

Climate change could threaten Calif. water supply

By Dale Kasler and Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

When it comes to California and climate change, the predictions are staggering: coastal airports besieged by floodwaters, entire beaches disappearing as sea levels rise.

Another disturbing scenario is brewing inland, in the sleepy backwaters of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. It's a threat to the Delta's ecosystem that could swallow up a significant portion of California's water supply.

Scientists from government and academia say rising sea levels caused by climate change will bring more salt water into the Delta, the hub of California's water-delivery network. As a result, millions of gallons of fresh water will have to be flushed through the Delta, and out into the ocean, to keep salinity from inundating the massive pumping stations near Tracy. That will leave less water available for San Joaquin Valley farmers and the 19 million Southern Californians and Bay Area residents who depend on Delta water – eventually as much as 475,000 acre-feet of water each year, enough to fill Folsom Lake halfway, according to one study by the Public Policy Institute of California.

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