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MEMORANDUM

TO: Tony Boren
Melissa Garza
Brenda Veenendaal

FROM: Len Simon
Brandon Key
Jen Covino

SUBJECT: Fresno COG 2016 Washington Meetings Summary Overview

DATE: April 28, 2016

Thank you again for the opportunity to work with the 2016 Fresno COG “One Voice” delegation. We were pleased to see such robust engagement between the delegates and the speakers on Capitol Hill and in the federal agency meetings. We believe that the meetings were a highly effective way to communicate the delegates’ priorities with both top-level federal officials and the policy experts working every day to craft relevant legislation and executive action around these priorities.

The COG came at a unique and opportune time to advocate their federal priorities in Washington, as was indicated by the meetings, with the California drought being high on everyone’s list of priorities. The following is a summary of the various meeting, including contact information and follow-up activities.

Monday, April 18th

9:30 a.m. **Department of the Interior**
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science
 Jennifer Gimbel, Assistant Secretary
 Thomas “Tom” Iseman, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Reclamation
 Dave Palumbo, Deputy Commissioner for Operations, Bureau of Reclamation

Fresno COG delegates presented their water policy priorities to the Department of the Interior, and emphasized Senator Dianne Feinstein’s March 24 letter addressed to President Obama, calling on the President to direct federal agencies to maximize pumping in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to the maximum extent allowed under the *Endangered Species Act* and biological

opinions. Delegates also highlighted the importance of the Temperance Flat project to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and asked the agency to streamline the environmental review process for faster approval of the project. Delegates explained that they had formed a Joint Powers Authority (JPA), the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority, to apply for California bond money that could be used to construct the Temperance Flat project. They expressed their concern about the possibility of BLM designating part of the San Joaquin River as “*wild and scenic*.” Delegates discussed the importance of water to Fresno County, not only for agricultural and municipal purposes, but as a source of economic development and job creation in the Valley.

Assistant Secretary **Jennifer Gimbel** said that the Obama Administration was in the process of writing a response to Senator Feinstein’s March 24 letter, which will be released in the near future. She said that Department of Interior staff discuss the drought situation daily with staff based in California and that both she and Interior Secretary Sally Jewell have talked about ways to increase operational flexibility. On the request to move forward on the Temperance Flat project, she said that she was impressed by locally-driven efforts to increase support for the project, but that BLM has not yet made a decision on how to increase the speed of the environmental review process. However, the project is being reviewed at the highest levels of the Department. Jennifer said that she and **Dave Palumbo** speak about the Temperance Flat project often and are confident that they can get into a position where they can be more supportive.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Review the Obama Administration’s forthcoming response to Senator Feinstein’s March 24 letter requesting more pumping.**

11:00 a.m.

Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources and the Environment

Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Mark Rose, Director, Financial Assistance Programs Division (FAPD)

Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs

Alex Jacquez, Legislative Analyst, External and Intergovernmental Affairs

Fresno COG delegates opened the meeting by reiterating to the department the devastating effect that the now five-year-long drought has had on farmers and smaller agricultural communities throughout Fresno County. They called on USDA to provide additional funding to mitigate the effects of the drought and requested a meeting with the Department’s Sacramento Office. Delegates requested a more stable funding source through APHIS’s quarantine programs, which has not received enough support through Farm Bill legislation. They called on USDA and other federal agencies to loosen federal regulations and allow dead trees to be harvested from National Parks and Forests to reduce the threat from forest fires.

