September 28, 2023

State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Chair Esquivel, Board members and staff,

We, the undersigned participating water agencies, are writing to express our strong support for the Voluntary Agreements, which will enhance healthy rivers and landscapes while helping California adapt to our climate reality by strengthening the environment, communities and farms.

Today, your staff issued a series of documents to update the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Bay-Delta). Protecting California's Bay-Delta watershed and its many beneficial uses is one of the State Water Board's primary responsibilities. This includes updating and adopting the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan (Bay-Delta Plan), which establishes water quality control measures and flow requirements needed to provide reasonable protection of beneficial uses in the watershed, including environmental, municipal, domestic and agricultural water supplies.

The draft documents include a staff report describing the State Water Board process to evaluate alternatives, a Substitute Environmental Document (SED), a scientific basis report and other supporting materials. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the different alternatives over the next several months. The State Water Board will consider those comments and adopt the Bay-Delta Plan Update in late 2024, after evaluating the alternatives and their environmental effects, and ensuring the new plan will protect the beneficial uses of water in the Bay-Delta watershed.

Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes

On March 29, 2022, Governor Newsom convened state, federal and local water leaders to announce broad agreement on measures to provide additional water flows and new habitat to help improve conditions in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta watershed. Also referred to as the Voluntary Agreements, this program for healthy rivers and landscapes is one of the alternatives that will be fully analyzed by the State Water Board over the next year.

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in 2022 and subsequent amendments outline terms for a transformational program that will provide substantial additional flows for the environment to help recover salmon and other native fish, create

new and restored habitat for fish and wildlife and provide significant funding for habitat improvements and water purchases. The terms also include a governance and habitat monitoring framework with clear metrics and goals to allow state, federal and local partners and stakeholders such as Tribes and NGOs to analyze progress and manage adaptively to ensure the program is effective.

If approved by the State Water Board, the program of implementation required under the *Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes* will become the new Bay-Delta Plan. The plan will be implemented through binding agreements between the State Water Board, state and federal agencies and participating water agencies to direct water, funding, and habitat restoration efforts to improve the health of California's Bay-Delta ecosystem and its tributaries.

We, the undersigned participating public water agencies from Red Bluff to the Mexican border, are working together with state and federal agencies on the *Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes* as a new and transformational approach to California water management – one that provides a better future for California to adapt to our climate reality. We support this approach, which offers:

- Substantial water – between 500,000 acre-feet and 700,000 acre-feet (more than half of Folsom Reservoir's 975,000 acre-feet capacity) – dedicated to the environment in many water years.
- Significantly reduced environmental effects throughout California compared to the traditional regulatory flows-only approach.
- A comprehensive portfolio of actions in river reaches, from ridgetop to river mouth, designed to reactivate the landscape-scale patterns of biophysical habitat conditions that robust, resilient populations of salmon (and other fish, bird, and wildlife populations) depend upon.
    - At least 155,000 acre-feet of additional water in critically dry years, and over 700 acre-feet of water in dry, below normal, and above normal years.
    - Restoration of over 27,000 acres of floodplain habitat, 434 acres of instream habitat and 291 acres of spawning habitat in rivers throughout the state. Many projects have already been completed as part of early implementation.
- A commitment to over $2.5 billion in funding to support water purchases, crop idling, a robust science program and construction of new habitat, including dedicated resources to monitor and ensure performance.
- Actions throughout the state designed to restore ecosystem function while concurrently helping secure water supplies for communities, farms, other fish and wildlife, recreation and hydropower.

- A collaborative science program that relies upon the latest scientific information from the University of California, USGS, NGOs and other leading institutions and agencies to guide actions and learn from applied science.
- Partnerships and collaboration with state, federal and local water agencies.
- Inclusive governance that will address changing climate conditions, support research to improve management actions for native fish and welcomes the participation of Tribes and environmental organizations.
- Collaborative and adaptive management of flow and non-flow measures through structured decision making informed by the latest science.
- A program that brings people from different backgrounds and disciplines together to make California a better place.

The Time to Act is Now

While there have been some notable successes, the various efforts to manage the Bay-Delta over the recent decades have not worked as planned overall, as both important species and water supply reliability have declined in the Bay-Delta and throughout the state. To change course and offer a different approach and trajectory, state, federal and local leaders have come together around these innovative agreements that will improve environmental conditions more quickly and holistically than traditional regulatory requirements, while providing more certainty to communities, farms, and businesses.

California's recent dry years have shown us how quickly we need to move and how much we can get done with a mutual commitment to additional flows, accelerated habitat restoration and learning together what works best – so that we can do more of it.

We look forward to working with the State Water Board in this process and to expanding our partnerships with diverse organizations throughout California to implement the *Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes*.

Sincerely,


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THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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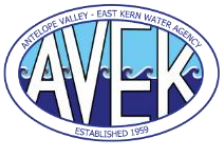
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WATER AGENCY

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