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California WaterFix's Time is Now!

by Jennifer Pierre, General Manager, State Water Contractors

Last week was huge for California WaterFix. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced an option to build WaterFix in two stages, aligning with the funding available to build the first of two tunnels designed to modernize and upgrade our water delivery system, and ensuring we can continue to move this vital project forward. It's a smart approach because it answers the needs of public water agencies – agencies that believe in the project and simply needed to find a path forward after nearly a decade of review and analysis.

Let's not forget, WaterFix received votes of confidence from 12 public water agencies last fall. The state's announcement is the best next step because it propels the project forward based on current willingness to invest, while allowing current discussions to continue about investments in the full project. The first tunnel, featuring two intakes, will supply two-thirds of the project's total conveyance capacity — 6,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). That's a win for 25 million Californians, 750,000 acres of farmland, and the economy. And we're not taking our eye off the prize. We'll continue to work toward building a second tunnel and third intake in the future to achieve the project's full scope, which calls for 9,000 cfs of capacity.

Maintaining the status quo is not a solution. California WaterFix is absolutely necessary, and will address a number of decades-long challenges. It will secure and improve the aging water infrastructure and delivery system in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta – an environmental treasure and the hub of the state's water supply – to efficiently move water supplies underneath the fragile Delta ecosystem rather than through it. It also will offer a flexible and reliable solution to manage water supplies for more extreme weather, including wet years and recurring droughts – a climate reality in California. Furthermore, it will protect and improve the delicate Delta ecosystem to benefit endangered fish species and restore their habitat. It's a win, win, win.

The best part about the option to stage the project is that we don't have to wait

to get started on making these meaningful improvements. Funding the first stage of the project lowers the initial investment to \$10.7 billion (in 2017 dollars), making it a prudent and responsible first step. The State Water Project (SWP) is able to fund and use the full 6,000 cfs of the Stage 1 conveyance capacity, and discussions are ongoing with Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors that are considering an investment in the project. At the end of the day, California WaterFix is an investment opportunity. Participating contractors will fund the project and secure their respective share of water supplies for the future. It's a plain and simple model, and the benefit is crystal clear. For those regions that depend on SWP water for as much as 80 percent of their supply, the benefit will be truly invaluable. Plus, if you consider that billions of dollars of investments have already been made in the SWP over the past several decades, it only makes sense to protect our investment in the state's most affordable and reliable source of water. The California WaterFix is necessary regardless of other investments that public water agencies may make regionally and locally; it's a necessary component of the portfolio approach all of the public water agencies are already implementing because it secures an important base supply for public water agencies.

The bottom line: California WaterFix is the best thing to happen to the state's water supply and delivery system since the initial construction of the State Water Project, and the momentum for the project is stronger than ever. In the coming months, public water agencies will finalize their level of participation in WaterFix. Next, DWR and participating public water agencies will move forward by setting up a joint powers authority (JPA) to oversee the design and construction of the project. That JPA will be comprised of SWP contractors and participating CVP contractors, pulling the best and brightest from each organization and allowing them to pool their expertise and resources to safely design, construct and deliver the project on time, on budget and in accordance with approved specifications – while ensuring the transparency required of a public agency. Construction of California WaterFix will begin once all the necessary permits are complete, which is anticipated to be toward the end of

this year. And while there's still much to be done, the future for this project is clear and bright.

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