

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

Thank you for your letter dated May 15, 2009. In it, you referenced the Drought Task Force. We appreciate the formation of the Drought Task Force and, as Representatives from the San Joaquin Valley, we would welcome the opportunity to contribute positively to the efforts of the Drought Task Force by participating in future meetings. This would make for a more collaborative process. In addition, we would like more information on the Drought Task Force; its members, meetings that have been held, action items that resulted, and plans for upcoming meetings.

In light of the distressing biological opinion released on June 4, 2009 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), we want to take this opportunity to reiterate our interest in a follow-up meeting with you on the status of those projects we discussed during our first meeting.

As you may know, NOAA's biological opinion found that the pumping operations of the Central Valley Project jeopardize long-term survival of winter and spring-run Chinook salmon, the green sturgeon, Central Valley steelhead, and Southern Resident killer whales. It calls for substantial reductions amounting to approximately 330,000 acre-feet in Central Valley and State Water Project water exports that are vital to agricultural water users south of the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta. We think that the operational impacts on the state and federal water projects are vastly underestimated. Additionally, there are substantial biological assessments that have been performed on the Delta, but NOAA has confirmed that these were not taken into account in the biological opinion. Thus, we believe that the biological opinion is seriously flawed.

As we discussed in our first meeting, there are a myriad of factors affecting the decline of fisheries in the Delta. These include tertiary treatment from sewage facilities which cause ammonia to drain into the Delta, unscreened private pump diversions, non-point source pollution from the surrounding urban areas, and invasive species, among other stressors. Coupled with past reallocations and the present reality of a third below-normal rain year, the economic impacts will be further devastating to our already depressed region. This drought could last another few years. The last drought began in 1988 and did not end until 1993.

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We look forward to an opportunity to sit down with you to follow-up on these issues, and we again renew our invitation to you to visit the Valley. Our farmworkers, farmers, and farm communities are looking for hope that someone in Washington cares, besides their representatives. Your visit would be important in demonstrating that the Obama Administration wants to help solve the difficult challenge we face in trying to provide food for our nation.

Our staff will be following-up with you shortly to arrange a time that would be convenient to meet.



JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



DENNIS CARDOZA
Member of Congress