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Contact: Joan Moody (202) 208-6416

Secretary Salazar, Chair Sutley, Obama Officials Announce Expanded Federal Response to California Water Crisis

WASHINGTON, D.C.— The Obama Administration is fully engaged in a coordinated response to California's ongoing water crisis, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Chair Nancy Sutley of the White House Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) and other top Obama Administration officials reported today at a public meeting with California state officials in Washington, D.C.

As part of the meeting, Secretary Salazar and Chair Sutley announced a series of actions the federal government is taking to deal with the devastating water shortages, including:

- Six federal agencies have signed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) that reestablishes federal leadership on California Bay Delta issues, including active involvement in on-going state efforts, such as the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, to help provide an assured water supply while restoring the environmental integrity of the Bay Delta.
- The Interior and Commerce Departments are asking the [National Academy of Sciences \(NAS\)](#) to conduct additional scientific analysis of the California Bay Delta ecosystem and help identify whether there are scientifically defensible alternatives to current water management plans in California.
- Secretary Salazar is urging Governor Schwarzenegger to convene a [special session of the legislature](#) to deal with the crisis at the State level.

"In this third year of drought, with the California Bay Delta in a state of environmental collapse and California's water infrastructure unable to meet the state's needs, we need all hands on deck to respond to the growing water crisis," said Secretary Salazar. "The federal government is now moving record amounts of water to areas that have been hardest hit, investing over \$400 million to upgrade California's water infrastructure, and – after eight years of neglect – reengaging as a full partner in California's water future."

"The Bay-Delta ecosystem is a critical environmental resource for California that helps sustain the state's economy, health and well-being," said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality. "By developing this multi-pronged approach, the Obama Administration is demonstrating its robust engagement in finding solutions to the Bay-Delta's challenges in order to address both the short-term crisis and to promote a more sustainable future."

"Using good science as our guidepost, we are committed to exploring every viable avenue and alternative to help Californians weather the drought, including gathering additional scientific information on potential water management alternatives that have a lower water supply impact," said Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke.

Federal-State Action Plan on California Water

Under an [MOU](#) signed yesterday, the Departments of the Interior, Commerce and Agriculture, CEQ, Environmental

Protection Agency, and Army Corps of Engineers will form a newly established Federal Bay-Delta Leadership Committee. The Committee will coordinate with the State of California and interested stakeholders and develop by December 15 a work plan of short-term actions. The plan may include:

- Developing an interagency science program to address key uncertainties in scientific information
- Expediting habitat restoration projects that are ready to move forward
- Taking an aggressive approach to addressing water quality threats
- Advancing measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Coordinating processes for undertaking regulatory actions by federal agencies in the Bay-Delta including, but not limited to, the potential co-location of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service personnel

National Academy of Sciences Review

While reiterating confidence in the soundness of the science behind two biological opinions (biops) issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, Secretary Salazar and Secretary Locke agreed to pursue additional, [independent review by the National Academy of Sciences](#) (NAS) of key scientific issues associated with the Bay Delta.

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) process is analyzing a large number of scientific issues, including the impact that a variety of stressors are having on the Bay Delta. The Secretaries will be engaging with the State, stakeholders, and other parties who are interested in the BDCP to evaluate whether, if, and how a NAS review might assist in this effort.

Also, with regard to the biops, the NAS will be asked to evaluate whether there may be alternative, scientifically sound approaches for protecting endangered species that have more limited water supply impacts. The NAS may also be invited to explore how the two biops work together, for example by focusing on questions such as spring flows in dry seasons and fall flows in wet seasons. Given the need to move quickly on this subject, the Secretaries are willing to potentially explore getting an independent scientific opinion on this point through the CalFed science panel.

Special Session of California Legislature

Separately, in [letters to Governor Schwarzenegger and California legislative leaders](#), Secretary Salazar praised the State's leadership on devising solutions to the water crisis and urged them to convene a special legislative session this fall to ensure prompt enactment of a package of bills. Key components of legislation already introduced include:

- A Delta governance structure
- A Delta plan addressing needs for storage, conveyance and other necessary operational tools, as well as the BDCP
- Water conservation/sustainable management provisions
- Water use reporting requirements
- A Delta conservancy