



August 23, 2019

Nancy Vogel
California Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Vogel,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to explain why we believe the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion project would be an excellent fit for the Water Resilience Portfolio. This innovative, multi-benefit project would provide critically important environmental water, enhance regional water supply security, and foster new relationships across watersheds.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir is an off-stream reservoir in Brentwood that is owned and operated by Contra Costa Water District. The proposed expansion would make substantial water available to wildlife refuges in the San Joaquin Valley, helping to meet a major unmet need for environmental water. The project has made significant progress towards its financial and permitting goals, but state support remains necessary to make the proposed environmental benefits a reality.

Only 5% of the wetlands that once spread across the Central Valley remain today, largely as publicly and privately managed refuge lands. These wetlands are essential habitat for hundreds of winged and terrestrial species, are part of California's commitment to national and international Pacific Flyway agreements, help to recharge overdrafted aquifers, serve as filters to improve water quality flowing to the Delta, and provide sportsmen and recreationalists opportunities to interact with nature.

Despite their importance, these Central Valley refuges rarely receive adequate water. The 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) established water requirements for 19 California refuges and wildlife areas. In the Act's 25-year history, the state/federal partnership created by the CVPIA has only delivered 100% of needed refuge water supplies to south-of-Delta refuges that have the required conveyance capacity twice. The proposed Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project would provide a significant enhancement of CVPIA deliveries,

averaging 46,000 acre-feet annually. This water, which would be used for the seasonal irrigation of wetland plants and winter habitat, would be enormously beneficial for waterfowl, shorebirds, giant garter snakes, and myriad other species that rely on the refuges.

This multi-benefit project is a concrete, near-term opportunity to dedicate substantial water to an unmet environmental need in California's Central Valley. To make the proposed environmental benefits a reality, the project will need continued support through the permitting and financing process. While the Water Commission's eligibility determination for Proposition 1 funding was a major step forward, substantial work remains. Among other priorities, there is a need to secure water rights approvals from the State Water Resources Control Board, a water conveyance agreement with the Department of Water Resources, long-term funding for conveyance to the refuges from state or federal funding sources, and efforts to ensure that the public-benefit agreement between the project and the Department of Fish and Wildlife is adequate to make the proposed environmental benefits a long-term reality.

For all of these reasons, we believe the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion project would be an excellent fit for the Water Resilience Portfolio. Please contact us with any questions or to discuss this project and the important environmental benefits it proposes to provide.

Sincerely,



Rachel Zwillinger
Defenders of Wildlife



Michael Lynes
Audubon California



Jay Ziegler
The Nature Conservancy



Ric Ortega
Grassland Water District