Ann Mills said that addressing the drought in California is a top priority for her, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, and the entire Obama Administration. USDA has developed an “*Action Plan*” that includes strategies to help make rural agriculture more drought-resilient. USDA is a

permanent partner in the National Drought Resilience Partnership (NDRP), which seeks to harness and coordinate distinct efforts by individual federal agencies already underway to assist in building resilience to drought on the ground. **Mark Rose** encouraged the Fresno COG to contact Carlos Suarez, USDA's NRCS California State Conservationist, who is based in Davis, CA. USDA officials emphasized that the President's FY17 budget request included robust support for the USDA APHIS program. On the issue of harvesting trees, USDA officials said that the Administration is in the process of evaluating new markets for timber feed stock.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Review the March 2016 Federal Action Plan of the National Drought Resilience Partnership;**
- **Request that Congress support a robust USDA APHIS program in FY17.**

1:30 p.m. **Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)**

Meeting with Senator and her Staff for presentation of "One Voice" Priorities

John Watts, Legislative Director

Ken Rooney, Legislative Assistant

Tristan Colonius, Legislative Assistant

Fresno COG delegates greeted Senator **Dianne Feinstein** and her staff with a standing ovation, thanking her for her tireless efforts to resolve the political impasse over the drought, her proposed legislation to increase water storage capacity in the state, and her March 24 letter to President Obama to increase water pumping. Delegates reviewed, with the Senator, their morning meetings with officials from the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. They expressed their concern with the slow process of approving a feasibility study for Temperance Flat, and discussed the air quality issues in the lower San Joaquin Valley.

The Senator told the delegates that she was taken aback by the roadblocks she has faced from Congress, Obama Administration, and the state against comprehensive water legislation. On Congressman David Valadao's recent effort to include provisions related to California's drought in the House FY17 Energy-Water appropriations bill, Senator Feinstein said that she was skeptical that the water issue could be resolved through the appropriations process. Although the House could pass a bill with only Republican support, individual objections in the Senate from either party could much more easily derail the process. She expressed her disappointment with the pushback she has received from several major environmental organizations as well. Senator Feinstein and her staff reviewed the provisions of the *California Emergency Drought Relief Act* with the delegates, which she introduced along with Senator Barbara Boxer on July 29. Senator Feinstein urged delegates to continue to work with their Congressional delegation to forge a compromise on a water bill. She praised the delegation for coming together with other San Joaquin Valley counties to form a JPA.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Support Senator Feinstein's efforts to work with the Administration to increase pumping within the limits of the biological opinions;**

- **Collaborate with Members of Congress to pass water legislation.**

3:00 p.m. **Department of Transportation**
Office of Government Affairs
Michael Daley, Director
Office of Infrastructure Finance and Innovation
John Augustine, Director
Federal Railroad Administration
Trevor Dean, Advisor

Fresno COG delegates thanked U.S. DOT for their work implementing the regulatory provisions of the *FAST Act* authorization bill. They reminded the agency of their past requests for federal funding for the Veterans Boulevard project, as well as the need to reduce traffic congestion on State Route 99. They highlighted the state’s High Speed Rail (HSR) project, and requested a special designation for Fresno County as the nation’s HSR training center. The County continues to compete to be the location for the state’s HSR heavy-maintenance facility, and the jobs and economic development that would be associated with the facility. Delegates requested that U.S. DOT become more flexible in its distribution of dollars that can be used for job training and apprenticeships.

John Augustine noted that the comment period will be ending soon on U.S. DOT’s National Strategic Freight Program. The Department is looking to develop a nationwide Multimodal Freight Network. He emphasized that while the new FASTLANE program is specifically geared toward funding large freight projects, TIGER funds can also be used for freight projects. Funding awards for both TIGER and FASTLANE may be announced in September. **Trevor Dean** said that he would talk with Transportation Secretary Foxx about the idea of increasing DOT flexibility for training dollars, calling it an issue that is “*close to Secretary Foxx’s heart.*” **Michael Daley** said that he would share relevant program and webinar information with the group.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Communicate with U.S. DOT Office of Government Affairs regarding FASTLANE and TIGER Grant applications, as well as progress on High-Speed Rail;**
- **Send information to U.S. DOT regarding requests for flexibility in training and workforce development spending across modal agencies.**

