

JIM COSTA

16TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
WATER, POWER AND OCEANS



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

LIVESTOCK AND FOREIGN AGRICULTURE

RANKING MEMBER

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

GENERAL FARM COMMODITIES AND RISK MANAGEMENT

March 24, 2016

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I ask you to direct the Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Marine Fisheries Service to maximize pumping in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to the greatest extent allowable with the applicable laws governing system operations.

California is facing the most serious drought in more than 1,200 years and water supplies for the residents and ecosystems of California have been stretched to the breaking point. Luckily, El Niño has provided us with significant rainfall and snowpack during this water year. Unfortunately, this increase will not alleviate drought conditions for all areas of California and the San Joaquin Valley, the region of California most affected by the impacts of this drought, will receive the least benefit from the increase in rainfall unless you take immediate action to address this imbalance.

The amount of water that is flowing down the Sacramento River system is the highest that it has been during this extended drought. Last week alone, flows in the Sacramento reached highs as large as 152,000 acre-feet per day. Despite this increase in the availability of water, the Bureau of Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife Service are now considering a reduction in pumping due to concerns about *potential* impacts to larval smelt. In January, when a similar amount of water was moving down the Sacramento River, pumping was actually reduced, leading to a loss of an estimated 270,000 acre-feet of water supplies that are desperately needed.

Despite the Sacramento flowing at flood levels through much of its range, instead of increasing pumping to capture more of the flood water flowing through the system, pumping levels remained constant, despite incredibly limited salvage of delta smelt.

It is important to note that California's hydrologic cycle is highly variable, and wet years are typically followed by dry years. Current predictions from meteorologists indicate that next year may be a La Niña year, which typically produce much lower rainfall and snowpack than average years. This point is particularly relevant when one considers that between January 1 and March 6 last year, 1.5 million acre feet of water flowed through the Delta and 745,000 acre feet was exported. During the same period this year, 5.5 million acre feet of water flowed through the Delta, but only 852,000 acre feet was exported. If pumping cannot be increased during times of excellent rainfall and high flows, how will Californians like those in the San Joaquin Valley, who rely on the Central Valley Project, ever be able to recover from drought?

The operation of the Central Valley Project this year has highlighted a fundamental problem with our water system. We cannot continue to operate a water project designed and

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constructed for the benefit of 23 million people with a rigid set of operating criteria that reduces our ability to adjust to actual hydrologic conditions. We need a more adaptable system that is able to adjust to the range of conditions presented by California's highly dynamic and variable climate.

Over two years ago, on February 14, 2014, at Joe del Bosque's farm, a farmworker from Kern County addressed you on the existing crisis. Through a translator, that farmworker said to you, "I am concerned about water because when farmers do not have water, I do not have a job, and my three children do not have a future." Those words tell the story of the entire San Joaquin Valley; without water it does not have a future. But two years have passed since those words were spoken to you and not enough action has been taken to relieve the immediate human suffering felt by that farmworker and tens-of-thousands of other people in an identical situation. The time to act on short-term, as well as long-term, actions to address this human disaster is now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim Costa", with a stylized flourish at the end.

JIM COSTA
Member of Congress