



December 9, 2014

Members of the California Congressional Delegation
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear California Congressional Delegation,

In the last twelve months, the Brown Administration has dealt with the most extreme three-year drought of modern times, while trying to implement a long-term, broad-based strategy to better protect California from future water shortages. We have done both with a recognition that the public interest is best-served by developing strategies that enjoy broad support across California and to fairly balance the needs of a diverse state with many different stakeholders and regional concerns.

As a result of the drought state of emergency declared by the Governor on January 17, 2014, California state agencies have worked very closely with their federal counterparts and impacted stakeholders to provide critically needed water supplies while protecting our water quality, imperiled species, and fragile ecosystems -- all are suffering from these unprecedented drought conditions. With a possible fourth year of drought, these same state and federal agencies are working to prepare a 2015 Drought Operations Plan, and expect to complete it early next month. Building on the experience of last year, these agencies are actively exploring alternative approaches to water project operations that hopefully will better optimize both water supplies and species protections under extreme conditions. Work in developing this plan continues. But, one thing is certain: managing an extreme drought is best done in real-time here in California, by agencies with on the ground experience and expertise, in close collaboration with affected stakeholders. This is the only way to rapidly and equitably balance all of the competing needs such as regulated and unregulated stream flow, locations of critical fish populations, upstream storage needs for temperature control and conservation purposes, salinity conditions as influenced by tidal cycles and barometric conditions, and others. In January, the Administration also adopted the California Water Action Plan, a comprehensive plan for future water management, including storage, conservation, recycling, water transfers and other actions that will better enable the state to provide for the next generation of Californians. Many elements in the Water Action Plan were included in Proposition 1 – the water bond – that was approved by over two-thirds of California voters just weeks ago.

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Coming off a year where more progress has been made on water policy in California than any time in recent years – with broad support evident in the electorate for this strategy – this is no time to reignite water wars, move water policy back into the courts, and try to pit one part of the state against another. For this reason, the administration opposes HR5781. Our collective energies should be devoted to a long-term solution for California's water needs in a way that rewards working together as opposed to dividing interests, just as the successful campaign for the water bond recently did. We stand ready to work with the supporters and opponents of HR5781 to that end.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Laird". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John Laird
Secretary for California Natural Resources