree in Business Administration. While a student there, he went to work as a lab tech in the Provo city water department. No longer interested in pursuing a legal career when he graduated in 1982, Grindstaff went to work in the Salt Lake City water department lab. There, he brought the plant into EPA compliance and won an award, the first of many.

He was recruited to move to California and become manager of the wastewater system in Riverside. In 1991, the system was named Plant of the Year.

He moved to Eastern Municipal Water District, in Riverside County, where he was assistant general manager, and where he met his wife, Shirley Squires.

He then went on to become general manager of the Monte Vista Water District in San Bernardino County.

By 1998 Grindstaff was general manager of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, covering San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties.

He went statewide in 2004 as Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Water Resources. In that capacity, he had management oversight of the State Water Project, dams and flood safety program, and the Colorado River and Salton Sea Restoration.

He served as acting director of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program in 2005, and in June 2006 Gov. Schwarzenegger appointed him director. In November of that year, Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman appointed Grindstaff Deputy Secretary for Water Policy, with broad oversight responsibility for all activities related to water, including CALFED.

CALFED, a department within the Resources Agency, was created in 1994 by Gov. Pete Wilson and U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to coordinate the activities and interests of the state and federal government and focus on the interrelated water problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Throughout his career, Grindstaff has worked in almost every aspect of water management, and dealt with almost everyone interested in water issues.

The University of California San Bernardino Water Research Institute awarded Grindstaff with its 2008 Life Achievement Award. The award recognizes a leader whose lifetime of achievements in water resources have resulted in significant benefits to the public.”

In the video shown at the event, a number of people who worked with and for him commented on the experience. Some of their reflections were:

“Joe tried to make it [Riverside wastewater system] a place where people wanted to work. He led by example.”

“He was a regional thinker, ahead of his time. He lives by the adage, ‘Service above Self.’”

“He was a great mentor.”

“He was able to cut through red tape without alienating people.”

At the Delta Stewardship Council meeting in May, Grindstaff’s announcement was met with sober gratitude for his service.

The deadline for applying to succeed Grindstaff as executive officer was July 27. The posting for the position stated, “The council is seeking a dynamic professional Executive Officer to provide vision and leadership to this evolving and forward-thinking agency,” and, “The ideal candidate is attracted to, and skilled in resolving, complex and contentious policy and political battles.”

Stakeholder comments

In his role as the Association of California Water Agencies Special Projects Manager, Mark Rentz worked with the board and staff of the Delta Stewardship Council. He said, “Felicia Marcus brought to the council a wealth of experience in dealing with complicated environmental issues. Her pragmatic approach which recognized the need for flexibility and adaptability over time was quite encouraging,” and, “Joe Grindstaff’s willingness to bring staff together with representatives from the water community to collaborate on complex issues has been exemplary. The improvements reflected in the sixth staff draft Delta Plan as compared to the previous versions is a testimony to Joe’s commitment to melding different perspectives without losing focus on the end game — advancing the coequal goals of statewide water supply reliability and restoring the Delta ecosystem.”

Mountain Counties Water Resources Agency Executive Director John Kingsbury worked on the Ag-Urban alternative to the Delta Plan. He said, “We have built a good relationship with Felicia Marcus over the past year-and-a-half. The water board decisions will affect our future. It is imperative that we provide information to help Felicia and her colleagues make good informed decisions.”

He added, “I appreciate that Joe Grindstaff always took his leadership role very seriously and was effective in working collaboratively with the stakeholders from around the state. There are significant challenges in trying to balance the diverse statewide interests and concerns. Joe came and saw ‘mountain counties’ first hand and I believe the Delta Plan is much better as a result.”

Roberta Long