

California's Water Resilience Portfolio

A Genuine Step Forward or Just Another Waste of Time?

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In late April, Governor Newsom signed Executive Order (E.O.) N-10-19, ordering The California Natural Resources Agency, The California Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, in consultation with the California Department of Finance to prepare a *water resilience portfolio* intended to reassess existing priorities regarding the State's Water Action Plan. Additionally, the effort is intended to address projected climate change impacts on current and future water systems, evaluate prioritized actions moving forward, and explore new ways to strengthen interagency collaboration.

This brief note reviews the various directions provided in E.O. N-10-19, examines the various inventories and evaluations that are to be undertaken, reflects upon the set of principles upon which the *water resilience portfolio* is to be based, and attempts to identify any inconsistencies or potential troublesome areas, either within the portfolio elements themselves or in relation to other ongoing actions elsewhere. At this point, the E.O. can best be described as a quick overview of what is generally required; it does maintain its distance at a fairly broad level.

Accordingly, several key requirements, many of which will be ultimately necessary to complete the portfolio are not yet identified. Moreover, the current format also remains uncertain. Will it include specific recommendations, prioritized actions, implementation directives, schedules, and will it identify "responsible" implementation parties? At this point, no one knows as there remains many unanswered questions.

A logical place to start is the primary objective and thus, the title of this initiative. Nowhere is "portfolio" actually defined. What is specifically being proposed? A new strategic vision? A new operational plan? A new implementation plan for developed new actions. A list of new recommendations? One can only assume that this current uncertainty was deliberate so as to leave room to allow the "portfolio" to evolve into whatever the experts and stakeholders believe would be the most appropriate. But since this was intended to call attention to the preeminent threat to California's water resource interests in the future, namely that of a rapidly changing climate, I can't help but wonder why this isn't called something more along the lines of, *California's Climate-Sensitized Water Resiliency Portfolio*?

The E.O. calls for the initial step to be a re-inventory and re-assessment of what seemingly looks like the major water resource metrics of the State. This process is called upon to adhere to certain established principles. At this juncture, however, there are as yet no established priorities laid out, no reiteration of the long-held notion of co-equal objectives. If we do decide to re-establish new water resource-related priorities, what are they? Who is to decide?

Most acknowledge that many very important water resource concepts, several having specific relevancy to future resiliency are not mentioned in the E.O. It is not entirely clear if these matters are still open for consideration or, whether a preemptive decision has already been made to omit them from inclusion in the portfolio.

If we really want to make this a different effort in terms of offering California's citizens something new, innovative, and highly effective then we have to shed the old mindset. We can't continue to pick up the same State documents, read about the same water-climate issues, issues that we have known about for almost half a century, see the same media "buzz" words, and just regurgitate text from old plans, policies, and visions. We can't rely on the same experts, the same opinions, the same strategies...and expect a different outcome...

We must endeavor to offer something bold, new, and creative! Bland, ineffectual and safe, may feel comforting, but it does absolutely nothing to address the real water-climate issues facing the State. So, what are some of the bold new ideas that will likely place themselves front and center in the years ahead? They could include as examples, among the many;

- ⓐ reconfiguring soon-to-be irrelevant water right permits,
- ⓐ settling the over-allocation issue,
- ⓐ revising hydrologic region yield under climate change,
- ⓐ expanding storm and flood water storage,
- ⓐ developing ultimate plans to curtail exports,
- ⓐ closing the flood control/water supply "gap",
- ⓐ implementing climate change-based reservoir reoperation,
- ⓐ constructing new joint surface and groundwater storage projects,
- ⓐ initiating SLR resettlement planning,
- ⓐ relisting Endangered Species based on projected new habitats,
- ⓐ eliminating the discredited unimpaired flow concept,
- ⓐ applying broad FIRO,
- ⓐ prioritizing renovation/reconstruction of faulty and/or aging infrastructure,
- ⓐ establishing Statewide groundwater safe yield,
- ⓐ establishing climate-based power rescheduling,
- ⓐ and the list goes on....

Let's hope that broader thinking prevails, and this effort doesn't end up as part of the long list of unfinished and ineffectual State initiatives of the past.

About the Author:

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