

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2015

Mr. Ren Lohofener, Regional Director  
Pacific Southwest Region, U.S. Fish &  
Wildlife Service  
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2606  
Sacramento, CA 95825

Mr. David Murillo, Regional Director  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Mid-Pacific  
Region  
2800 Cottage Way, Room MP-100  
Sacramento, CA 95825

Mr. William Stelle, Regional Administrator  
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration  
Fisheries, West Coast Region  
7600 Sand Point Way Northeast, Building 1  
Seattle, WA 98115

Dear Regional Directors Lohofener and Murillo and Regional Administrator Stelle:  
We write to express our grave concerns with the 2015 Drought Contingency Plan and subsequent updates for New Melones Reservoir operations and flow requirements for the remaining 2015 water year.

Last April/May, 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation drained approximately 60,000 acre-feet of water from New Melones reservoir on the Stanislaus river - enough to meet the annual needs of a city, of half a million people - in order to comply with environmental laws and regulations.

Since last year, drought conditions have only grown more severe, and many forecasts predict the drought to continue.

Proposed river releases in the coming months that are significantly higher than required under the 2009 Operations and Criteria Plan Biological Opinion for dry and critical water-years will likely cause New Melones to reach dead pool by August. Even if operations of New Melones strictly followed the 2009 OCAP-BO, New Melones will reach dead pool by September or October, still causing a dry river for returning fall-run salmon.

If the reservoir reaches dead pool, communities that rely on Lake Tulloch (downstream of New Melones) for their water supply will be unable to access their water, irrigators downstream of Tulloch Dam will go without water during the hottest months of the year and no flow will be available for fall-run salmon upon its return migration.

Our offices have had previous discussions with you and your staff and are acutely aware of the significant challenges this year causes for balancing the needs of the irrigators, power generation, recreation and the environment. However, pursuing a course of action that leaves no water available during some of the hottest months in the Central Valley and provides no options for returning fall-run salmon is a gross mismanagement of the river system and a failure to avert a preventable disaster.

We request that your agencies enter immediate emergency consultation to devise a new plan that provides for reservoir and river releases to (1) allow for conservation of water in New Melones and Tulloch Reservoirs for as long as possible and (2) to provide certainty that the Stanislaus river will have flow throughout the remainder of the 2015 calendar year.

Our offices stand ready to assist you as needed and appreciate your immediate attention to this request.

Sincerely,

  
JEFF DENHAM  
United States Representative

  
TOM MCCLINTOCK  
United States Representative

Cc: Mr. Charlton H. Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Game