4:00 p.m. **Department of Energy**
Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs
Francisco Carrillo, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs
Will Swenson, Advisor, Intergovernmental & External Affairs
Georgette Furukawa-Martinez, Advisor, Intergovernmental & External Affairs
Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy
Christina Nichols, MBA, Mantech, Inc., Contractor to the US DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office/SunShot
Josh Olsen, Lead Policy Advisor for Technical Operations, Weatherization

Assistance Program
Jonah Steinbuck, Policy Advisor on Climate and Clean Energy

Fresno COG delegates described the work of the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC), which is using state Cap and Trade funds toward solar projects in the community. However, many impoverished communities don't have the economic resources to benefit from solar PV technologies. Delegates expressed interest in making changes to the Department of Energy's (DOE) Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), by making funding for solar projects a higher priority. Delegates were particularly interested in workforce development opportunities that could be attained through the development of solar energy in Fresno County.

Josh Olsen emphasized that the Priority List for WAP funding is a state-driven plan. He encouraged delegates to see what California has done regarding its ranked priorities. Changes to that should be requested at the state level. He mentioned Ohio as an example of a state that has successfully used WAP funding for solar projects. **Christina Nichols** said that DOE is considering repurposing some LIHEAP funding for solar PV projects. She encouraged delegates to look into both the *National Community Solar Partnership* and the Department's *Community and Shared Solar* programs. She said that the Department's *Commercial PACE* program could be used by a large-sized organization such as a hospital system. The Department anticipates rapid employment growth in the solar industry in the coming years, which Fresno County could take advantage of given its ideal weather and topography. **Jonah Steinbuck** discussed a program that is being newly-implemented, called the *Clean Energy for Low Income Communities Accelerator*, which aims to lower energy bills in low income communities through expanded installation of energy efficiency and distributed renewables. The White House will officially "launch" this new program on May 9, and the Department of Energy is seeking local government partners to join in the initiative.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Review California's ranked priorities for WAP funding, and consider state-level policy changes;**
- **Review the Department's *Community and Shared Solar* programs;**
- **Review the Department's *Commercial PACE* program;**
- **Consider partnering with the Department's *Clean Energy for Low Income Communities Accelerator*.**

Tuesday, April 19th

9:00 a.m. **Department of Justice**
Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Assistance
Esmeralda C. Womack, Southwest Division Chief
Steve Edwards, Senior Policy Advisor
Office of Communications
Nikita Purdy, Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs Specialist

Sheriff **Margaret Mims** described the problems associated with having large numbers of criminal aliens in Fresno County jails. She said that the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) was a vital funding source for the County. In Fiscal Year 2016, the program received \$210 million nationally, and it received \$185 million in FY15. Fresno COG delegates requested more details from the officials on other BJA programs as well.

Esmerelda Womack said that when it comes to funding for programs such as SCAAP, Congress controls spending decisions, not BJA. However, the agency does receive a large number of applications for the SCAAP program every year, so it remains in high-demand. She encouraged delegates to look into the *Bulletproof Vest Partnership* (BVP) program, which closes for applications on May 16. She also noted that Byrne-JAG formula funds could also be used to purchase bulletproof vests. **Steve Edwards** said that, while his specialty is law enforcement adjudication, delegates might be interested in learning more about the *VALOR Training Program*, which provides critical, nationwide, no-cost officer safety training to all levels of law enforcement. BJA is currently in the process of reviewing proposals for about fifty grant solicitations now and through the summer, with final award announcements likely coming in September. After the meeting, **Nikita Purdy** followed-up and confirmed that through the BVP program, bulletproof vests can be purchased for correctional officers.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Request that Congress supports a fully-funded SCAAP program in FY17;**
- **Review BJA's *Valor Program* along with additional BJA grant programs for mental health grants and human trafficking programs.**
- **Discussed hosting a Valor Training in Fresno. Need follow up on that.**

10:30 a.m. Congressional Leadership 2016 – Representative Jim Costa (D–CA 16)

After wishing Congressman **Jim Costa** a happy birthday, Fresno COG delegates quickly turned to the issue of the drought in California, and thanked Congressman Costa for his years of work to solve the state's ongoing water problems. Delegates described their meetings with the Bureau of Reclamation and Senator Feinstein on Monday. They expressed concern about the possibility of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) possibly designating certain parts of the San Joaquin River as a "*scenic and wildlife*" area. Other issues the delegates raised with Congressman Costa included: funding for CSBG and CDBG, the PILT program, U.S. DOT flexibility on job training, High-Speed Rail, and air quality.

