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ORANGE COUNTY WATER DISTRICT
ORANGE COUNTY'S GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY

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February 21, 2020

The Honorable Gilbert Cisneros
United States House of Representatives
431 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

***RE: Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee's Members' Day Hearing:
Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2020***

Dear Representative Cisneros:

In preparation for the February 27 Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee's Members' Day Hearing, the Orange County Water District (OCWD; the District) is requesting your prioritization of authorizing the Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study in the Water Resources Development Act of 2020. The District manages and protects the Santa Ana River Watershed through habitat restoration and wildlife management while managing the vast groundwater basin that provides most of northern and central Orange County's drinking water. Moreover, OCWD has benefitted from a long and fruitful collaboration with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) that has provided notable successes in managing water resources throughout the Santa Ana River Watershed. Our joint efforts to manage natural resources in Prado Basin, the largest riparian woodland in coastal southern California, have provided remarkable environmental benefits, including recovery of the endangered Least Bell's vireo.

USACE and OCWD have recently advanced our joint efforts through the Prado Basin Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study ("Study") which OCWD desires to submit as a proposal to Congress under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2020. OCWD expects a completed Chief of Engineer's Report for the Study in 2020. We ask for your support in WRDA 2020 legislation in authorization of the ecosystem restoration project that will be recommended by the Chief of Engineers in furtherance of our efforts to improve these critical natural resources.

The partners in the Study, the USACE and OCWD, have authorities for management of the Santa Ana River Watershed to address a variety of public objectives for water resource management. Prado Dam is operated by USACE to provide flood risk

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management. The Study's purpose was to evaluate ecosystem restoration measures, which are described below, and evaluate increased water conservation at Prado Dam. USACE may approve increased water conservation through the USACE's Military Subordinate Command, following completion of the Study and environmental analysis and permitting, since this measure would be 100% funded by OCWD. Congressional authorization of the ecosystem restoration measures in the Study is required for federal participation.

The ecosystem restoration measures in the Study were carefully developed and evaluated to restore the quality and function of aquatic, riparian, and transitional habitats within the Prado Basin, and to address obstacles to regional wildlife movement for both terrestrial and aquatic species. Native species that would benefit from this restoration include the Federally-listed threatened or endangered least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, western yellow-billed cuckoo and coastal California gnatcatcher. The restoration of natural resources in Prado Basin provides vital regional, statewide and national benefits due to the importance of Prado Basin as a home for threatened and endangered species and its location on the Pacific Flyway, a major route for migratory birds that extends from Alaska to Patagonia.

We look forward to your support as we strive to enhance the environment and provide value to the nation.

Please contact Mr. Greg Woodside, Executive Director of Planning & Natural Resources at OCWD at (714) 378-3275 or gwoodside@ocwd.com with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Vicente Sarmiento, Esq.
President

cc: Representative Linda Sánchez
Representative Katie Porter
Representative Lou Correa
Representative Alan Lowenthal
Representative Harley Rouda
Representative Mike Levin