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January 18, 2024

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: A Better Pathway for the Bay-Delta

Dear Governor Newsom:

As elected officials representing Colusa County located in the Sacramento River Basin, we encourage you and your administration to support the *Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes* (previously known as *voluntary agreements*) and the associated benefits for communities, farms, businesses, the environment, and the public. We specifically urge the State Water Board to identify the *Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes* alternative in its final Staff Report and forthcoming program of implementation as the State Water Board's best pathway for updating the Sacramento/Delta portions of the Bay-Delta Plan.

We are deeply concerned with the State Water Board's proposal for a 55 percent unimpaired flow into the Delta, which would redirect significant amounts of much needed water away from the Sacramento River Basin into the Delta and put out to the ocean without any benefit. This in turn would be devastating to both the economy and the environment in Colusa County. It would adversely affect the availability of critical water for cities and rural communities (many of which are disadvantaged), farms, wildlife refuges, fisheries and recreation. We support a healthy Delta, but the unimpaired flow approach proposed by the State Water Board will redirect impacts upstream into the Sacramento River Basin and will likely fail to achieve its goal of protecting Delta water quality.

The potential impacts to our county are not abstract; we experienced dry year impacts in 2022 which will be repeated if an unimpaired flow approach is adopted by the State Water Board. For context, the acres of crops planted which rely on annual water allocations went from 204,463 in 2021 to 56,061 acres in 2022. Most notably the harvest rice acres went from 152,880 to 19,753. The gross value of Colusa County's agricultural production in 2022 was \$433,189,000. This is a decrease of 47.7% in comparison to the value in 2021.

More specifically, the "unimpaired flow" approach will have significant effects not just locally and regionally but statewide:

- 1) Evacuation of critical water from storage and the curtailment of water diversions throughout our region will significantly affect precious water supplies for all purposes. This is particularly true in dry years like we have seen this decade, where water available in storage is critical to helping Californians get through these challenging times. In other words, we will go backward under the State Water Board approach—not forward—in our efforts in developing more resilient water infrastructure to prepare for the next drought in California. For example, the operations of an off stream storage facility in western Colusa County (Sites Reservoir) would be severely impacted to a point of irrelevance. We find this disturbing and curious as Sites Reservoir is touted as a priority project in your administrations 2020 Water Resilience Portfolio.
- 2) Less surface water available will lead to significant additional groundwater pumping throughout the region, which will make our efforts to implement sustainable groundwater management as required under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) more difficult. In our region, the groundwater resources are currently sustainable and we will continue to work hard with other local agencies to assure that our precious groundwater resources remain sustainable into the future. However, the State Water Boards unimpaired flow proposal will make our collective efforts to achieve groundwater sustainability more difficult if not impossible.

In sum, we encourage your administration to abandon the flawed “unimpaired flow” approach. Instead, we recommend that you pursue an integrated approach in the *Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes* where water is used for specific environmental purposes that are compatible with important flood protection and other water uses in the region. We believe that this 21st century approach to water management will better serve the Sacramento River Basin and more effectively protect Delta water quality. We encourage your administration to embrace an approach that achieves your water quality goals for the Delta without redirecting impacts upstream to the Sacramento River Basin, while also supporting priorities within your water resilience portfolio.

Sincerely yours,



Gary J. Evans, Chair
Colusa County Board of Supervisors

cc: Ann Patterson
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Wade Crowfoot
Yana Garcia
Karen Ross
Karla Nemeth
Chuck Bonhman
Joaquin Esquivel
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