



September 16, 2014



Dear Secretary Vilsack,

The organizations on this letter are writing to ask for your immediate help in responding to an unprecedented third year of drought conditions in California's Central Valley, and the effect on migratory bird species that are already arriving to find a landscape lacking in food resources and habitat. We believe that there are immediate actions that could dramatically improve the situation and help alleviate what looks to be a critically dry year for migratory waterfowl and other wetlands dependant species.

One of the cruel ironies of this drought for waterfowl is that very good breeding ground conditions have resulted in record waterfowl populations that will be heading south along all four flyways this winter. In the Pacific Flyway, those birds are arriving on a landscape that lacks its historical wetlands areas, has under-resourced public and private managed habitats, and will simply be unable to meet the needs expected to be delivered based on international migratory bird treaties and Pacific Flyway partnerships.

Ducks Unlimited food resource modeling predicts that food demand will exceed supply for waterfowl and other migratory bird species. This unfortunate circumstance is due to the lack of available summer irrigation water for public refuges to grow nutritionally valuable plants and the near complete elimination of post-harvest winter flooded rice which today provides upwards of 50% of the wintering waterfowl and migratory bird food resources. This is coupled with fall/winter water supplies to refuges that will be 50-60% of their mandate federal allocation goals. The situation for private wetlands is much worse; some may see no water at all. Planted rice acres are down 25%, and there will likely be large reductions (upwards of 80%) in the amount of available surface water for flooding of harvested fields.

Refuges and public trust investments should continue to be the backbone of migratory bird habitat in California's Central Valley. However, we must also rely on winter flooded rice. During this unprecedented drought and resultant shortfall in food resources, short term solutions that can be implemented quickly have become high priority. Pumping groundwater to supply public and private wetlands, as well as harvested rice fields, could provide much needed short-term relief. Areas such as public and private wetlands that are not receiving adequate water, and the roughly 450,000 acres of rice that were planted in the Central Valley, given the appropriate incentives (funding), could be flooded with pumped groundwater to create immediate energetic and habitat opportunities for migratory birds.

The benefits of making extra water available on rice fields has also been clearly demonstrated for shorebirds, another group of migratory, wetland-associated birds that are critically dependent on the Central Valley's wetlands. Data gathered by the BirdReturns project, a collaboration between The Nature Conservancy, California Rice Commission, Audubon California, Point Blue Conservation Science, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, shows clearly that shorebirds and other migratory birds respond quickly to the presence of water on the landscape, which replaces essential habitat that is not otherwise available. In addition, projects like this that add water to the landscape have been shown to increase

the productivity and economic benefit of rice fields for the landowners and growers—a true win-win for conservation.

The partners on this letter are asking that various federal agencies with an interest in water management, agriculture, and wildlife resources determine if any end of year monies returned from other budgeted expenses could be redirected into a program to cover the cost of wetland and post harvest rice field flooding. This is an economical, effective way to create much-needed habitat during this crisis.

Earlier this year, President Obama visited California's Central Valley, and brought with him an agricultural relief package to deliver much needed hope to farmers and water contractors in the midst of this crisis. We know that solutions to this water crisis continue to be an administration priority. We urge you to work with us to find cooperative solutions that can prevent a calamity for migratory birds this year.

Thank you,



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Cc: U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein  
U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer  
U.S. Representative Doug LaMalfa (CA 1)  
U.S. Representative Jared Huffman (CA 2)  
U.S. Representative John Garamendi (CA 3)  
U.S. Representative Mike Thompson (CA 5)

U.S. Representative Doris Matsui (CA 6)  
U.S. Representative George Miller (CA 11)  
Mr. Michael Boots, Council on Environmental Quality  
Mr. Mike Connor, Deputy Secretary of the Interior  
Mr. Lowell Pimley, Acting Commissioner, USBR  
Mr. David Murillo, Regional Director, Mid-Pacific Region, USBR  
Mr. Dan Ashe, Director, USFWS  
Mr. Ren Lohofener, Regional Director, USFWS  
Mr. Tomer Hasson, Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget  
Ms. Janelle Beland, Undersecretary, Natural Resources Agency  
Mr. Charlton Bonham, Director, Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Mr. Mike Sutton, President, California Fish and Game Commission