

Committee on Resources

Testimony

Subcommittee on Water and Power

Thursday, April 17, 1997

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STATEMENT OF LESLIE FRIEDMAN JOHNSON

**THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
CALIFORNIA REGIONAL OFFICE
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
HEARING ON THE CALFED BAY-DELTA PROGRAM
PRESIDENT'S FUNDING REQUEST FOR FY 1998
APRIL 17, 1997**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing me an opportunity to submit this statement regarding the CALFED Bay-Delta Program on behalf of The Nature Conservancy ("Conservancy"). The Conservancy is an international, non-profit land conservation organization dedicated to the long-term preservation of biological diversity.¹ For more than 45 years The Nature Conservancy has implemented our mission by focusing on local, on-the-ground conservation, utilizing the best available science, market forces, and partnerships with people and groups across the political spectrum. We currently have conservation programs in all 50 states and 17 other nations. The Conservancy has more than 900,000 individual members and over 1,385 corporate sponsors. The premise that underlies our work is that in order to safeguard imperiled species, we must protect and often restore their habitats. The Conservancy has been actively implementing ecosystem conservation and restoration projects at sites throughout the Bay-Delta watershed for nearly 20 years. Because we share CALFED's goal of restoring Bay-Delta ecosystem health, the Conservancy has been actively participating in the CALFED process since the Bay-Delta Accord was signed. We are also an active participant in the California Bay-Delta Water Coalition, and have signed on to the Coalition testimony submitted to you today under separate cover. For my individual statement I will focus on the specific questions you have asked me to address.

SUMMARY

As authorized in October 1996 by P.L. 104-333, Title XI, the California Bay-Delta Environmental Enhancement and Water Security Act, the Administration has included \$143.3 million for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program in the Bureau of Reclamation's FY'98 budget request. ***The Nature Conservancy strongly supports this funding level request.***

The San Francisco Bay-Delta and its watershed is a 500-square-mile region supporting an immense diversity and richness of aquatic and terrestrial species and habitats as well as substantial commercial and sport fisheries, several of which are on the verge of extinction. In addition, the estuary and its watershed support considerable wetland habitat for waterfowl that provides a large

recreational hunting base. Simultaneously, the Bay-Delta Estuary serves as the primary water supply conveyance system for a massive agricultural economy and two-thirds of California's

population. The conflict between these competing uses has produced significant environmental problems, which in turn have stalled efforts to improve water supply reliability for all interested parties. Similarly, the future viability of commercial and sport fishing on the West Coast is dependent upon solving these complex ecological problems.

The Bay-Delta ecosystem also has important implications for other Western states. For example, this region provides critical nesting and wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl whose seasonal migrations along the Pacific Flyway reach from northern Alaska to the tip of South America. Moreover, a restored salmon fishery in California could benefit fisheries along much of the Pacific Coast and decrease the likelihood of additional listings under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

STATUS OF THE CALFED PROCESS FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

First, I must point out that there is no single environmental perspective. The environmental community is made up of a diversity of organizations spanning the spectrum from small, local grass-roots groups to large, international corporations. Each of these groups has a slightly different focus ranging from comprehensive ecosystem restoration to local watershed projects to water conservation to reduction of point-source pollution. The CALFED program, likewise, is actually multiple programs: interim, long-term, ecosystem restoration, water supply reliability, water quality and levee system vulnerability. As a result there exists an enormous range of perspectives depending on which group one polls regarding which specific program area.

Environmental and conservation organizations have demonstrated unprecedented commitment to the CALFED process. In the ten years I have been working on conservation issues in California I have never before seen anything approaching the level of environmental and conservation group involvement witnessed in the CALFED arena. To the best of my knowledge, every CALFED forum--including public workshops, the Bay Delta Advisory Council (BDAC), the Ecosystem Roundtable, BDAC work groups on finance, assurances, water quality, water supply reliability, and ecosystem restoration--is attended by at least one and often multiple representatives of the environmental community. In addition, a broad diversity of conservation and environmental interests has come together as the Environmental Water Caucus (EWC), a forum for sharing information and coordinating input to the CALFED Bay-Delta program. EWC, in turn, has established multiple work groups to focus on various CALFED program elements. Collectively this is a remarkable response from a community that is chronically understaffed and under- or un-funded.

Environmental and conservation groups are at the table because we believe it will take a comprehensive program on the scale of that undertaken by CALFED to effectively address the complex problems manifest in the Bay-Delta. The environmental community is clearly as fully engaged as any other interest group in developing a rational, consensus-based solution to Bay-Delta problems. It is also important to note that a commitment to the process does not imply a blanket endorsement of CALFED recommendations.