Congressman Costa said that he might be able to support a "Dear Colleague" letter from the San Joaquin Congressional delegation to the California Water Commission in support of funding for CalFed projects. On the issue of designating part of the San Joaquin River as a "*wild and scenic*" area, he assured delegates that a final designation would need to be approved by Congress, though he acknowledged the potential for BLM to designate it as a "study area." On non-monetary asks of federal agencies, such as asking DOT and DOL to be more flexible on training dollars, he encouraged delegates to contact his Legislative Assistant **Megan Funkhouser** on those issues. On the idea of a High-Speed Rail facility, the Congressman

acknowledged that many counties have proposals with merit, and the final decision would lie with the California HSR Authority.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Request a list of Southern California members of Congress to reach out to regarding comprehensive water legislation;**
- **Request a letter from the San Joaquin Valley Congressional Delegation in opposition to BLM possibly designating a portion of the San Joaquin River as “wild and scenic”;**
- **Send additional information to Congressman Costa’s office regarding DOT flexibility on workforce training.**

11:15 a.m. **CA Regional Delegation – Representative Eric Swalwell (D–CA 15)**

The Fresno COG delegates emphasized to Congressman **Eric Swalwell** the anticipated economic development benefits associated with the building of the nation’s first High-Speed Rail line in Fresno County. However, the lack of state redevelopment funding has been a challenge for local governments hoping to build new projects. They highlighted the importance of adequate federal appropriations for transportation projects, given the fact that Fresno County is one of many self-help counties in California. Delegates also expressed their concerns to Congressman Swalwell about how the ongoing drought in California is negatively impacting residents in Fresno County.

Congressman Swalwell expressed his enthusiasm about the construction of the new HSR line in the San Joaquin Valley, saying that it would increase the economic ties between the Valley and the Bay Area. He called Congressman Jim Costa a “*millennial-minded*” member of Congress. While acknowledging that he voted against Congressman David Valadao’s drought legislation in the House, Congressman Swalwell said that he remains concerned about the impact of the drought on the state.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Collaborate with Congressman Swalwell on increasing economic ties between the Bay Area and Fresno County.**

1:00 p.m. **Congressional Leadership 2016 – Representative Tom McClintock (R–CA 4)**

Fresno COG delegates explained their requests to Congressman **Tom McClintock** to deal with the ongoing natural and man-made drought in California. This includes support for the JPA to proceed with construction of Temperance Flat, and other long-term water storage facilities. Delegates also expressed their concern about the possibility of BLM designating part of the San Joaquin River as “*wild and scenic.*” They requested Congress and the Administration to allow dead trees to be removed from federal lands to reduce the risk of a large wildfire in the Sierras.

Congressman McClintock called on the Senate to pass Congressman Valadao's water legislation that had already been adopted in the House. He expressed frustration with the growing environmental review costs associated with projects such as new dam construction. He also supports Congress making changes to the *Endangered Species Act* and significantly increasing the state's water storage capacity. He agreed with the need to remove dead trees from federal lands and said that Congress will not pass a law designating part of the San Joaquin River as "wild and scenic."

