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Contact:

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, Restore the Delta, Barbara@RestoretheDelta.org; (209) 479-2053; quoted parties available for interviews;

Dr. Jon Rosenfield, Science Director, SF Baykeeper, jon@baykeeper.org; (510) 684-4757

BREAKING: Trump Water Grab Threatens Public Health for Four Million Residents in the Bay-Delta Region, California Tribes, Fishery Economies, and So Cal Water Users: Has National Implications

Southern and Northern California organizations are united in response to Executive Orders that will upend California water policy

Stockton, CA – President Trump issued [Executive Orders](#) on Friday that will have devastating consequences for California's water future, public health, and environmental protections, threatening a federal takeover of California's right to manage its land and waters. The President's orders conflate fire prevention needs with water operations in California all based on the myth that water operations for environmental protections had any impact on water infrastructure used in the Los Angeles fires. These orders prioritize corporate water interests, primarily corporate and hedge-fund farms growing [water intensive cash crops](#) in the San Joaquin Valley like almonds, at the expense of Delta communities' health and economy, Native American Tribes, the California fishing industry. It hastens the destruction of Central Valley rivers and collapse of the San Francisco Bay-Delta ecosystems, favoring corporate agricultural interests over Southern California water users recovering from devastating fires.

The Implications of these Executive Orders include:

1. **Invocation of the "[God Squad](#)":** The God Squad exemption in the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) could be deployed on the Delta's imperiled fish and several other species, exempting federal Central Valley Project (CVP) water operations from protecting them in the future and rendering any ESA protections nonexistent. Overriding environmental protections serves to extract more water from the already-collapsing Bay-Delta estuary, which will exacerbate [toxic algae blooms](#) and risk the health of four million Delta residents.
2. **Creates a Federal Mandate for Raising Shasta Dam and the Delta Conveyance Project:** The plan to raise Shasta Dam will destroy sacred sites of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, violate state laws, and harm native fish and wildlife. The Delta Conveyance Project will destroy the largest estuary on the West Coast of the Americas. Will potentially cut other programs for fish and migratory birds.
3. **Elimination of Other Federal Protections:** Calls for the elimination of federal requirements that "impose significant costs" on permitting and water deliveries. This could include eliminating clean water, public safety, waterfowl protection and salmon restoration programs. This [amounts to an "extinction plan"](#) for California's billion-dollar

commercial salmon industry, already reeling from closures and \$1 billion in economic losses over the past two years.

4. **Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP) Operations:** Will control operations of both the state and federal water projects without any protections for California rivers or the Bay-Delta estuary, leaving seven endangered species in peril and threatening water quality for millions of Bay-Delta residents.
5. **Exempting CVP and SWP Operations from California Endangered Species Act (CESA):** Overrides safeguards of the California Endangered Species Act for state and federal water operations.
6. **Water Storage:** May fast-track expensive and inefficient dam and Delta Conveyance construction projects that have been challenged, overriding protections for fish, ecosystems, and communities; prioritize maximizing reservoir capacity, halting dam removal or modification efforts; roll back regulations that safeguard water resources under the guise of ensuring water security for farms and urban areas.
7. **More to come:** Orders a prompt rewrite of some regulations that implement the federal Endangered Species Act, all over the country.
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“These executive orders are a direct assault on the health and economic vitality of Delta communities. By diverting water away from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and prioritizing storage and conveyance projects, this policy threatens to degrade our water quality, leading to increased pollution and health risks for residents, and also destroying our local economies,” **said Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, Executive Director with Restore the Delta.** “Governor Newsom must resist this federal overreach and stand firm for California’s water protections. Capitulating to Trump-era water policies would prioritize profits for industrial agriculture and foreign entities over the health, safety, and livelihoods of Californians.”

These Executive Orders come on the heels of the wildfire emergency in Los Angeles. In the last two weeks, Trump has falsely claimed that Delta water protections cause water shortages and exacerbate wildfires. Experts overwhelmingly agree that Southern California’s water challenges stem from climate-driven drought and infrastructure constraints—not protections for fish or the Delta. Despite this, Trump has used this misinformation as the foundation for his attack on California water policy. The result threatens to irreversibly damage the largest estuary on the West Coast, destroy sacred sites, and marginalize sovereign and state-recognized California tribes.

