

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 17, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We urge you to choose California's Great Central Valley and its associated watersheds as one of the eight national "Critical Conservation Areas" as required under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). We believe California's diverse agricultural production and wildlife habitat is unparalleled and our constituents have already forged longstanding partnerships on these issues. If selected as a Critical Conservation Area, the partners are ready to continue their work and would be provided the tools necessary to implement sustainable agriculture practices for the benefit of both producers and the environment.

The watersheds associated with the Central Valley are of great importance to California agriculture which has an annual production value significantly higher than that of any other state. However, farmers and ranchers in California face enormous challenges. California's Mediterranean climate – with cool, wet winters and warm, dry summers – makes it a unique place to grow a wide variety of crops. It also makes it a desirable place for people to live, a home to a vast amount of plant and animal species that exist nowhere else on earth, and an essential seasonal habitat for millions of migratory birds and important fish species. The common element to all of these is maintaining an adequate water supply and the smart management of those supplies.

The RCPP encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales. Designation as a Critical Conservation Area would facilitate collaborative, innovative and voluntary partnerships with interested landowners in the Central Valley to:

- Restore and maintain the health of critical watersheds;
- Enhance food safety to benefit all Americans dependent upon the Central Valley;
- Facilitate wildlife-friendly farming practices to:
 - Provide seasonal habitat for migratory birds and other wetland-dependent species and
 - Support recovery of listed and many other "at risk" species;
- Recharge groundwater aquifers and increase stream flows;
- Increase both immediate drought response needs and long-term regional drought resilience;

- Address water quality concerns, especially the management of nitrates in groundwater;
- Manage floodplains to enhance both public safety and water supply;
- Improve air quality in an area with one of the most extreme challenges in the nation; and

We expect there are very few places in the country, if any, where both the challenges to agricultural production and the opportunities for innovative solutions are as great. We urge you to designate the Great Central Valley as a Critical Conservation Area. Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to reach out if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,



JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress



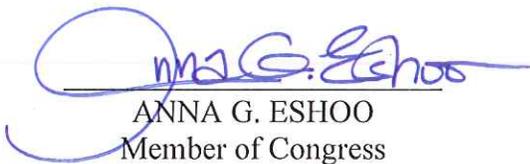
AMI BERA
Member of Congress



JANICE HAHN
Member of Congress



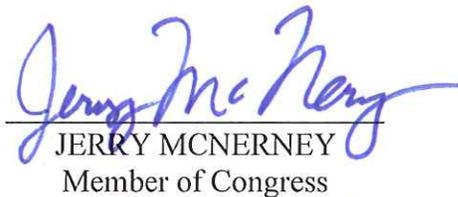
MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress



ANNA G. ESHOO
Member of Congress



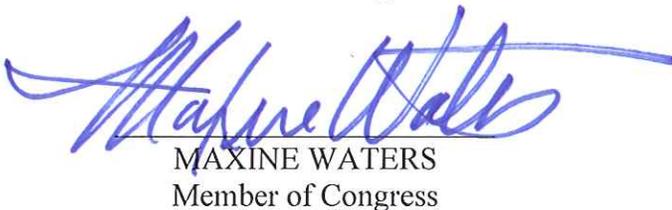
ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress



JERRY MCNERNEY
Member of Congress



SAM FARR
Member of Congress



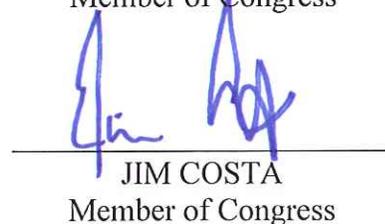
MAXINE WATERS
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