



January 30, 2014

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Opposition to H.R. 3964

Dear Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member DeFazio and Members of the Committee:

California is experiencing the worst water crisis in our modern history. We are in our third consecutive year of below normal precipitation and, this year's snowpack – on which 25 million Californians depend as the source of their water supply – currently is only 10 percent of what it should be. In Sacramento and Redding, we have broken all records for consecutive dry days in the middle of the rainy season. The California Department of Public Health reports that 17 communities across the state are at risk of running out of drinking water within 60-120 days. Just days ago, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife announced the closure of several fisheries and CAL FIRE has already responded to over 400 fires in the month of January, a startling fact when you consider they responded to zero during the same time last year. As you know, California's climate is such that it is generally dry for almost half the year – and we rely on rain and snow during the winter season to carry us through the year. Conditions – in terms of both water supply and water quality – are unprecedented and serious. Simply put, we face the driest year on record, after two dry years, which is why Governor Brown proclaimed a drought State of Emergency on January 17, 2014.

California is a huge state, in which its 38 million residents depend on a large and unique series of dams, canals, and waterways administered by hundreds of different water agencies. It is a complex system – and legislation that alters it in favor of some interests over others in a different part of the state, in the middle of this great water emergency when water managers have tried to plan and act on current realities – is not helpful.

I write today to express California's strong opposition to H.R. 3964, which seeks to undermine California's own ability to address serious water challenges and to erase years of progress toward a collaborative long-solution to address our long-term water needs. The bill falsely holds

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the promise of water relief that cannot be delivered because in this drought, the water simply does not exist. It would be much more prudent to help educate California residents and members of Congress how dire this situation is, and that we must work together on the limited items that might be helpful in such an emergency situation.

The state of California is also focused on finding long-term solutions that unite us during this challenging time. State law, enacted in 2009, requires us to achieve the co-equal goals of both water supply reliability and ecosystem restoration through the use of sound science. In fact, earlier this week the state finalized an action plan on storage, conservation, recycling, water transfers, and all actions that we can take to make California's water system more robust. We ask for your help in those constructive, long-term efforts – where we are trying to bring people together around solutions.

The choices we face in this drought are extraordinary. Rarely are we forced to simultaneously confront water allocations this critically low, Delta salinity conditions this uniquely challenging, and the difficulty of moving water around the state due to low reservoir levels.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 3964 and instead ask Congress to join us in supporting consensus-based water solutions that are truly responsive to California's drought and long-term water needs.

Sincerely,



John Laird
Secretary for Natural Resources

cc: California Congressional Delegation