“Our people and the waters they depend on are under extreme threat. Fish and plants that are integral to our culture and our traditional food sources are endangered. We will not stand by while the Trump Administration attacks our ways of life and we call upon California’s elected and appointed officials to oppose these vile and unprecedented actions to destroy our culture and environment,” **said Malissa Tayaba, Vice-Chair, Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.**

“President Trump is trying to strip Tribal members of birthright citizenship; and he is trying to drown the Winnemem Wintu people with the raising of Shasta Dam,” **said Gary Mulcahy, Government Liaison for Winnemem Wintu Tribe.**

Governor Newsom faces a critical decision: uphold California's environmental protections and public health or capitulate to Trump-era water policies that prioritize corporate profits over people. Standing firm means safeguarding the Bay-Delta, honoring commitments to Indigenous sovereignty, and protecting millions from the impacts of ecological collapse. Capitulation would undermine decades of progress, deepen inequality for frontline and tribal communities, and align California with regressive policies that harm the environment and public trust. This moment will define California's leadership in sustainability and justice

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS FROM SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN CALIFORNIA GROUPS:

"The linkage of wildfires in Los Angeles with California water policy is coherent in one sense only: it leverages a crisis to advance a radical conservative agenda. Today, it's a radical assault on every duck, frog, and fish in the West, and on every body of water they live in. It's also an attack on all the people who live near and depend on the West's rivers, ponds, marshes, lakes, bays, and seas," **said Chris Shutes, Executive Director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance.**

"Conflating the health of the Bay-Delta in northern California with the catastrophic wildfires in Los Angeles is not only factually inaccurate, it's dangerous as it does nothing to address the underlying causes of the wildfire crisis – including climate change. Today's announcement by the new administration demonstrates both a severe misunderstanding of water management and a blatant disregard for the needs of imperiled wildlife. Communities like Altadena and Palisades desperately need aid, not more political posturing that ignores science and continues to fan the flames of climate change," **said Ashley Overhouse, Water Policy Advisor, Defenders of Wildlife.**

"President Trump's decision to use the need for disaster relief for Los Angeles wildlife victims to force through unrelated California water management policies is not only wrong, it's surreal. None of the actions he's taking to overrule state law would have made a difference in preventing or fighting the wildfires. Southern California reservoirs have plenty of water stored, and protections for endangered species constitute a very small portion of the state's overall water budget. Instead, implementing the President's wish list will dewater California rivers, promote toxic algal blooms, cause a number of native species to go extinct – not just Delta smelt, but salmon, steelhead and sturgeon – and the biggest winners would be corporate agribusinesses in the San Joaquin Valley, not the people living in the fire-prone areas. This exploitation of a humanitarian crisis to impose misinformed and destructive policies in California is an insult to the state's residents and the victims of the wildfires," **said Gary Bobker, Program Director of Friends of the River.**

There is no connection between ongoing efforts to fight southern California's urban wildfires and protections for northern California's water quality and imperiled wildlife. President Trump is deliberately misinforming people about the causes of Los Angeles's catastrophic fires to distract from his real goal, which is to divert more water to wealthy corporate cattle ranches and nut farms. Ultimately, environmental laws protect people and communities. Increasing water diversions beyond levels that are already unsustainable will harm communities that rely on San Francisco Bay's water quality and fisheries. We call on Governor Newsom to help the people of Los Angeles recover, quickly, while defending California's waters, wildlife, and vulnerable

communities from the Trump's radical anti-environmental agenda," **said Jon Rosenfield, Ph.D., Science Director for San Francisco Baykeeper.**

