July 26, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, California 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins
President Pro-Tem
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: Immediate Funding for the Protection of the Pacific Flyway

We, the undersigned organizations, write to stress the urgency for funding for winter flooding of ricelands to support the millions of migratory birds that are so dependent upon Pacific Flyway habitat.

Without winter flooding, the Flyway will be seriously impacted. Never before have we seen winter water deliveries curtailed to such extreme levels. Without immediate action, we estimate that winter-flooded ricelands available for these migrating birds will be less than 25 percent of normal. In our state, where over 90 percent of the original wetlands are gone, these species have become dependent upon these winter-flooded rice fields. For example, approximately 50 percent of everything ducks eat comes out of winter-flooded rice fields. These fields are also essential for struggling shorebirds and, therefore, have been specially designated as Shorebird Habitat of International Significance. Having these species find nothing but dry fields when they arrive here next fall would be devastating. There is also a need to better understand how this year’s drought and droughts like this are affecting wetland dependent migratory birds and how effective incentive programs are at mitigating those impacts.
We encourage you to consider an allocation of $10 million from the funding approved in AB 129 for winter flooding as soon as reasonably possible, but no later than September 1. Rice farmers are currently making their plans for how they will manage their rice straw in absence of surface water. Most will implement additional tillage operations, in lieu of winter-flooding, because the use of groundwater for this purpose is far too cost-prohibitive for them. If no cost-share assistance is available by September 1, it will be very challenging to deploy these environmental assistance funds prior to growers conducting their tillage operations after rice harvest. In addition, we encourage you to also consider an allocation of $2 million to support the science needed to monitor and measure the impacts of drought that can guide future habitat programs and ensure cost-effective investments.

We appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to working with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Michael Lynes, Director of Public Policy
Audubon California

Timothy A. Johnson, President/CEO
California Rice Commission

John Carlson, President
California Waterfowl

Jeff McCreary, Director of Operations, Western Region
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Gary Link, Legislative Affairs Director
Northern California Water Association

Jay Ziegler, Director of Policy and External Affairs for California
The Nature Conservancy

Cc: The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Budget Committee
The Honorable Vince Fong, Vice Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
The Honorable Jim Nielsen, Vice Chair, Senate Budget Committee
The Honorable Richard Bloom, Chair, Assembly Budget Sub-Committee 3
The Honorable Bob Wieckowski, Chair, Senate Budget Sub-Committee 2