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The Honorable Phil Isenberg
Chair, Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force
650 Capitol Mall, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814



Dear Mr. Isenberg:

I write to you as President of the Board of Trustees of Reclamation District No. 999 (District). This letter is intended to provide the Delta Vision Task Force with an overview of the District's lands and operations, and its status as a "special place" within the greater Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. In preparing its final recommendations for the resource management of the Delta, the Task Force should give due weight to the needs and importance of our community and its people, and fashion a comprehensive program that provides for a healthily functioning ecosystem while ensuring the ongoing reasonable and beneficial use of water within the Delta.

The California Legislature created the District by special act in 1919 to safeguard approximately 26,000 acres of productive agricultural lands in Yolo and Solano Counties from flooding and overflow. (Reclamation District No. 999, Chapter 161, Statutes of 1919.) This area is bordered by the Deep Water Ship Channel and the Yolo Bypass to the west, Sutter Slough to the south, Elkhorn Slough and the Sacramento River to the east, and Reclamation District No. 307 to the north. The historical township of Clarksburg is in the northern part of the District, near the Sacramento River. Today, the District has the primary responsibility for virtually all facets of water management within its jurisdiction. Not only does the District operate and maintain the levees that protect the District's lands from floods and overflow, but also delivers water for irrigation and operates extensive drainage facilities.

The thriving agricultural community within the District's boundaries is a striking example of traditional family farming successfully adapting to changing market conditions. Since the 1850s, agriculture in this area focused primarily on vegetable row crops and grains. But during the 1960s, a growing demand for California wines prompted farmers to begin planting grape vines. Today, the District's lands form the backbone of the Clarksburg wine appellation, home to more than 25 varieties of grapes and a stable of fine wineries, including Bogle. Located in Sacramento's backyard, Clarksburg's Old Sugar Mill has become a popular weekend destination and wine-tasting venue. In short, six generations of family farmers in the District have developed a pastoral legacy that we anticipate will prosper for centuries, and that exemplifies the kind of special place that the Delta Vision process has recognized as critical to the area's future.

As a steward of our water resources, the District has also taken steps to ensure the coexistence of the beneficial use of water in our community with aquatic species in the Delta channels. In 2005, the District installed a positive fish screen barrier on one of its major water intake facilities, one of the first major screening efforts in the northern Delta. The District is currently working with State agencies to screen the rest of the District's diversions.

Yet it has come to our attention that one of the many recent proposals presented to the Task Force is a plan for the State to take most or all of the lands within the District and surrounding areas by negotiated sale or eminent domain, and to convert our lands from a community into a seasonal floodway and marsh. The Task Force should dismiss this approach outright. Such a plan would destroy our homes, our farms and our family legacies, hamstringing the Clarksburg wine appellation, and eliminate a large, increasingly productive swath of the Yolo County tax base.

Instead, the Task Force should focus on other, more measured alternatives to improving passage of northern Delta floodwaters and enhancing habitat. One less invasive approach to controlling floods would be to improve the efficiency of the Yolo Bypass. If any additional seasonal floodways in the north Delta are deemed of critical importance, they should be located in narrow, targeted areas away from acreage that is planted in high-value permanent crops, such as grape vines.

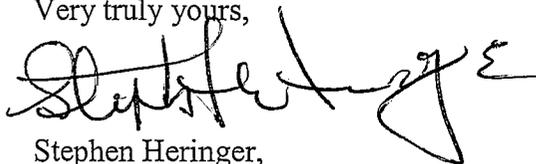
The Task Force's Final Report implicitly recognizes that places like the District must be preserved. First, the report recognizes the importance of the Delta as a special place, and historic agricultural communities such as the District are a critical component of what makes the Delta so special. Second, the Report cites the coequal goals of water supply and ecosystem protection, underscoring the California Constitution's requirement put water resources "to beneficial use to the fullest extent" possible. The beneficial use of water within the Delta, at the confluence of the State's two largest river systems, warrants a higher priority than the use of that water in distant locations, as recognized in the Water Code's protections for watersheds of origin.

It should be remembered that the imbalances in the Delta ecosystem are primarily the consequence of the construction and operation of the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project. Along with the Delta ecosystem itself, the water users in the Delta are the most negatively affected by the operation of the Projects. The State committed itself to protecting in-Delta waters users from the effects of the Projects, not sacrificing them in order to sustain high export rates, when it executed the North Delta Water Agency contract in 1981.

On a final note, we urge the Task Force to make a more concerted effort to reach out to local landowners and solicit their feedback on the final recommendations. More than any other group of stakeholders, the residents of the Delta will most strongly feel the impact of these decisions.

We appreciate the efforts of the Task Force, and the District's Board of Trustees looks forward to working with you in laying the groundwork for a sustainable future for our Delta.

Very truly yours,



Stephen Heringer,

President, Board of Trustees, Reclamation District No. 999

cc: Hon. Arnold Schwarzenegger

Governor, State of California

Board of Trustees, District

Board of Trustees, Reclamation District No. 150

Board of Trustees, Reclamation District No. 307

Board of Trustees, Reclamation District No. 765