



Jennifer Halferty - District One   Fred Stump - District Two   Bob Gardner - District Three  
John Peters - District Four   Stacy Corless - District Five

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## **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF MONO**

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P.O. BOX 715, BRIDGEPORT, CALIFORNIA 93517  
(760) 932-5538 • FAX (760) 932-5531  
*Shannon Kendall, Clerk of the Board*

August 21, 2018

**Via U.S. Mail and Email**

Honorable Tony Cardenas  
United States Congressman, 29th District of  
California  
1510 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Judy Chu  
United States Congresswoman, 27th District of  
California  
2423 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nanette Diaz Barragan  
United States Congresswoman, 44th District of  
California  
1320 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Jimmy Gomez  
United States Congressman, 34th District of  
California  
1226 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Maxine Waters  
United States Congresswoman, 43rd District of  
California  
2221 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: LADWP's Reduction in Water to Mono County Pasture, Wetland and Meadow Habitat

Dear Honorable United States Representatives:

The Mono County Board of Supervisors sincerely appreciates the July 26, 2018, letter from your delegation on this important environmental issue and appreciates you providing a voice for your Los Angeles constituents. We recognize the challenging position of elected officials and are committed to addressing underlying issues and finding common ground.

In the spirit of honest dialogue, the County feels compelled to clarify and respond to several points included in your letter. Many of these same points were also made in a letter which the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) sent to environmental organizations (Sierra Club, Audubon, Friends of the Inyo), the California Resources Agency and other state and federal representatives in response to their expressions of concern regarding the drastic and unanalyzed water reductions in Mono County this year. Mono County responded to LADWP's letters separately, and wishes now to provide you with a similar response.

Honorable Congressional Representatives

RE: LADWP's Reduction in Water to Mono County Pasture, Wetland and Meadow Habitat

August 21, 2018

Page 2 of 4

Your letter states that continued irrigation of pastures, meadows and wetlands in Mono County is not consistent with a new climate reality. We understand that climate change is and will continue to impact water supply availability throughout the State. Sound science and long-term water planning are needed in order to adjust to these changing climate realities – and we all must adapt. However, LADWP's change to more than 70 years of water supply and management practices in Mono County, affecting over 6000 acres of pasture, wetland and meadow habitat, occurred without environmental review or planning.

***Habitat and species, including the Bi-State Sage Grouse, currently being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act, have already been severely impacted.***

And the practice of transporting water hundreds of miles from Mono and Inyo Counties is not considered the most responsible nor reasonable climate adaptation strategy in the eyes of many. Indeed meadows, such as those now dry, sequester carbon and, when irrigated, contribute to groundwater recharge, enhancing the natural reservoir which is increasingly important storage as high elevation snow fields diminish. In addition to these factors, we believe that all opportunities to conserve water and increase its efficient use should be explored and fully exhausted before additional export from distant and fragile environments is undertaken – and particularly if that export is implemented without prior environmental review.

Your letter further explains that the irrigation of these lands no longer aligns with the best interest of Los Angeles area families and states that continued irrigation will cost \$30 per year per family. Setting aside for the moment whether such a cost is accurate, we urge you to consider not only the financial burden to ratepayers but the environmental costs of LADWP's actions. If the cost to ratepayers is your primary consideration, however, then ***the County would encourage you to investigate the cost to ratepayers of LADWP's environmental litigation and court-ordered restoration and mitigation projects in the Eastern Sierra.*** These costs far outweigh the costs of implementing additional water conservation and efficiency measures that could save the amount of water under discussion, protect valuable habitat in Mono County for the bi-state sage grouse and preserve Los Angeles' relationship with Mono and Inyo Counties. In addition, we would encourage you to consider creative solutions to address the very real burden on LA ratepayers from the City's reliance on imported water, such as the *Water Affordability Act of 2018*, introduced by U.S. Senator Kamala Harris – which would provide funding for urban water users to help defray increasing water costs.

