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## The Stockton Record: Standing their ground

State water officials are seeking access to 170 delta properties whose owners are saying no.

But this access dispute has less to do with property rights and privacy than with the state's obvious interest in digging a ditch -- a peripheral canal -- to take north state water around the delta and ship it south.

These landowners, some of them anyway, are trying to block a water project they believe is ill-conceived, being rammed down their throats or both.

No peripheral canal, which supporter Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger likes to call a conveyance system, has been formally proposed, let alone approved.

But the just-passed package of five state water bills allows it to happen, and a seven-member delta panel that will oversee state water issues will have the power to make it happen.

The fact that the governor will name four of the panel's seven members is a pretty clear indication that's the direction the state is headed, the lack of a strong scientific or engineering basis and the concerns of delta region residents and officials be damned.

Make no mistake, the forces aligning to push a peripheral canal project are strong. Their financing and organization, from south state water districts to south Valley farming and water interests, grows each day. So does their vitriol (as does that of delta residents). It takes nothing more than a drive south on Interstate 5 to see the rage. Billboards dot the freeway blaming Congress for the drought.

Some landowners have gone along. But entry to 170 properties is being denied, and the state has gone to court to force access. How exactly the matter will play out is unknown.

A judge's studied consideration of the situation is the least a property owner has the right to expect.