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March 5, 1993

The Honorable Bill Clinton  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I urge your immediate attention on the serious issues of the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta.

Today's listing of the Delta Smelt as a threatened species by the Department of the Interior under the Federal Endangered Species Act is the latest in a series of developments for this heavily stressed estuary, which is the critical nexus of California's water delivery and supply system. The federal and state water projects that divert water from the Delta serve some 20 million urban users and millions of acres of some of the country's most valuable agricultural lands.

The Delta is also a fish and wildlife habitat of national significance. Last year, the winter-run Chinook Salmon was listed as threatened by the Department of Commerce, and two other fish -- the splittail and the long fin smelt -- are at present proposed for listing by the Department of the Interior. Further, the U.S. EPA claims oversight authority of the estuary under the Clean Water Act.

I am writing to request that you intervene to coordinate the various agencies of the federal government which have authority over disparate but significant issues relating to California's Bay-Delta. If not properly coordinated, these regulatory decisions make more likely severe economic dislocation as they serve to limit the transport of water through the Bay-Delta to agricultural and urban consumers. Additionally, this species-by-species approach is the aquatic equivalent of not seeing the forest for the trees. Our fish and wildlife resources are also not well served by such a disjointed, uncoordinated approach.

As you may already know, the State is taking important action that serves as the foundation for a more cooperative approach. The California Water Resources Control Board is

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developing new interim water quality standards for the Bay Delta estuary. In order to determine a permanent solution, I have convened the Bay-Delta Oversight Council, composed of 22 leading Californians representing all the key interests. The function of the Council is to oversee preparation of a comprehensive environmental review of all options for management of the Delta, under provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and its California equivalent.

This approach reflects my belief that the long-term solution to the problems of the Bay-Delta lies in anticipatory, multi-species habitat conservation - rather than the one-time, single species process that characterizes the approach that has brought us to this perilous point. We must urgently find a way for the relevant federal agencies to work within the process we have established here in California so that we can move forward equitably, effectively, and efficiently to resolve these complex issues.

We are moving in a similar direction in Southern California under a process called Natural Communities Conservation Planning, which holds great promise for terrestrial species, as Secretary of the Interior Babbitt has recognized. This program seeks to conserve an entire habitat in sufficient amounts such that the potentially threatened and endangered species that inhabit it can be protected permanently, while accommodating necessary economic development.

Thus, recognizing the diverse interests of the federal government in the great resource that is the Bay-Delta, I request that we convene a meeting of senior policy officials from the federal government and from the State of California. The purpose of this meeting would be to discuss and recommend steps toward improving the Bay-Delta by taking into account both its critical economic significance and its environmental values.

I look forward to working with you and those in your Administration on this important matter.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



PETE WILSON