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To: "AB2121Policy@waterboards.ca.gov" <AB2121Policy@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: Wed, Apr 23, 2008 5:22 PM
Subject: Comments on the Draft North Coast Instream Flow Policy

April 23, 2008
Chair & Members Tam Doduc
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Tam Doduc,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft North Coast Instream Flow Policy. As all Californians know, the state's salmon and steelhead fisheries are in trouble. One of the biggest problems is clear: too many of our rivers and streams simply lack the water to support fish. I urge you to take decisive action with the Instream Flow Policy to conserve stream flows and to help put salmon and steelhead back on the road to recovery.

The final Policy must include a few basic things: scientifically-based criteria to limit diversions when stream flows drop below a certain level, measures to guard against the cumulative effects of multiple diversions, restrictions on new on-stream reservoirs, mandates for universal monitoring and reporting of both water diversions and stream flows, and provisions to periodically review the effectiveness of the Policy.

The Policy should take a broad, watershed-scale approach to the problem. It should provide incentives for landowners to go above and beyond the minimum required by the Policy, including measures to improve stream flows during the critical dry season. The State Water Board also needs to establish strong programs to ensure compliance with the law. Finally, the Board should conduct an honest assessment of the funding and staffing needed to implement the Policy and request adequate resources to get the job done.

With those steps, the Instream Flow Policy can be a crucial step forward for conservation in California. After more than 15 years of hard work by Trout Unlimited and others, it is time to finalize the Policy and get about the business of bringing back the fish.

As a fisherman for forty plus years I have witnessed the dewatering of our streams--a pump here to water a garden, a 'farm pond' on a side creek to irrigate a vineyard.

Its my 'goldfish bowl' theory: if every few days I dipped a small cup of water out of the fishbowl to water to the potted fern on the shelf, the goldfish would at first appear to be doing fine. But as the water got lower, the uneaten food flakes and fish pooh would increasingly begin to cloud the remaining water. A few more dips for the fern and the goldfish are gasping at the surface. Any less water and the fish die-- I wouldn't even need to completely empty the fishbowl.

I'm certain we have long passed the 'doing fine' stage on many of our streams--what seemed at first benign ('there's plenty more water in the river") is now killing the fish. Its time to stop!

DR. D. V. HICKSON
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Sincerely

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