Follow-Up Activities

- **Communicate with Congressman McClintock on tree removal from federal lands and requests for support for additional water storage such as the Wild and Scenic Designation Letter of Support**
- **Encouraged delegation to mobilize the public behind the issues limiting pumping through education and empowerment**

1:30 p.m. **Office of Congressman Jim Costa**
Scott Petersen, Deputy Chief of Staff/Legislative Director

2:00 p.m. **One Voice Project and Policy Priorities**
Office of Congressman Tom McClintock
Chris Tudor, Legislative Director

Office of Congressman Devin Nunes
Jilian Plank, Legislative Director

The discussion began with Congressman Jim Costa's Legislative Director **Scott Petersen**, who was later joined by Congressman Tom McClintock's Legislative Director **Chris Tudor** and Congressman Devin Nunes' Legislative Director **Jilian Plank**.

Fresno COG delegates presented their federal priorities to the Legislative Directors. **Scott Petersen** noted that, although the boundaries of Congressman Costa's district have changed over the years, "*All of Fresno County is our home.*" On water issues, his office hopes that more Southern California Democrats will push the rest of California to move toward a compromise on water legislation. Fresno COG delegates requested that Scott send them a list of the Southern California members being targeted. He also said that his office is encouraging EPA and Interior to develop a "recovery plan" under the *Endangered Species Act*. Scott said that his office is working toward legislation that would ease EPA penalties on Fresno County for *Clean Air Act* non-attainment.

Chris Tudor reiterated Congressman Tom McClintock's concerns about the water situation in California. He believes that Senator Feinstein does not want a water bill to pass. **Jilian Plank** said that Congressman Devin Nunes is equally concerned, and was disappointed that Senator Feinstein stepped away from negotiations last year on water legislation. They said they would help delegates with letters of support for building Temperance Flat and preventing a "wild and scenic" designation on the San Joaquin River.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Work with House delegation staff as legislation is developed and reviewed.**
- **Send letter requesting support of water issues.**

3:00 p.m. **Senate Environment & Public Works Committee**
 Tyler Rushforth, Counsel (Minority)

Fresno COG delegates expressed their concern about Congress’s inability thus far to move forward on passing comprehensive water legislation to help California during its drought. They explained the drought’s effect on local communities and farmers alike. They expressed interest in the upcoming Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) bill in the Senate, discussed Fresno County’s air quality issues, and talked about the importance of moving freight.

Tyler Rushforth said that his boss, Senator Barbara Boxer, believes that something needs to be done to address the drought, which is why his committee is working quickly on the WRDA bill. The goal is for Congress to pass a WRDA bill, including spending for local water infrastructure, by the end of the summer. On air quality issues, Tyler said that Congress may need to revisit changing the *Clean Air Act* at some point in the future.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee’s WRDA bill, which was introduced this week, would allow non-Federal interests to provide funding to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to update or modify project operations to improve water supply. The bill also requires the development of drought resilience guidelines to help communities better prepare and respond to drought and requires the Corps to update the operation of its reservoirs to incorporate new technologies and better meet project purposes, including water supply needs.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Monitor Senate progress on the WRDA bill, including provisions to improve water infrastructure in Fresno County.**

Wednesday, April 20th

9:00 a.m. **White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs**
 Rohan Patel, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
 Tim Male, Associate Director for Conservation and Wildlife, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)
 Bridget Cummings, Staff Assistant
 Leslie Ramirez, Staff

Fresno COG delegates met with several members of the White House staff, including **Rohan Patel**, Deputy Director of Intergovernmental affairs, who has a strong background in environmental policy, and **Tim Male**, Associate Director at CEQ, who Rohan described as, “*the*

point person for the President on the drought.” Delegates presented all of their policy priorities to the White House, including the work that was being done at the local level.

