

This has been a significant news week for California's delta.

On Wednesday, California's Natural Resources Agency endorsed a plan for a water tunnel system to bypass the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, coupled with a habitat restoration plan for the Delta. Bettina Boxall's [story in today's Los Angeles Times](#) has the details. Many environmental groups oppose the plan, a variation on the so-called peripheral canal plan from decades ago. (This [L.A. Times article](#) from last month has an excellent overview of the environmental and water supply issues facing the Delta.) Since the Governor is leaving office in just a few weeks, it is unclear what the new Jerry Brown administration will do with this decision.

And also this week, U.S. District Judge Oliver Wanger tossed out the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion that required protections for the endangered delta smelt that had angered farmers in the region by requiring sharply reduced pumping of water for irrigation.

I haven't had time to wade through the 225-page opinion, but [according to the Los Angeles Times' Boxall](#), the court found support for the conclusion that water pumping is likely to jeopardize the smelt's existence, despite its invalidation of the Biological Opinion. The FWS will have to go back and do its work again, and it remains to be seen whether the new Biological Opinion will support pumping restrictions as stringent as those imposed before.

All in all, an interesting week for water politics and environmental protection in the Delta. And kudos to Bettina Boxall of the Times for covering these issues so closely.