"Two consecutive salmon season closures, tens of thousands of fishermen and women out of work, fishing businesses closed, toxic algal blooms, temperature-polluted rivers, and millions of baby salmon killed before they even have a chance to reach the ocean – that's the reality of the Bay-Delta watershed today. Let's make it clear that water for fish is water for people and jobs. The lack of action to save salmon and protect the health of the Bay-Delta watershed and its communities is simply a way to facilitate a joint state and federal water grab. It's unfortunate that this precedent means the fourteen most terrifying words for fishermen and anyone who relies on this ecosystem are: I'm from the state and federal government, and I'm here to help the Delta. I call on Governor Newsom to finally stand up and fight for California's Bay-Delta watershed and salmon fishing jobs. Frankly, the Governor's agencies failed to do that last time," **said Scott Artis, Executive Director of Golden State Salmon Association.**

"Eliminating Delta water quality protections will not help people recover from the fires in Southern California or fight them in the future, and it will most definitely not help with the local water infrastructure we need for emergency protections including drought, flood and fire. It will take away water from Southern California people for unsustainable almond exports for big ag interests supporting Trump," **said Bruce Reznick, Executive Director of LA Waterkeeper.**

"It is deeply concerning to see a critical moment for displaced wildfire survivors in Los Angeles exploited to attack the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The urgent need for wildfire aid and the need for sustainable water management are distinct issues, yet they are being conflated to pit communities against one another. Even if the Delta is sacrificed, natural resources will still flow to industrial-scale agriculture, leaving vulnerable communities on the losing end as climate disasters increase displacement. Urban areas like South Stockton will endure severe heat waves, toxic algae-polluted waterways, and year-round exposure to high levels of PM2.5. California must reject harmful environmental rollbacks that deepen inequity and exacerbate the climate crisis," **said Gloria Alonso Cruz, Environmental Justice Advocacy Coordinator with Little Manila Rising.**

"There is no way to describe the pain these Executive Orders will cause in California -- not just for the environment but for Tribes, environmental justice communities, fishing communities, and future generations. The harmful narrative that water is being wasted or that we do not have the best interest of all Californians in mind when participating in environmental processes is purposefully divisive. Tribes and other communities have been working together for years to find solutions that are sustainable and equitable, and it is disheartening to see such harmful actions being taken that will impact California's Tribal communities. These orders taken in conjunction with the myriad of actions taken this week show that Trump intends to attack the environment in any way that he can. California has always been a leader in environmental protection and these executive orders are a giant leap backwards for our state. California has been placed on the chopping block and Governor Newsom must do everything he can to protect our beautiful state and all who live here," **said Kasil Willie, Staff Attorney of Save California Salmon.**

"President Trump's conflation of wildfire recovery with releasing more water from the Delta is a shameful political stunt that will threaten the safety and livelihood of millions of Californians. This

comes on the heels of Trump's Executive Order urging agencies to route more water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which would cause the unsustainable depletion of water from an already failing ecosystem to be used for mostly large-scale agricultural purposes. Trump's water policy is closely aligned with Governor Newsom's, who wants to promote the \$20 billion Delta Tunnel to draw even more water from the Delta. These policies would have severe consequences for local Delta communities, Tribes, fishermen, and endangered species. Sierra Club California strongly opposes Trump and Newsom's environmentally destructive water policy, and we'll be fighting to stop them in the courts and at the relevant state agencies. Sierra Club California and our allies will continue to push for adoption of local, sustainable water sources that will create shovel ready local jobs while protecting the Delta's communities and threatened ecosystems," **said Caty Wagner, Sierra Club California Water Campaign Manager.**

"The Trump Administration is leveraging the crisis endured by tens of thousands in fire-stricken communities in Los Angeles to undermine Delta Tribes and communities grappling with environmental justice and public health crises. By framing water policy as a zero-sum game and pitting communities against each other—the Administration isn't solving problems—it's deepening divisions and endangering millions while flouting the law. This isn't about helping wildfire victims or addressing drought; it's about dismantling environmental protections and exploiting the state's most vulnerable communities for corporate gain. For nearly a century, California law has required maintaining adequate flows in the Delta to preserve water quality and ecological integrity, ensuring that all residents—including Tribal Nations and disadvantaged communities—can rely on this critical watershed for their health, safety, and livelihoods. We can, and Governor Newsom must, demand solutions that protect everyone," **said Terra Baer, Certified Student Attorney, Yale Environmental Justice Law and Advocacy Clinic on behalf of the Delta Tribal Environmental Coalition**

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