

A feisty Brown unveils new water plan



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An impatient and feisty Gov. Jerry Brown unveiled an extraordinary plan to bore two tunnels beneath the vast delta east of San Francisco to shift millions of acre-feet of water from northern California south to the state’s farm belt and the thirsty population of southern California.

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his surprised listeners at a news briefing. Brown, flanked by ranking state and federal officials, denounced the “analysis paralysis” which he said has led to inaction on California’s longest policy dispute – the equitable distribution of water across a state in which most of the rain falls in the north and most of the people live in the south.

Even as he spoke, environmentalists and their allies gathered outside the Resources Building and the state Capitol to protest the governor’s plan.

The \$23 billion project — \$14 billion for the pipes and \$9 billion for environmental protections — is the culmination of nearly seven decades of formal study by federal and state agencies to get northern water to the south. Thirty years ago, voters rejected the construction of the Peripheral Canal that would have tapped the Sacramento River near Hood and transferred the water in a concrete-lined ditch some 42 miles to pumps at the delta’s southern edge.

The crux of the dispute is the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, the source of about half the state’s drinking water.

The delta, a confluence of rivers, is a fragile, farm-rich, marshy, slough-laced landscape crisscrossed by aging 19th century levees. Taking large amounts of water directly from the delta has harmed wildlife, so the dream of engineers and water contractors has been to devise a method of transferring northern water from above the delta southward without endangering the environment.

In the latest plan, the twin pipes will carry water, gravity fed, to the southbound aqueducts and channels near Tracy – including the 700-mile-long California aqueduct – and thence to the water wholesalers, who are picking up the bulk of the tab of the billion project.