



*“Collaboration for Sensible Regulatory Solutions”*

September 28, 2017

Barry Thom  
West Coast Regional Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
1201 NE Lloyd Boulevard  
Portland, OR 97232

**RE: Support for United Water Conservation District in Managing and Enhancing Water Resources in Ventura County**

Dear Administrator Thom,

The Ventura County Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business is a business advocacy organization representing over 450 members countywide. Over half of our diverse membership is involved in farming, ranching and support services.

Our county has over 100,000 acres of irrigated agriculture and is unique in the number of small family farms that produce over 50 specialty crops for domestic and international markets. Water is the life blood of our local \$3.5 billion agricultural economy.

We are writing this letter in support of the United Water Conservation District (UWCD) in managing and enhancing the water resources within their 335 square mile service area. Our members, many who rely on potable drinking water, groundwater and surface water within the service area, have benefitted greatly from UWCD's services.

The past five years of drought have been punishing to Ventura County. A majority of our farmland relies on water flowing down the Santa Clara River with storm flows diverted through the Vern Freeman Diversion (VFD) facility to groundwater basins that supply water for cities and agriculture. Data shows that since 2013, during the worst of the drought, only a small fraction of the storm flows were allowed to be diverted.

We believe that UWCD's public safety improvement projects for the Santa Felicia Dam modifications to the dam's spillway are of paramount importance in protecting the public's safety and providing a reliable water supply. That is why we are asking for your leadership and support in securing appropriations to adequately fund these essential and critical public safety improvements to UWCD's Santa Felicia Dam.

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We also believe there is a need to balance protection of existing endangered steelhead trout while ensuring a sustainable supply of water for basin recharge to contend with seawater intrusion and, ultimately, human consumption. UWCD has shown through numerous rigorous scientific studies that an equitable solution can be found, yet they continue to struggle due to the uncompromising position of the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS), which persists in requiring increased environmental flows which negatively impacts UWCD's diversions.

UWCD is also being subject to unproven and costly modifications to the existing fish passage at the VSD that was approved and installed in 1993 and deemed insufficient by NMFS only 15 years later. And monitoring of steelhead passage at the VFD from 1993 to 2014 show only 11 adult steelhead have attempted to pass in 21 years.

This past winter, in spite of significant storms, UWCD was limited to only 10,000 AF of surface water diversions, less than one-fifth of its average annual diversions for groundwater recharge. Based on United's water rights, it could have diverted an additional 20,000 AF at the VFD if not for NMFS increasing pressure for greater instream flows. Unfortunately, UWCD sees this trend only increasing, which is why as stakeholders we request your support for UWCD's suggested modification to the Freeman Diversion fish passage as well as legislators and regulatory agencies' support in securing a Memorandum of Understanding between UWCD and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

UWCD has been a valued, trusted and reliable leader in protecting and securing water resources for the people of Ventura County for over 90 years. Committed to enhancing water supplies through groundwater replenishment, the construction and operation of water supply and delivery facilities and systems, and through collaborative efforts with neighboring water agencies and the cities of Piru, Fillmore, Santa Paula, Oxnard, Port Hueneme and Ventura, UWCD's efforts provide an invaluable service to Ventura County's communities, farms and businesses and VC CoLAB is among its most ardent supporters.

Sincerely,



Lynn Gray Jensen

Executive Director