

## **Planning & Obtaining Water for Department of Fish and Game-Managed Wetlands and Fisheries**

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is one of the largest land holders in the state. DFG manages these properties on behalf of all Californians for recreational opportunities, conservation programs, and research and education projects. An important element for the vitality of these activities is a reliable supply of water, which allows for wetlands management on wildlife areas, and the restoration of native fish populations in fish hatcheries and ecological reserves. Currently, the state does not have a consistent statewide program to plan for or obtain water for DFG properties making it dependent on federally supplied water resources. Unfortunately, obtaining water through this channel can be cumbersome and expensive. The state would benefit greatly from an integrated statewide water acquisition program to aid in the strategic management of wetlands, fisheries, instream flow and species recovery. SB7X 2, which authorized an \$11.4 billion General Obligation water bond as a portion of the 2009 Comprehensive Water Package, would provide \$100 million for the conveyance of water for the refuge water supply program. The funds would be provided to the Wildlife Conservation Board and made available to DFG. The bond initiative has been postponed to the June 2012 election.

Waterfowl, fishing and conservation organizations support actions to acquire water supplies for resident and migratory fish and wildlife species. However, domestic and agricultural water users often compete with environmental water acquisition programs for existing limited water supplies. Additionally, some water districts and developers may oppose spending bond funds on water acquisition for environmental purposes.

Several water supply management strategies are currently used by DFG to help secure water such as Wildlife Conservation Board acquisitions, water exchanges, permitting programs and dedication of instream flow. As stated above, the state would benefit greatly from an integrated statewide water acquisition program. A programmatic approach could be coordinated with current efforts through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Bureau of Reclamation under the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, and with USFWS and National Marine Fisheries Service regarding listed species recovery strategies. Such efforts could expand DFG's water procurement opportunities to provide for the protection of California's vital fish and wildlife resources by making it more competitive with other major water interests that also attempt to obtain water allocations.