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Historic Recommendations Presented to the Delta Stewardship Council

Diverse coalition of national and local environmental, fishing and environmental justice groups recommend solutions to settle California water wars and recover the San Francisco Bay-Delta watershed

Stockton, California, At tonight's meeting of the Delta Stewardship Council a coalition of diverse environmental, environmental justice and fishing groups from throughout California will present a consensus set of recommendations designed to bring balance to the historic conflicts between water for California, and water for the environment. The recommendations presented by this diverse group calls for an analysis of various conveyance and export alternatives, including recommendations to reduce exports and replace the water with an aggressive statewide conservation program.

The recommendations follow in the footsteps of the State Water Board's ground-shaking and scientifically-based Delta Flows report, which indicates that the health of the largest estuary on the west coast needs to have greater inflows and outflows and less water diversions if it is to survive as a home for fish and wildlife. Bill Jennings, Ex. Director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, and long time Delta advocate stated, "Water flows are at the heart of the challenges faced by in-Delta and through-Delta fisheries. How we meet the California legislature's requirement of "reduced reliance on the Delta" will be a challenge, but the State Water Board has shown us it must be done"

The groups have presented data that clearly shows that agricultural and urban interests can accommodate to the changes while saving California taxpayers billions of dollars in the process. They are clear that the changes will take time, with a phased approach necessary to allow accommodation by communities, businesses, farmers and urban citizens alike. Jonas Minton, Water Policy Advisor at the Planning and Conservation League noted, "These fiscally prudent recommendations can allow California's economy to prosper with a healthy environment."

Barbara Barrigan Parrilla, Executive Director of Restore the Delta, explains that, "Successful habitat restoration in the Delta requires those living and working in the Delta to be full partners in designing, implementing and evaluating the restoration projects." She further states, "In many cases restoration can be designed to be compatible with sustainable Delta agricultural practices."

There is no doubt that the status quo cannot continue. Commercial and recreational fishing for salmon has essentially been closed for the past three years as a result of Bay-Delta problems.

Chinook salmon is probably the iconic fish of California, especially for coastal communities from Santa Barbara to the Oregon Coast. Zeke Grader, Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's Associations, speaking for those who bear the brunt of this disaster said, "Restoring the Delta estuary means restoring salmon – a native California food and unequalled source of quality protein; moreover, restoring that estuary and its fish will create sustainable, high value jobs for the state."

The groups feel that both fishing communities and farmers must find solution, and do it by working together. Dr. Mark Rockwell, California Representative for the Endangered Species Coalition says, "Endangered species challenges, especially for California fisheries, have put the Delta problems on the National stage, and we have to find balanced solutions through cooperation not conflict. We have to resist reverting to our old ways of water management, and find methods that brings recovery of endangered species, and adequate water for farmers and city dwellers alike."

The Delta Stewardship Council is charged with developing a plan for the Delta by the end of the year. Debbie Davis, Policy Director for the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water stated that she "looks forward to working with the Stewardship Council to assure that the Delta Plan is just and equitable for disadvantaged communities." Barbara Vlamis, Executive Director of AquAlliance in Chico added, "Without protection for the mighty Sacramento River watershed, California's cities, Delta, and economy are lost. As the state struggles to regain its hydrologic health, preservation is equally as important as restoration."

This is a critical moment for the Council, the Bay-Delta ecosystem and all Californians. The Delta's ecosystem is in a state of ongoing collapse and there are concerns regarding the long-term physical stability of the Delta. Barry Nelson, Senior Policy Analyst for the Natural Resources Defense Council feels that "Crafting a visionary and effective Delta Plan will require the careful consideration of a wide range of alternative actions, including significant new directions in water management which this diverse group has presented."

The complete document submitted to the Council can be viewed at: www.ewccalifornia.org.

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