

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 13, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Jerry Brown
Governor of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear President Obama and Governor Brown:

El Niño is predicted to hit California hard this winter, and research has shown that it may be stronger than the record El Niño event from 1997-98, which caused widespread flooding, mudslides, and disruptions across California. We write to urge you to ensure that proper preparations are being made for the effects of the coming El Niño this winter, which has the potential to be both beneficial, from a water supply perspective, and detrimental, from impacts from potential flooding. To adequately prepare, we must be able to both respond to the increased statewide threat of flooding and mudslides and capture predictively high levels of precipitation through existing reservoirs and other water storage such as groundwater recharge, with an emphasis on areas that have been most severely impacted by drought conditions.

California's devastating drought is now in its fourth year, and with it comes continued consequences to Californians across the state from the lack of water and excessively dry weather. We recognize that work has been done, and continues to be done, to address issues related to this persistent drought at both the state and the federal levels, though, it is clear that significant work remains if we are to resolve both the short-term and long-term challenges impacting California's water supply and water quality and to build additional resiliency into California's water system.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicts that the current El Niño event in the Pacific Ocean has a 95 percent chance of continuing into the 2015-2016 winter. Furthermore, data from NOAA shows upward of a 93 percent chance of normal to above normal precipitation statewide, though where in the state this precipitation falls will significantly impact the effects of El Niño on California communities. This increased precipitation could be immensely beneficial to both communities and natural ecosystems severely affected by the drought. Thankfully, through federal, state, and local investments, California has an advanced water storage and distribution system, including the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project. Moreover, California's reservoirs remain at a record low, which further demonstrates the ability to capture massive amounts of water from this predicted precipitation. Given historically low reservoir levels across California, significant precipitation events should be opportunities to refill reservoirs and begin charging badly depleted aquifers.

Additionally, as we have learned from previous El Niño events, we must prepare for potential floods and mudslides from powerful storms. Data from the National Climatic Data Center on the 1997-98 El Niño revealed that California experienced a state average of 14.40 inches of rain in the month of February 1998, with Santa Barbara receiving a drastic 21.74

inches. This reportedly caused 17 storm-related deaths and over \$550 million in damages. Clearly, action must be taken to mitigate the consequences of the potentially stronger 2015-16 El Niño. We must have an effective response to show that we have learned from the previous disaster and are now better prepared to protect our state.

With the information presented above, we request that you answer the following questions in regards to what your plan is to manage El Niño precipitation and mitigating flood and mudslide risks in California:

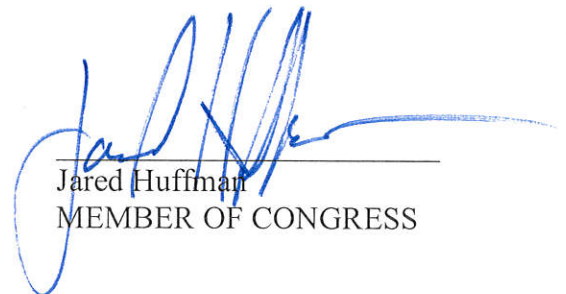
- What work has been performed to update the Drought Contingency Plan for the upcoming water year?
- What mitigation projects, if any, have been completed in California to reduce the risk of severe flooding and to address the impact of drought and wildfire? Can any projects be accelerated prior to potential storms due to an El Niño?
- What steps have been taken to coordinate with the California Office of Emergency Services, including the state-federal flood operation center and any other agreements such as the state-federal cooperative Silver Jacket Program?
- How have your agencies utilized existing authorities and implemented new authorities to mitigate flood risk and to fund important conservation and mitigation projects, such as those provided in the Agricultural Act of 2014 and the Water Resources Reform Development Act of 2014?
- What are federal and California government agencies, including the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Department of Water Resources, the California Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Water Resources Control Board, doing to coordinate their response to flood risks, ensure that reservoirs can safely capture and store precipitation without increasing risks to public safety, and find alternatives to water storage at federal and state reservoirs, such as diverting precipitation for local groundwater recharge, should El Niño-related precipitation events threaten reservoir integrity?

We greatly appreciate your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response and our working together to address this urgent situation.

Sincerely,



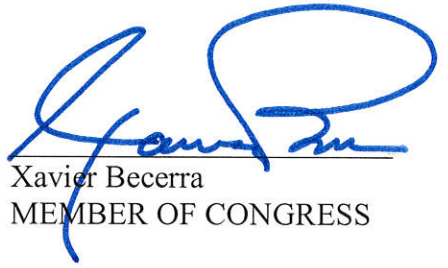
Jim Costa
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Jared Huffman
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Peter Aguilar
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Xavier Becerra
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



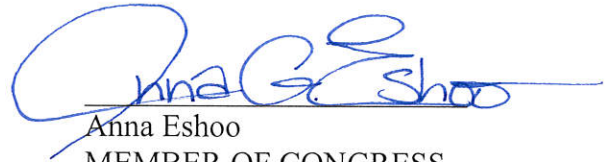
Lois Capps
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



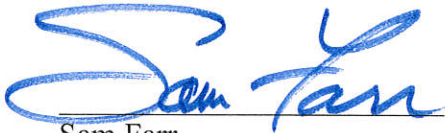
Tony Cardenas
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Mark DeSaulnier
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



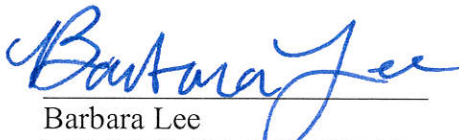
Anna Eshoo
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Sam Farr
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Mike Honda
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Barbara Lee
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Alan Lowenthal
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Doris Matsui
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Jerry McNerney
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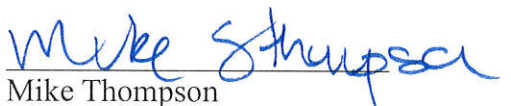
Grace Napolitano
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



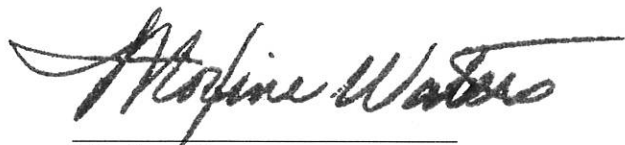
Raul Ruiz
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Brad Sherman
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Mike Thompson
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maxine Waters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the word "Waters".

Maxine Waters

MEMBER OF CONGRESS