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January 27, 2026

Chair Esquivel and Board members
State Water Resources Control Board
SacDeltaComments@waterboards.ca.gov

Subject: Comment letter – Revised Draft Sacramento/Delta Bay – Delta Plan Updates & Ch. 13 of Draft Staff Report

Dear Chair Esquivel and Board members,

The Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS) is a consortium of 18 community, environmental, and health-based organizations whose members span the Sacramento region. The health and stewardship of the region's water resources is a primary interest of ours and has prompted ECOS to be a signatory to the region's 2000 Water Forum Agreement and a significant contributor to the technical work and negotiations that are leading to an updated Water Forum Agreement 2050 that is scheduled for ratification early this year.

ECOS' involvement in the Water Forum has seen this region take several actions to ensure appropriate stewardship of its water resources. Generally, these actions have been taken in advance of other parts of the state or the state in general and we are concerned that one path you might chose, the "unimpaired flow" regulatory approach, would serve to undo the benefits of these actions. Instead, ECOS urges the Board to adopt the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes Program as the preferred approach for the American River tributary to reasonably protect beneficial uses of water.

Some of the actions our region has taken under the umbrella of the Water Forum Agreement include the following.

- Water Forum members establish groundwater subbasin sustainability goals many years before the California Legislature established SGMA.
- The region has done the technical and scientific work to establish Flow Management Standards for the lower American River designed to balance competing water interests while providing the best practical outcome for Salmonids in the river system regardless of the type of water year. These standards are currently included (in part) in the regulatory Biological Opinion for the Central Valley Project Long-term Operation and part of an MOU with the Bureau of Reclamation for the operation of Folsom Reservoir.
- The region has invested heavily in lower American River habitat restoration.
- Regional water purveyors and their rate payers have invested in the infrastructure and mutual agreements to enhance local water purveyors' abilities to carry out conjunctive use water management principles and operations. The costs of these facilities have increased some

rates beyond what might have been the amount charged for less far-sighted water facility management.

- Regional Groundwater Sustainability Plans approved by the state include the conjunctive use programs and infrastructure as part of the projects and programs necessary to maintain subbasin sustainability.

All these efforts and actions are in service of managing the region's surface and groundwater resources to their optimal benefit for the region's beneficial users and uses as well as downstream beneficial users and uses. These efforts face potential peril if the Board adopts the "unimpaired flow" regulatory approach. We find this particularly troubling as the Board's analysis for the American River in Appendix H1a2.7.13- *Groundwater Storage by Basin* shows over a million acre-feet of reduced groundwater storage in the American River's groundwater basins from the implementation of "unimpaired flows" – even with the Board's imposition of "Water Supply Adjustments" which are intended to reduce impacts of the unimpaired flow approach.

In addition to the region's current commitment to conjunctive use as its primary water sustainability strategy, climate impact analysis spanning out to 2050 and beyond, used to underpin the Water Forum 2050 Agreement, indicates that the region's only path forward to continued water supply sustainability is dependent on aggressive conjunctive use and a balanced approach to surface and groundwater resource management. This approach also has the best outcome for the continuing health of the American River. The potential of losing 1-million-acre feet of groundwater greatly jeopardizes the region's short- and long-term water supply sustainability. This loss would also have a negative impact on the region's Groundwater Sustainability Agencies efforts to improve groundwater/surface water interactions and maintain groundwater dependent ecosystems.

ECOS believes the American River region's Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposal has been developed with the same adaptive, and impact-oriented mindset that has been used to create the next generation Water Forum 2050 Agreement. The water contributions for the American River generated by this proposal will be provided with an emphasis on ensuring enhanced flows in the driest year types. This dry and critical year water will benefit the American River and points downstream in times when the system needs it most. These flow contributions will be provided in balance with upstream reservoir operations and in consideration of continued groundwater sustainability.

Based on the options before you, it seems that the reasonable choice that is environmentally protective while providing water for all beneficial uses is the Healthy Rivers and landscapes proposal. ECOS urges you to accept this proposal.

Sincerely,



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Chair, Water Committee and ECOS Board Member