



April 2, 2014

Mark Cowin
Director
Department of Water Resources
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

RE: FUTURE CAPTURE OF WATER DURING STORM EVENTS

Dear Director Cowin:

The Merced County Board of Supervisors would like to urge you to evaluate the operating criteria that govern the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project to allow local water systems to capture the greatest amount of water possible from recent and any future rainfall.

Justification of this action can be attributed to the unprecedented drought and extremely low water allocations for farmers as a result of the ongoing lack of rain. This set of circumstances is leading to the fallowing of farmland, which is the driving-force behind our local economy. With a current unemployment rate of 16.1 percent, a significant reduction in agriculture production would further compound the economic impact to our communities.

We understand the need to release water into the Delta to protect various species of fish and prevent saltwater intrusion, but there are safeguards in place to ensure both of those concerns are strictly addressed. Meanwhile, Central Valley communities will soon be dealing with overwhelming unemployment and economic losses due to a lack of water availability. Some communities are at risk of running out of water altogether.

Officials have confirmed that there is no imminent threat to any endangered species of protected fish related to water pumping operations. We must not let our protection of fish species outweigh the needs of our local farmers and community members, many of whom are facing potentially devastating outcomes from the current drought.

As the rain season comes to a close, the State has received about half of its normal precipitation, many reservoirs have fallen far below half-capacity and the snowpack is around 25 percent of normal. This has led the State to declare a drought emergency, prompted a visit from President Obama and drove the Secretary of Agriculture to declare 26 counties as natural disaster areas.

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We encourage you to keep the water flowing during this dire time for Merced County and the rest of the Central Valley. The actions taken during this drought will have lasting effects on our local, state and national economies. The Merced County Board of Supervisors hopes you will use your authority to protect our agricultural lands, communities and local economies by capturing what little rainfall we have left this season.

Sincerely,



Jerry O'Banion, Chairman
Merced County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor, District Five

cc: Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Representative Jeff Denham
Congressman Jim Costa
Senator Anthony Cannella
Assemblyman Adam Gray
Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture
Felicia Marcus, Chairwoman, State Water Resources Control Board
Frances Spivy-Weber, Vice Chair, State Water Resources Control Board
Dorene D'Amado, Member, State Water Resources Control Board
Tam M. Dodue, Member, State Water Resources Control Board
Steven Moore, Member, State Water Resources Control Board
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Janelle Beland, Undersecretary, California Natural Resources Agency
Gordon Burns, Undersecretary, California Environmental Protection Agency
David Murillo, Regional Director, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation