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**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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February 8, 1999

Marti Kie, CALFED
c/o Pete Rawlings, Biologist
Jones & Stokes Associates, Inc.
2600 V Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95818-1914

RE: CALFED Conservation Strategy

Dear Ms. Kie:

Tuolumne County's Wildlife Habitat data base and Handbook identifies some special habitats and special status species (State or Federally listed Rare, Threatened, Endangered, Candidate species, Species of Special Concern, and Forest Service Sensitive species) within Tuolumne County which are contributing watersheds of the study area, and which could be effected by the CALFED project. Those species noted as special status in each habitat type below should be considered for recovery programs by CALFED, if they are known to occur in any area proposed for alteration by the CALFED project and should be maintained in project areas not proposed for alteration. Therefore, as you have requested, I offer the following comments and information:

Lacustrine habitat is found along the New Melones Lake reservoir of the Stanislaus River, since it has severe fluctuations seasonally. Utica Reservoir and Spicer Meadow Reservoir, located on tributaries of the North Fork Stanislaus River, as well as Beardsley Reservoir and Donnells Reservoir, located on the Middle Fork Stanislaus River, also have severe fluctuations seasonally, yielding lacustrine habitat. Lacustrine habitat is found along Lake Don Pedro and Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which are located on the Tuolumne River, due to severe seasonal fluctuations which yield a bathtub ring effect. These reservoirs provide habitat to a host of waterway dependent special status species in Tuolumne County, including double-crested cormorants, bald eagles (November through April), golden eagles, peregrine falcon, great blue herons, migratory California gulls (spring), and osprey.

Tulloch Lake and Goodwin Reservoir, which are downstream of New Melones on the Stanislaus

River, support emergent vegetation due to the fairly constant water level in these two reservoirs most of the year. Lyons Lake and Pinecrest Lake, which are located on the South Fork Stanislaus River, also support emergent vegetation due to fairly constant water levels most of the year. These reservoirs with emergent vegetation also provide habitat for double-crested cormorants, bald eagles (November through April), golden eagles, peregrine falcon, great blue herons, osprey, migratory California gulls, as well as tri-colored blackbirds, yellow warbler, and Coopers' hawk.

Natural seasonal wetlands are located at the junction of many of the intermittent and perennial streams that drain into the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers systems. These features may be located on the USGS maps for Tuolumne County and provide critically important habitat for the County's special status aquatic species, including western pond turtles, foothill yellow-legged frogs, mountain yellow-legged frogs, California tiger salamander and great egrets. Vernal pools located in the proximity of the Stanislaus River system in Tuolumne County are northern basaltic vernal pools, with their associated special status plant species, and are located atop the Table Mountain formation which runs the length of the County. No vernal pools are known to occur near the Tuolumne River system within Tuolumne County.

Managed seasonal wetlands are primarily found below the 1,800 foot elevation in Tuolumne County's agricultural belt, on stream channels supplying the Stanislaus River and Tuolumne River. In this dry-land grazing area, stock ponds for livestock are common. Above this elevation a complex of water conveyance ditches were developed by gold miners in the 1850's. The system originates at Lyon's Lake and supplies domestic and agricultural water to at least 28,000 people in Tuolumne County. The riparian areas supplied by these managed systems provide important habitat for special status wildlife, including western pond turtles, tri-colored blackbirds, Barrow's goldeneye, western least bittern, Cooper's hawk and San Joaquin roach.

Montane riverine aquatic habitat is located in the undammed reaches of both the Stanislaus and the Tuolumne River systems. Salmon and steelhead still run in the reach below Goodwin Dam on the Stanislaus River. These reaches all have rainbow trout and some have been stocked with other trout species which are important to the County's fishermen and tourism. The lower elevational reaches have the San Joaquin roach.

Valley-foothill riparian woodlands, with their associated valley oaks, willows and Fremont's cottonwood are found up to the 3,200 foot elevation in the central Sierra of Tuolumne County. Habitat type elevations drop as one goes farther north in the Sierra and rise as one goes farther south in the Sierra. The riparian woodlands provide critically important food, water and shelter for over two hundred different species of wildlife, some of which are special status species like the riparian brush rabbit, bank swallow, black swift, harlequin duck, yellow-breasted chat, San Joaquin Valley woodrat, western pond turtle, foothill yellow-legged frog, yellow warbler, osprey and Cooper's hawk.

Montane riparian woodlands, with their associated willow, black cottonwood, white alder, Oregon ash, and dogwood are located above the 2,500 foot elevation in Tuolumne County. They

also provide critically important food, water and shelter for wildlife species, some of which are special status species like the Sierra Nevada Mountain Beaver, western pond turtle, mountain yellow-legged frog, purple martin, osprey and Cooper's hawk.

Grasslands should only be consider special habitats for conservation purposes where they provide habitat for native grasses and native herbaceous meadow plants, or are occupied habitats of special status animal species. The majority of Tuolumne County's grasslands are non-native annual grasses and weedy species such as yellow star-thistle.

Valley/foothill woodland and forest, which includes the vast oak savannahs found below the 2,500 foot elevation in Tuolumne County's foothills, provide for both grassland dependent and woodland dependent species. The valley oak, blue oak, interior live oak, canyon live oak and foothill gray pine woodlands provide forage, shelter and shade for wildlife year around, but especially during the hot, dry summer months in the western Sierra. This habitat is critically important for special status species like the San Joaquin kit fox, ringtail, San Joaquin pocket mouse, Yuma myotis, American badger, prairie falcons, golden eagles, sharp shinned hawks, ferruginous hawk, white-tailed kite, northern harrier, Merlin, burrowing owl and loggerhead shrikes. It allows the raptorial species to hunt from perches above the interspersed grasslands. This habitat also is critical for non-hibernating wildlife species, like migratory herds of mule deer, and special status Sierra Nevada red fox, pine martin and fisher, that migrate downslope in the Sierra to escape severe winter conditions at higher elevations.

Montane woodland and forest comprised of ponderosa pine, sugar pine, incense cedar, Douglas fir, white fir, and black oak is found above the 2,500 foot elevation in the central Sierra of Tuolumne County. Not only do the mixed conifer and black oak forests provide habitat for a host of common wildlife species, they also provide habitat for special status fur-bearers, such as the Sierra Nevada red fox, wolverine, Sierra Nevada snowshoe hare, western white-tailed hare, lodgepole chipmunk, pine martin and Pacific fisher, as well as special status birds such as great grey owls, Sierra spotted owls, long-eared owl and northern goshawks.

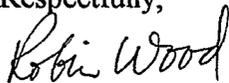
Serpentine chaparral habitats should also be considered for their endemic species habitats by CALFED. The serpentine belt of the "Mother Lode" is traversed by the Stanislaus River and by the Tuolumne River and their tributaries in the western portion of Tuolumne County. Some of the serpentine endemic plant species and one serpentine endemic fish sub-species occur no where else but Tuolumne County's serpentine belt. Serpentine soils have high metal content (cadmium, nickel, manganese, magnesium and cobalt) and low content of normal plant nutrients like calcium, phosphorus and nitrogen. This chemical soil composition is toxic to most non-native species and selective genetically to serpentine endemic species, reducing competition with non-adapted plants. This has allowed for genetic drift and isolation of species within the serpentine belt, while allowing for the preservation of these rare plants through lack of non-native competition normally found in common soils throughout the foothills of California. Special status species in this area include Layne's butterweed (ragwort), Cleveland's butterweed (ragwort), California verbena (vervain), Rawhide Hill onion, Red Hills soaproot, Congdon's lomatium, Hernandez blue curls,

Shaggyhair lupine, foothill yellow-legged frog, California horned lizard and Red Hills roach.

Table Mountain formation, which forms the cliffs above the Stanislaus River in Tuolumne County should also be considered special habitat by CALFED for the roosting and nesting habitat it provides for special status species such as prairie falcons, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, California horned lark, western mastiff bats, Townsend's big-eared bats, hairy Sierra side-band snail, and the plants endemic to the formation, include Jepson's onion and plants found in the northern basaltic vernal pools along the table top, such as the spiny-sepaled button celery.

Tuolumne County's 1987 Wildlife Project Handbook identifies habitat conservation measures for many of the species listed in this letter. Please contact me at the Tuolumne County Planning Division at (209) 533-5633, for additional conservation information on specific species.

Respectfully,



Robin Wood
Biologist and AICP, Senior Planner