Rohan discussed the progress being made on several of the delegation’s priority issues by the Obama Administration, including: the National Drought Resilience Partnership, updated Principles and Guidelines for Federal Investments in Water Resources, and the FASTLANE grant program. The Administration is interested in California’s implementation of the AB 32 Cap-and-Trade program to reduce carbon emissions, particularly the impact the investments will have on low-income communities. Rohan also encouraged delegates to review the President’s March 21 Memorandum: *Building National Capabilities for Long-Term Drought Resilience*. Tim Male asked the delegates to explain their timeline on securing funding for the Temperance Flat project, and the delegates explained California’s Chapter 8 deadline to obtain funding from the water bond. The delegates and the White House also discussed the Valley’s air quality issues extensively.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Communicate status of requests to and feedback from federal agencies with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.**
- **Rohan Patel, Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, asked to speak with the Agricultural Commissioner “offline” regarding the support for more Canine Teams and access into more postal offices.**
- **Fresno COG’s Fast Lane Grant- Rojan wants the actual application and offered to weigh in with DOT, emphasizing the need to fund it.**
- **High Speed Rail Training Priority – Authorization in Appropriations Bill coming out for a new apprenticeship program. This seemingly should have an advantage as a good project for that funding. Asked us to follow up with them after the appropriations are release.**
- **Clean Air Act Modernization – in combining the 6 plans we are currently required to honor. Said it was perfectly reasonable ask to combining the plans. Interested in supporting that?**

11:00 a.m. **Department of Commerce**
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
 Peter Colohan, Director of the Social Intelligence Division, National Water Center, and NOAA Representative, National Drought Resilience Partnership

Fresno COG delegates said that their number one federal legislative priority is finding solutions to deal with the drought in California. They called on Congress to increase pumping from the delta as a critical step.

Peter Colohan emphasized that his specialty was in weather forecast modeling, and acknowledged that this is one of the most serious droughts in U.S. history, and that the El Niño climate pattern was not as beneficial to the state as was originally predicted. In the future,

precipitation will likely fall harder and in shorter bursts in California, due to climate change. He highlighted the National Drought Resilience Partnership (NDRP), which seeks to coordinate federal agencies and investments in a more coherent way to respond to future droughts. Peter expects the President to officially sign off on the NDRP in the coming months.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Collaborate with the National Drought Resilience Partnership. Suggested a teleconference between One Voice participants and NOAA staff regarding biological opinions and funding sources.**

1:00 p.m. Congressional Leadership 2016 – Representative Devin Nunes (R–CA 22)

Fresno COG delegates explained their federal priorities to Congressman **Devin Nunes**, including: water policy and storage, a possible “*wild and scenic*” designation on the San Joaquin River, and air quality in the Valley.

Congressman Nunes said that one of the main reasons he ran for Congress was to solve the state’s water problems. He said that any permanent solution would need to come from Congress, not the federal agencies, and commended Congressman David Valadao on his water legislation. He supports Congressman Valadao’s legislative strategy of including California drought text as part of the FY17 Energy-Water bill because it will force the Senate to either (1) remove the language, or (2) compromise with the House. As much as unity is required in Congress, unity is also required within California: north, south, and central. That’s one of the reasons he appeared in the educational film *Dead Harvest*, which can be viewed for free on Vimeo. Congressman Nunes said that he and his office will do whatever they can to advance Fresno COG’s legislative priorities.

- **Work with Congressman Nunes as legislation is developed and reviewed.**
- **Send letter requesting support of water issues.**

Follow-Up Activities

2:00 p.m. Congressional Leadership 2016 – Representative David Valadao (R–CA 21) Cole Rojewski, Chief of Staff Kristina Dunklin, Legislative Director

Fresno COG delegates explained their federal priorities to Congressman **David Valadao** and his staff, including: water policy, air quality, SCAAP funding, CSBG and CDBG spending, transportation and goods movement in Fresno County, and High-Speed Rail.

Congressman Valadao said that, as part of the House FY17 Energy-Water Appropriations bill, he included six sections to address California’s drought and move water south from the delta (specifically, Sections 204-209 of the House bill). Like his colleague Rep. Nunes, Congressman Valadao called for greater unity within the California Congressional delegation to solve the ongoing water problems. He emphasized that his office is always willing to talk and collaborate

with others. On transportation issues, he said that Congress included helpful provisions in the *FAST Act* transportation bill. On the request for a High-Speed Rail heavy maintenance facility in Fresno County, Congressman Valadao said that he has decided to not be involved in the debate over which county should be chosen.

