



Conservation Community Statement of Opposition to HR 3964

Over the next several months, the ongoing drought in California will test our ability to build consensus around policy solutions that balance various needs of communities, agriculture, and the environment. But House Resolution 3964 is not the answer California needs. This deeply partisan, opportunistic bill will only serve to move us further away from a rational water policy built by a consensus of the people most impacted by the drought.

This disingenuous bill reinforces the misperception that somehow the environment is taking water from farmers, when that is simply not the case. Waiving state and federal environmental protections will not appreciably increase water supplies that simply don't exist. The San Joaquin River Settlement Agreement, which the bill would reverse, actually anticipates drought years, and will severely restrict and even stop water releases in critical years such as this one. H.R. 3964 would suspend the court-approved Settlement at a time when salmon are once again spawning in the San Joaquin River and critical water infrastructure projects are poised to bring better water management and up to 11,000 new jobs to the region.

HR 3964 is a cynical attempt to use the drought to pursue an agenda that is at odds with California's progress in addressing its natural resource challenges through years of good faith negotiations, compromise, and balance. California is in a better position to address the drought than we've ever been before, and this bill would only be a step backward.

FACTS: California is faced with an unprecedented challenge. Three consecutive dry years and a snowpack at a record 12% of normal have already impacted people, wildlife, fisheries and food crops. Never has it been so apparent how we are all dependent on and connected by water. Over the next several months these conditions will test our ability to conserve, compromise, and collectively weather the acute impacts of the drought. In the years to come, evolving to a place of greater resilience as a state will demand that we collaborate to rapidly integrate water management, agriculture, and the environment, to conserve and make the most efficient use of water.

The clear call for cooperation and unity in this pivotal and demanding time for California highlights what Senator Feinstein accurately described as the “disingenuous...irresponsible and...dangerous” nature of H.R. 3964 recently introduced by Congressman Valadao.

Disingenuous – Drought, not environmental regulations protecting salmon and other endangered fish, is the reason for the states low water supplies

- Largely recycled from equally flawed and widely condemned legislation introduced in 2012 by Congressman Nunes, H.R. 3964 reinforces the misperception that the environment is taking water from farmers, and offers farmers false hope. Waiving state and federal environmental protections will not appreciably increase water supplies that simply don't exist.
- Equally misleading is H.R. 3964's billing as temporary relief when in fact several key provisions in the bill are designed to be permanent.

Irresponsible – California's future hinges on our ability to work together

- The Brown Administration has refused to pit “fish vs. farmers” and is focusing on solutions that balance and integrate the needs of families, farms, fish and wildlife. By contrast, H.R. 3964 would exploit the strain the drought is placing on California by introducing divisive political partisanship that undermines our potential for recovery through collaboration.
- The San Joaquin River Settlement Agreement exemplifies a balanced approach to meet the needs of farms, municipalities, and the environment. Anticipating drought years, the Agreement's terms severely restrict and even stop water releases in critical years such as this one. H.R. 3964 would suspend the court-approved Settlement at a time when salmon are once again spawning in the San Joaquin River and critical water infrastructure projects poised to bring better water management and up to 11,000 new jobs to the region.

Dangerous – Weakening environmental protections threatens the extinction of Salmon species and the collapse of fisheries critical to our economy and natural heritage.

- H.R. 3964 would likely have devastating effects on salmon fishermen and thousands of small businesses. California's Bay-Delta estuary is the heart of the salmon fishery in California. The closure of the salmon fishery in 2008 and 2009 resulted in thousands of lost jobs in California and Oregon. Delta farmers also rely on environmental protections to maintain water quality. Delta farmers, the commercial and recreational salmon fishing economy, and communities across California and along the West Coast depend on the environmental protections that H.R. 3964 would eliminate.

California's progress in addressing its natural resource challenges is the result of long and expensive efforts, in good faith, to achieve compromise and balance multiple needs. Investments in water recycling, stormwater capture and groundwater recharge can provide communities with more drought-resistant water supplies. Larger scale efforts to expand Central Valley floodplains and restore Sierra Nevada meadows can increase and diversify water retention in the landscape in a fashion that is compatible with agriculture and the environment, improving water supply reliability for all. These are real solutions to California's drought. H.R. 3964 is just more of the problem.