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# Smartphones used on floating robots to track water flow

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By Gene Ryan Briones on 05/10/2012 18:10 PDT

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A group of engineers at the University of California have deployed a fleet of 100 floating robots in the Sacramento River. The goal of the engineers was to demonstrate the next generation of water monitoring technology that promises to transform the way the government monitors its precious Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta that has a network of channels that direct drinking water to two-thirds of California's population and irrigation water to 3 million acres of agriculture. CITRIS researcher Alexandre Bayen led the Floating Sensor Network project by using a network of mobile sensors that can be deployed rapidly on water to provide real-time, high-resolution data in hard-to-map waterways. Check out the video after the break.

According to the engineers, the sensors can shed light into how the water moves and how pollutants are spread. It's also said that the sensors can monitor the migration of salmon and how salt and fresh water in Delta's ecosystem combine. "Monitoring the state's water supply is critical for the general public, water researchers and government agencies that rely upon costly fixed-water sensor stations that don't always generate sufficient data for modeling and prediction. The mobile probes we are using could potentially expand coverage to hundreds of miles of natural and manmade channels that are currently under-monitored, and help

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agencies [responsible](#) for managing the state's limited water supply," Bayen said.

Technically, each sensor is equipped with a GPS-enabled mobile phone encased in a 12-inch-long watertight capsules marked with fluorescent tape. The researchers wrote specific programs to run on the open source platforms used on the robots and on the smartphones. Out of the 100, 40 were fitted with propellers to help the floating robots move around obstacles or targeted areas. Bayen expects the cost of the project to go down while its performance will improve. He also expects the floating robots to become an invaluable tool for the future.

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