- **Work with Congressman Valadao as legislation is developed and reviewed;**
- **Send letter requesting support of water issues.**
- **Review Sections 204-209, Congressman Valadao's sections, of the FY17 House Energy-Water Appropriations bill.**

Follow-Up Activities

3:30 p.m.

Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

Arnita Hannon, Intergovernmental Liaison

Demond Matthews, Presidential Management Fellow, Intergovernmental Liaison

Office of Water

Roger Gorke, Senior Policy Advisor (phone)

Office of Air and Radiation

Lori Stewart, Chief of Staff

Office of Climate Change Adaptation Activities

Dr. Joel Scheraga, Senior Advisor for Climate Change Adaptation (phone)

Office of Public Affairs

Allison Dennis, Public Affairs Specialist

Region IX (*participating via teleconference)

*Kerry Drake, Associate Director

*John Kemmerer, Associate Water Director

*Brett Maier, Congressional Liaison

Fresno COG delegates described the environmental issues facing Fresno County, specifically the difficulty in complying with *Clean Air Act* provisions, given the topography of the southern San Joaquin Valley. Attainment is near-impossible in the Valley due to the pollution caused by mobile sources such as truck traffic from other regions. Delegates said they had asked Congress to pass Air Quality Empowerment Zone legislation (H.R. 6378) to help address the issue. In addition to the complications caused by California's ongoing drought, delegates requested authority to remove dead trees from federal lands to reduce the risk of a devastating wildfire in the future.

Lori Stewart says that she understands the frustration with *Clean Air Act* non-attainment, from her years working on transportation issues. She recognizes that California has done much good work at the local level to reduce emissions in the Valley, but more needs to be done. EPA *Diesel Emission Reduction Act* (DERA) funding has been used successfully to convert many vehicles to clean diesel technology and reduce emissions.

On water issues, **Roger Gorke** described progress being made on the National Drought Resilience Partnership (NDRP), which he is involved in. EPA, DOT, and Interior are looking to

create “Finance Centers,” to think more creatively about how federal dollars can be spent. For instance, EPA’s SRF funding can potentially be used to leverage additional private dollars. NDRP is also working to engage FEMA more actively. Roger offered himself as a primary federal point of contact in California on NDRP, to the Fresno COG. He said that he would look into having a group of federal officials visit Fresno County to discuss the drought and air quality issues in more detail.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Request that members of Congress support Air Quality Empowerment Zone legislation;**
- **Streamlining the process for Clean Air Act provisions on Exceptional Events Rule. Using demonstration programs to test it out. Said Drought is not an allowable exceptional event, but high winds are. So if we can tie in the drought to what IS exceptional in the Act, we can access the provisions. Following up on that.**
- **Invited their staff out to the San Joaquin Valley to see the drought impacts and issues first hand. Follow-up with Roger Gorke in the EPA on the NDRP. Plans are already moving forward for that visit so they can see how much the Valley has already done to help themselves with drought relief, to see the human toll it is taking on our people and land. They followed up with staff immediately.**
- **Possibility of getting FEMA funding for pre-disaster mitigation that is new. EPA has been reaching out to them to see about leveraging Federal agency funding from several agencies like EPA, USDA, Interior, for this pre-disaster mitigation.**
- **John Kimmer from the EPA Region 9 Water Program said there is support from the Drinking Water Revolving Fund provided through the State Water Resources Control Board in the State Revolving Loan Fund**
- **Ground Water Recharge – EPA is interested in working with our area to discuss what is already being done in Fresno County.**

In Addition, CSBG and CDBG—each congressman and their staff expressed continued support for these programs.

Conclusion

We hope you find this information useful as the Fresno Council of Governments continues to develop and refine its federal affairs agenda in the coming months. Please contact us if you have any questions or if we can provide further clarification about the contents of this summary overview.