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January 11, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Mr. Wade Crowfoot
Secretary
Natural Resources Agency
1416 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsome, Secretary Haaland, and Secretary Crowfoot:

As you work to respond to the severe winter storms and atmospheric rivers impacting California, I write to urge you to take all permissible actions to maximize the conservation of available surface water, including pumping at the southern Delta Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP) pumping plants, for future use. We must make the most of the heavy precipitation we are receiving and use it to our advantage by bolstering our water supplies to increase our resiliency during ongoing and future periods of drought.

I understand the CVP and SWP are operating under “first flush” actions due to high turbidity until January 17. Given high levels of precipitation, and more of it falling as rain rather than snow than is normal for this time of year, project operators should consider actions to maximize future water supply, especially during this period of high flood flows. To accomplish this, project operators should consult the real-time monitoring and operational flexibility provisions of the 2019 biological opinions. It is my belief, that their analysis will demonstrate that operating the pumping plants at capacity would have minimal impact on listed species.

As I have said before, we cannot continue to operate on a calendar-based approach but rather a dynamic approach that responds to shifting and extreme weather patterns. This situation calls for the exact adaptive management and water operations strategies that we need to improve drought resilience in a future with extreme weather and climate change and which are allowed under the 2019 biological opinions.

As you know, federal dollars are available for the next five years through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to develop our water infrastructure. These resources need to be deployed quickly and strategically to facilitate the construction of new surface supply and the development increased capacity for groundwater recharge, particularly in California’s over drafted groundwater basins to replenish depleted aquifers.

If we had completed the critical reservoir projects in the pipeline, such as raising San Luis Reservoir, expanding Los Vaqueros Reservoir, building Sites Reservoir, and building Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir, we would be in a position today to move and store more water both for flood control and water supply purposes at a time of abundant flows and minimal impact on listed

species. Community drinking water systems, agriculture, and listed species that occupy managed wetlands alike would benefit from an increased supply of stored water for use during the next dry period. If the 2022 water year is any indication, that could come as soon as next month. It makes NO sense to miss the opportunity created by the extraordinary wet conditions California is now experiencing.

Further, I encourage you to work with water districts and other state and local partners to maximize the use of groundwater recharge. For decades, including the last three years of drought, we have depleted our aquifers and reduced groundwater levels across the San Joaquin Valley. It is imperative that we use these high flows to restore our groundwater. High flow storm events such as those occurring right now demonstrate the need to rapidly deploy federal resources for groundwater storage made available by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the annual appropriations bills.

In August, Governor Newsom released a water supply strategy calling for California to “create storage space for up to four million acre-feet of water, allowing us to capitalize on big storms when they do occur and store water for dry periods.” Included in this figure, is a goal to expand average annual groundwater recharge by at least 500,000 acre-feet. The strategy calls for streamlining these efforts and created an interagency strike team to “facilitate state permitting and supply completion of these projects.” As these storms show, we have no time to waste.

We need to quickly move forward with these projects and implement the Governor’s water supply strategy. Due to shifting climate change induced weather patterns, we know that weather “whiplash” will continue, where California will experience long periods of drought followed by periods of intense rainfall. We need to develop our infrastructure to be prepared for when the next intense storm event comes.

As of January 11, at least 17 people have been died in the relentless storms. Communities across the state have been evacuated because of flooding. Estimated damage so far has topped \$1 billion and 220,000 utility customers are without power across California. More extreme weather is in the forecast with for more storms heading towards California in the next ten days. The human impacts of our current water infrastructure shortcomings carry tragic costs.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to advance these efforts towards a sustainable water future for California and our nation.

Sincerely,



JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

Cc: Camille Calimlim Touton, Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Karla Nemeth, Director, California Department of Water Resources