The statement in your letter that LADWP is currently diverting water to protect sage grouse and working with local environmental organizations fails to recognize that this summer, LADWP eliminated most of the water historically provided to the sage grouse, and is only now providing back small amounts in response to concerns expressed by the California Resources Agency, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Mono County and others. ***To be clear, there is no science or agency/environmental organization approval that supports the conclusion that the reduced amount of water that LADWP is currently supplying to sage grouse habitat is sufficient to prevent harm to that species.*** As of this writing, the historically green meadows and wetlands are brown and dry and invasive plant species have begun to take hold creating fuel for hotter and more catastrophic wildfires. Meadow forage used by sage grouse chicks has vanished and visitors to the Eastern Sierra from Los Angeles and around the world observe these changes as they pass through Mono County on State Scenic Highway 395 traveling to Mammoth Lakes, Mono Lake, and Yosemite National Park.

Another point we wish to address is your letter's characterization of the water supplied to lessees over the last several decades as "free water," or "surplus," and the representation that it was provided on an "ad hoc" basis. The County believes this to be a misunderstanding of the historic practices. The water is not "free" but is supplied pursuant to the terms of agricultural leases, for which lessees pay rent rates to Los

Honorable Congressional Representatives

RE: LADWP's Reduction in Water to Mono County Pasture, Wetland and Meadow Habitat

August 21, 2018

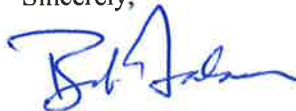
Page 3 of 4

Angeles based on the local value of irrigated (as opposed to non-irrigated) pasture. In fact, without the water, LADWP offered to reduce the rents by 75% this year. It is correct that the leases do not guarantee a specific amount of water and that amounts have varied at times based on hydrologic conditions. Indeed, in wet years such as 2017, the lessees graciously agreed to receive and spread additional water which was of no benefit to them in order to prevent harm to LADWP's water and power infrastructure from excess flows.

In reality, these lands are irrigated pastures, meadows and wetlands which support sensitive wildlife species, and have been so for more than 100 years. This habitat is viewed locally as de facto mitigation for natural habitat lost by LADWP water and power operations through the creation of Crowley Lake, as well as the numerous other impacts throughout Mono and Inyo Counties caused by water export to Los Angeles. ***The suggestion that these meadow systems, and the habitat they support, is now revocable is highly troubling.***

We appreciate your commitment to the City of Los Angeles and its residents, and thus understand the context within which letter was drafted. However, we would be remiss if we, on behalf of our constituents and the hundreds of thousands of visitors from the Los Angeles area to Mono County each year, did not take this opportunity to correct and clarify the record. Moreover, we see water management practices in the region as a shared responsibility of the residents of the Eastern Sierra and Los Angeles. This issue presents a unique opportunity for both regions to work collaboratively to address the impact of climate change on water supply availability. Los Angeles' elected officials and residents surely would not stand for another municipality limiting its water resources in the sudden and drastic way that LADWP has implemented its new water management policies in the Eastern Sierra. To the contrary, they would push back and explore opportunities to mutually address the underlying issues and find common ground to resolve the matter collaboratively. We respectfully urge you to consider the County's collective actions to date through such a lens and help us find the common ground with LADWP so as to resolve this situation in a reasonable and informed manner. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Mono County Administrative Officer Leslie Chapman at (760) 932-5414 or [lchapman@mono.ca.gov](mailto:lchapman@mono.ca.gov).

Sincerely,



Bob Gardner, Chair  
Mono County Board of Supervisors

cc: U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein  
U.S. Senator Kamala Harris  
U.S. Congressman Paul Cook  
U.S. Congressman Jim Costa  
California State Senator Tom Berryhill  
California State Senator Bob Hertzberg  
California State Senator Jeff Stone  
California State Senator Ben Allen  
California State Senator Henry Stern  
California State Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon

Honorable Congressional Representatives

RE: LADWP's Reduction in Water to Mono County Pasture, Wetland and Meadow Habitat

August 21, 2018

Page 4 of 4

California State Assemblymember Frank Bigelow  
California State Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia  
California State Assemblymember James Gallagher  
California State Assemblymember Wendy Carillo  
California State Assemblymember Laura Friedman  
Secretary John Laird, California Natural Resources Agency  
Director Charlton Bonham, California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Mel Levine, President, LADWP Board of Commissioners  
Aura Vasquez, Commissioner, LADWP Board of Commissioners  
Jill Banks Barad, Commissioner, LADWP Board of Commissioners  
Christina Noonan, Commissioner, LADWP Board of Commissioners  
Nancy Sutley, Chief Sustainability Officer, LADWP  
Nury Martinez, Chair of Energy, Climate Change, and Environmental Justice Committee  
Los Angeles City Council