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Testimony on “Creating Jobs by Overcoming Man-Made
Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act
April 11, 2011

Good morning

My name is Mary Nejedly Piepho and I am a member of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here on behalf of the Delta County Boards of Supervisors that represent the five counties encompassing the Delta: Sacramento, Yolo, Solano, San Joaquin and Contra Costa. Together, we represent more than four million Californians that live and work in the Delta. I am here today to encourage you to work together with us in solving the very serious water challenges facing our regions and the state, rather than solutions that might benefit one region at the expense of others.

The five Delta Counties joined together to articulate a common vision and voice for the Delta, advocating on

behalf of local government and the 4 million people in the Delta. We are fully aware that two-thirds of our state relies on water that flows through the Delta and that it is an ecosystem of national significance. We feel strongly that we should have an integral role in addressing the multitude of complex Delta issues that directly affect us in every way. “Nothing about us without us”.

The DCC strongly supports a scientifically-based approach to solving water issues for the state, and restoring the Delta ecosystem. We encourage Congress to support the recent state legislative actions contained in the Delta Reform Act and the existing body of state law. Additionally, we hope that Congress will fund as a priority scientific expertise in helping to address these problems. In particular, Congress should rely on the considerable expertise of the federal and state biologists who have studied the Delta and its fish populations to determine actions to protect and restore the Delta ecosystem, rather than imposing conditions through legislation that would further contribute to the decline of the Delta smelt and other at-risk species.

The Delta is a unique and critically important natural resource to the state and the nation, above and beyond its clear value to the residents, families, farms and those that

depend upon its fishery. The Delta as a place supports 4 million people and I am one of them. The Delta, at 1,300 square miles, is the largest estuary and wetland ecosystem on the west coasts of both North and South America, and includes over 500,000 acres of agricultural land and 200,000 jobs. The five-county Delta region has consistently contributed more than \$2 billion annually in agricultural gross value.

California has a very diverse economy, up and down the state, with no single sector dominating our total state economy. Our state's economic health depends on a healthy Bay-Delta and comprehensive water program that balances the needs of all sectors and all users -- agricultural, recreational and tourism, commercial, industrial and residential water provision alike. Each is vital.

We recognize the serious economic problems facing the Central Valley and the importance of Central Valley agriculture to the state and nation. We have similar economic impacts and values in our area as well. Surely, there must be a close examination of the diverse factors which contribute to these problems, and solutions to these contributing factors must be jointly crafted. All who care about the Valley and California water issues should

acknowledge that there is a body of data prepared by respected individuals and institutions suggesting that some problems in the Central Valley have relatively little to do with reductions at the south delta export pumps.

There have been a number of official letters and reports during and since 2009 that confirm that most of the recent reductions in water supplies were due to drought conditions and not simply Endangered Species Act restrictions.¹ It is crucial that the examination of the complex and at times interrelated problem areas is comprehensive so that real and sustainable solutions to these problems can be achieved. For both short and long-term benefits to the state.

It is also important to note that additional impacts to the Delta fishery will continue to create economic hardship in other areas of the state, for example, to the salmon and recreational fishing industries. We must be very careful in implementing supposed 'solutions' that benefit one area of the state while adversely affecting another.

There are several items that the Subcommittee should consider as priorities for resolution, which we think will

¹ (Lester Snow letter to Sen. Feinstein 5/09, Congressional Research Service Report on CA Drought 12/09, and University of the Pacific – Eberhardt School of Business, Unemployment in the San Joaquin Valley in 2009: Fish or Foreclosure, 8/09)

help move the state toward real and comprehensive solutions

First among these is additional storage south of the Delta. Until the critical issue of south Delta storage is addressed and implemented, there is little or no benefit to removing pump restrictions; there is simply no place to store any additionally gained water. Since December, there have been several extended periods when the export pumps were not constrained by the biological opinions, but rather by their own ability to pump water or deliver it. Most recently, the pumps shut down completely and they are still not delivering as much as they could because there is no place to store the water. If agencies are not getting their full amounts this year, it is because investments have not been made for storage to enable more water to be pumped in wet years (which would also help in dry years).

Second is the adoption of a solutions-oriented approach, beginning with immediate actions we know will be required now and in the long term. These include emergency planning, protection of key infrastructure with levee improvements, fish screening and actions to promote a healthy ecosystem that will enhance water supplies and improvement of water quality for all.

An additional and absolutely critical investment we need to make in order to ensure reliable, high-quality water supply for all users everywhere, is in the improvement of the Delta levee system. The Delta Vision project, completed by the State of California, arrived at the same conclusion. Levees are a critical part of water supply and quality. They are not “only” for flood control or for the protection of local privately owned lands. Levees protect water quality and important infrastructure that keeps California running and will for the foreseeable future. We must protect levees today in order to protect existing water supplies and maintain operational flexibility even with any proposed isolated conveyance facility.

In your deliberations we hope that you will consider these and other solutions that benefit the Central Valley with consideration of the state as a whole. We believe that ensuring the continued health and reliability of the Delta is key to the health of the other regions that depend upon it. We look forward to working with you on comprehensive solutions that benefit us all rather than pitting us one against another.

In closing, let me reference the *Principles of Agreement* adopted by the Delta Counties Coalition, which describe our joint interests on the Bay Delta Estuary and are

attached to our written testimony. I will not address these Principles in detail, but hope you can find time to review them. The Delta Counties Coalition believes the Bay-Delta must be protected and restored or it will not be available as a resource that is reliably available to help meet the various and legitimate needs of those around the state who must surely share our interest in protecting this precious and valuable resource.

Thank you for considering our testimony today.

Delta Counties Coalition Principles of Agreement

The Coalition adopted a set of founding principles of agreement by resolution for the purpose of articulating mutual interests on Delta issues and formulating the foundation for a strategic program of action to further the directives of the Coalition. Furthermore, the Coalition has resolved to work together and with other agencies to better understand Delta-related issues from a regional perspective and to use their unified voice to advocate on behalf of local government in available forums at the federal and state levels. The following includes those principles regarding the management of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and greater Bay/Delta Estuary:

1. Protect and improve water quality and water quantity in the Delta region and maintain appropriate Delta outflow for a healthy estuary;
2. Protect the existing water right priority system and legislative protections established for the Delta;
3. Respect and safeguard Delta Counties' responsibilities related to land use, water resources, flood management, tax revenues, public health and safety, economic development, agricultural stability, recreation, and environmental protection in any new Delta governance structures;
4. Represent and include local government in any new governance structures for the Delta;
5. Protect the economic viability of agriculture and the ongoing vitality of communities in the Delta;

6. Support rehabilitation, improvement and maintenance of levees throughout the Delta;
7. Support the Delta pool concept; in which the common resource provides quality freshwater supply to all Delta users, requiring mutual responsibility to maintain, restore and protect the common resource;
8. Support immediate improvements to through-Delta conveyance;
9. Require that any water conveyance plan for the Delta be aligned with the principles established by this resolution and supported by clearly demonstrated improvement the entire state's water management;
10. Protect and restore the Delta ecosystem including adequate water supply and quality to support it in perpetuity;
11. Include the study of storage options and implementation of conservation, recycling, reuse, regional self-sufficiency as part of a statewide improved flood management and water supply system; and
12. Support those conservation actions that are aligned with the principles established by this resolution and that are in accordance with habitat plans and programs of the Delta Counties.