NEED FOR THE FUNDING LEVEL IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S FY'98 BUDGET: IMMEDIATE SPENDING ON ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION IS A PRIORITY FOR ALL CALIFORNIA

Although the CALFED program requires all parts of a long-term solution to move forward together, agencies and stakeholder interests have recognized the need to begin implementation of ecosystem restoration immediately. We believe this is important for several reasons. **First**, the ecosystem restoration element of the CALFED program is the foundation for all of the other program elements. With so many species in decline or on the brink of extinction, restoration of ecosystem health is widely recognized to be necessary to achieve long-term water supply reliability. Thus, while the CALFED agencies are developing several alternative long-term solutions, an aggressive ecosystem restoration program, by the agreement of all parties, will be common to all of the alternatives.

Second, commitment of significant funding--on the order of the current federal funding request-- is a necessary precondition to stimulate development of ecosystem restoration projects on a scale sufficient to achieve restoration of ecosystem health. Uncertainty about the availability of funding has had a stifling effect on development of large-scale restoration projects. In an era of decreasing funding, agencies and private organizations alike have been reluctant to invest the effort or resources necessary to develop large-scale projects because they have lacked confidence that funding would be available to carry them out.

Federal funds will be used in conjunction with existing Proposition 204, Central Valley Project Improvement Act and other restoration program funds to support an array of urgently needed ecological improvements including, but not limited to:

- *Restoration of tidal, shallow water, riparian, instream, wetland, and other habitats;
- *Improved fish protection and management;
- *Protection and enhancement of existing habitat;
- *Expanded wetlands protection;
- *Improved ecosystem water quality to support aquatic resources;
- *Improved habitat management;
- *Improved management of introduced species;
- *Identification and addressing of other limiting factors that have impaired ecosystem recovery.

I would like to elaborate a bit by describing a few types of activity for which funding is urgently needed:

Emergency measures to prevent additional listings and/or extinction. A clear, and widely-supported priority for immediate funding is activity that immediately, directly and tangibly improves conditions for species approaching or on the brink of extinction. Activities that may meet this definition include screening unscreened water diversions, improving fish passage, and restoring habitat for listed and candidate species.

Experimental and demonstration projects. There are several highly-degraded habitat types central to the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Common Program for which restoration technologies are still relatively unproved (e.g. Delta wetlands). Immediate development of large-scale experimental and demonstration restoration projects is a necessary step in the direction of restored ecosystem health.

Large-scale habitat restoration. Preliminary drafts of the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program plan

have indicated a need to acquire, protect and/or restore large amounts of habitat. Again, dependability of funding is critical to development of a successful program. Without secure funding (or at least good prospects), agencies and private entities are much less likely to pursue such projects.

The CALFED process has significantly advanced the collective vision of ecosystem restoration in the Bay-Delta watershed; the requested federal funding will provide the means to begin seriously implementing that vision.

THE CALFED RESTORATION COORDINATION PROGRAM: A SYSTEMATIC, CONSENSUS-BASED APPROACH TO PROJECT FUNDING

As noted above, the Administration has included \$143.3 million for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program in the Bureau of Reclamation's FY'98 budget request. As implementation occurs, it is anticipated that funds will also be transferred to other federal agencies participating in the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. *The Nature Conservancy strongly supports this "one-stop" federal line item as an efficient and streamlined approach to funding the interim CALFED ecosystem restoration program.*

I am going to leave it to the other panelists to describe the CALFED Restoration Coordination Program and the Ecosystem Roundtable, and will limit my comments to addressing how I believe this approach improves upon the status quo.

As mentioned above, the Conservancy has been implementing conservation and restoration projects in the Bay-Delta watershed for nearly 20 years. Over that period, developments in the

field of conservation biology have led us and others to recognize that conservation and restoration of ecosystems, including the natural processes that sustain them, is more effective and sustainable than species by species conservation efforts. Ecosystem restoration of the magnitude required to achieve ecosystem "health" needs to be conducted on a large scale, and in a highly-coordinated fashion.

To date, there has been no coordinating framework to guide the actions of various state, federal, local and private interests. Due to limited resources, differing agendas and lack of coordination, these interests have historically pursued projects of relatively small scale in a manner that is fragmented, reactive, and often focused on narrow objectives (e.g. habitat acquisition for a single species without respect to ecosystem context or natural process function). While state, federal and local entities have indeed cooperated on many important and worthwhile projects, and are increasingly developing projects on an ecosystem scale, the various priorities, decision-making processes and institutional constraints unique to each agency or group often make cooperative efforts cumbersome.

The CALFED Restoration Coordination Program promises to be a vast improvement over traditional ecosystem funding programs in that CALFED, with input from stakeholders on the Ecosystem Roundtable, has developed a process to coordinate not only the expenditure of the requested federal funds, but also CVPIA Restoration Fund, Proposition 204 and other funding sources. We strongly support CALFED's role in coordinating this effort. Fragmenting the federal appropriation among the various federal agencies or earmarking of specific projects would undermine the coordination already underway.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee to describe The Nature Conservancy's

support of the CALFED Bay-Delta program and the Administration's FY'98 funding request. As we have described in greater detail above, ecosystem restoration is a necessary foundation for other elements of the CALFED program, and is critical to the long-term environmental and economic health of the West and the United States as a whole. The requested federal funding is urgently needed to move these ecosystem restoration efforts forward.

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