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**AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA WATER AGENCIES
CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
CALIFORNIA WATERFOWL ASSOCIATION
CENTRAL VALLEY PROJECT WATER ASSOCIATION
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WATER ASSOCIATION
SACRAMENTO VALLEY LANDOWNERS ASSOCIATION
WESTERN GROWERS ASSOCIATION**

October 13, 1999

The Honorable Bruce Babbitt
Secretary, U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Mary Nichols
Secretary, The Resources Agency of California
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Secretary Babbitt and Secretary Nichols:

We are writing to express our concern about the reduced emphasis that the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (CALFED) and its member agencies are placing on the installation of fish screens to protect threaten and endangered fish species and other water-dependent species in the Central Valley. Several proposals for CALFED assistance to screen diversions were not funded in the last round because of the vast number of proposals submitted and relatively limited funds available through the solicitation process. Screen proposals worthy of funding were not selected simply because the money was not available.

The installation of state-of-the-art fish screens on water diversions throughout the Central Valley is a top priority of the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Central Valley Project Improvement Act's Anadromous Fish Restoration Program (AFRP), the California Department of Fish and Game's Unscreened Diversion Program, the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Fish Screen Program, and CALFED's Ecosystem Restoration Plan (ERP). Yet, a review of current CALFED funding priorities and the 5-year outlook for the

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CVPIA Anadromous Fish Screen Program shows that these important programs are not receiving priority treatment in terms of funding.

In the past five years, water users have initiated far-reaching efforts to screen diversions, refurbish fish ladders, construct siphons, remove dams and implement other habitat improvement projects to enhance the environment. These projects allow for the multiple use of water while providing protection from entrainment to all life stages of salmon, splittail and steelhead. In addition to providing environmental benefits and keeping water users "whole", these projects also convey a positive message for the CALFED Bay-Delta program to policy makers in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

CALFED's ERP establishes specific objectives, targets and programmatic actions designed to accomplish CALFED's overall mission "...to develop a long term comprehensive plan that will restore the ecosystem health and improve water management for beneficial uses of the Bay-Delta ecosystem." If successful, the plan should rehabilitate native fish, wildlife and water-dependent species and their habitat in the Bay-Delta system, and increase water supplies and reliability for California's cities, businesses and farms. One measure of success of the overall program is an improving environment, achieved in part by implementation of restoration projects that resolve known problems. The installation of fish screens on agricultural diversions to prevent the entrainment of fish species are perhaps the best examples of projects that clearly protect the environment and reduce regulations on individual agricultural water suppliers and farmers. Screened diversions also provide assurances that water supplies can be delivered to state and federal wildlife refuges and private wetlands that benefit migrating waterfowl and other wildlife.

CALFED in coordination with AFRP has successfully installed new fish screens at several important sites in the Central Valley. However, thousands of unscreened water diversions continue to operate in the Sacramento River Basin, the San Joaquin River Basin, and Delta. Other agricultural water users in the Central Valley have a vested interest in ensuring state and federal funds are effectively managed to ultimately improve the fishery, and alleviate regulatory mandates. Their participation is based on the belief the projects will succeed, and are an effective way to restore salmon species and protect landowners from burdensome regulations. Their financial stake in these projects means they will actively oversee the government agencies carrying out the projects.

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To meet the CALFED ERP Stage 1 expectations for fish screens (i.e. screen all diversions greater than 250 cfs and majority of diversions between 100 and 250 cfs), we recommend fish screens remain a top CALFED ecosystem restoration priority for FY 2000 and through the remainder of Stage 1. We request that CALFED prioritize those projects that impart tangible benefits, and set aside a portion of the FY 2000 funding sufficient to cover Central Valley screen proposals. The six year budget schedule for the Central Valley Project Improvement Act implementation must also be bolstered to continue long-term execution of screen projects.

If you have questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Dan Keppen at NCWA at 916-442-8333.

Sincerely,

Donald Gordon
President
Agricultural Council of California

Stephen K. Hall
Executive Director
Association of California Water Agencies

Bill Pauli
Executive Director
California Farm Bureau Federation

Bill Gaines
Director of Government Affairs
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David L. Moore
President
Western Growers Association

cc: Key state and federal elected officials
Robert Hight, CDFG
Jim Lecky, NMFS
Michael Spear, USFWS
CALFED and Restoration Fund Round Tables

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