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CONTACT:

State and Federal Governments Sign Agreement

Extending Bay-Delta Accord

SACRAMENTO -- State and federal officials today signed an agreement extending the historic Bay-Delta Accord for an additional year, reaffirming their dedication to working with the major water interests -- agricultural, urban, fishing, and environmental -- to develop a long-term solution to the State's major water problems.

"The extension of the Accord today is critical to keeping the focus on a long-term solution that will meet the needs of all Californians," said Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior. "Only by maintaining the strong commitment to partnership embodied in the Accord can we succeed in reaching a solution that promises mutual benefit to those who have historically battled over water."

"California's future--both economic and environmental--is inextricably linked to water" said California's Secretary for Resources Doug Wheeler. "Today we take another step together toward a future in which the water needs of wildlife and fisheries, farmers, and cities alike can be met."

"The extension of the historic Bay-Delta Accord gives us the chance to craft a long-term plan that works for everyone, including business interests, farmers, environmentalists, and communities," said Carol M. Browner, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "By including all interested parties in this important process, we can ensure that a final plan will better protect the public health and environment of California and strengthen its economy."

"This Accord and its promise of a long-term solution developed through consensus of all interests is an exciting approach which we are trying to emulate in other areas," said Commerce Secretary William Daley. "The success of the Accord is important to our approach to restoration of our nation's fishery resources, providing additional time to ensure the long-term solution is sound and is a wise investment."

As described in the attached Questions and Answers, the agreement extends commitments of the state and federal governments outlined in the Bay-Delta Accord until the end of 1998. The continuation maintains the substantive commitments of the State-Federal partnership toward restoring the Bay-Delta ecosystem and ensuring California's long-term water supply.

"With the 'breathing-space' provided by the Accord, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program has made impressive strides in crafting the comprehensive solution," said Bob Perciasepe, Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "The additional year will allow sufficient time for CALFED to complete the plan and undergo environmental review without the distraction of water-related disputes."

The extension of the Accord also allows the parties to the agreement to continue to build on the substantial progress toward developing a long-term plan to improve the State's water supply system and restore the Bay-Delta ecosystem. Since the Accord was signed in 1994, CALFED--a Federal-State partnership--has been developing a plan for the long-term solution in cooperation with environmental, urban, and agricultural interests. Currently, the CALFED Program is narrowing the number of alternative approaches to solving the State's water problems before issuing a draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement early in 1998. The adoption of a long-term plan is anticipated in late fall 1998.

"Through the Accord the interested parties have already made tremendous strides in habitat restoration and water quality protection efforts. This extension will help us stay the course and meet our goals," said Peter Rooney, Secretary for the California Environmental Protection Agency.

The Bay-Delta Accord, which was signed on December 15, 1994, set forth principles in the following key areas towards the implementation of a permanent Bay-Delta protection plan:

Water Quality Standards and Operations: The agreement includes water quality standards to protect the fish and wildlife of the estuary and included a commitment by the State and Federal water projects to meet the standards during the term of the Accord. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) has adopted water quality objectives consistent with the standards proposed in the agreement. The agreement asks the SWRCB to conduct water rights proceedings to implement the SWRCB's adopted Water Quality Control Plan for the Bay-Delta Estuary.

Although not a signatory to the Accord, the State Water Resources Control Board reaffirmed its commitment to issue a final water rights order implementing the Water Quality Control Plan by the expiration of the agreement in December 1998.

Endangered Species Act: The agreement specifies that compliance with the "take" provisions of the Federal Endangered Species Act is not intended to result in any additional loss of water supply. To meet that goal, the Accord allows for operational flexibility, developed through a state and federal operations group, within the constraints of the water quality standards and the Endangered Species Act. These provisions would otherwise expire in December 1997.

Environmental Restoration and Rehabilitation: The State and Federal governments and agricultural, urban, and environmental interests committed to funding non-flow ecosystem restoration projects, such as fish screens, habitat purchases, and pollution controls.

In November 1996, the voters of the State of California passed Proposition 204, which provides \$60 million for the state's share under the Category III Program. The first awards for ecosystem restoration, using this state money, are expected in mid-November, 1997. The federal share will be provided from appropriations in 1998, 1999, and 2000.

In addition to the Category III Program, the CALFED Bay-Delta Program is also working on a comprehensive plan for ecosystem restoration. The Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan (ERPP) is to be implemented as part of CALFED's long-term solution. Proposition 204 includes \$390 million for implementation of the ERPP--contingent upon a certified Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement and a state/federal cost-sharing agreement. President Clinton signed the Bay-Delta Act, authorizing \$143.3 million for ecosystem restoration in fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000. The Congress recently appropriated \$85 million for ecosystem restoration programs for fiscal year 1998. Information about the ERPP is available from the CALFED Bay-Delta Program at (916) 657-2666.

More information on the Bay-Delta can be found on the CALFED Bay Delta Program website at: <http://calfed.ca.gov> or, for all of California's natural resources, the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System (CERES) at: www.ceres.ca.gov. Detailed environmental data from a variety of sources for every watershed on a national basis, including the Bay-Delta, can be found at www.epa.gov/surf/iwi.