DELTA AD HOC RECREATION COMMITTEE
c/o Delta Protection Commission
P.O. Box 530
Walnut Grove, CA 95690

January 4, 2000

Steve Ritchie, Acting Executive Director
CALFED
1416 Ninth Street, Room 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Comments on Recreation in the North Delta Bundle of Stage IA Actions

Dear Mr. Ritchie:

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta contains around 700 miles of navigable channels, providing a variety of recreational opportunities including boating, fishing, hunting, camping, wildlife viewing, and other day-use activities. According to a recreation survey conducted in 1997, around 23 percent of all registered boaters and licensed anglers in California recreated in the Delta in 1996. Of the boaters and anglers recreating in the Delta, most reside in the Delta counties of Sacramento, San Joaquin, Contra Costa, and Solano, but many travel from as far away as the Bay Area, Stanislaus County, and Los Angeles County. According to an economic analysis of only boating and fishing in the Delta (i.e., not including people who camp, hunt, view wildlife, or recreate at day-use facilities such as parks and picnic areas), it is estimated that the Delta supports well over 14 million recreational user days per year, resulting in over $250 million in expenditures (yielding over $455 million in total expenditures and over 8,000 jobs) in the Delta region.

It is because recreation plays such an integral role in the land use and economy of the Delta region that it is recognized, along with agriculture and wildlife/fisheries habitat, as a land use which needs to be protected by the State of California under the Delta Protection Act of 1992. In light of the tremendous amounts of proposed ecosystem restoration and water quality actions proposed under the CALFED Program for the Delta over the next 30 years, the Delta Ad Hoc Recreation Committee (Committee), which is made up of representatives of several State agencies, boating and recreational fishing groups, and local government recreation managers, was convened to discuss the possible impacts to and future role of recreation activities in these proposed actions.

Recreation in the Delta is focused on the unique attributes of the region – the many waterways, the vegetation, and the fish and wildlife. The proposed ecosystem restoration will support and enhance Delta recreation. The water quality program will enhance water contact recreation opportunities as well as providing enhanced aquatic habitat.

The goal of this Committee is, in an active advisory role, to assist CALFED in identifying unique opportunities to go beyond mitigation requirements and provide new recreational opportunities that tie in with or benefit from the proposed CALFED actions. This strategy of not only mitigating impacts to recreation, but working with the Committee to identify and assist in the development of needed recreation enhancements in the Delta, will help build support for the overall CALFED program from a broader spectrum of the public. The Committee is currently undergoing its own process to identify potential recreation opportunities associated with boating in the Delta and will be providing more information to the CALFED Program as it becomes available. In addition, the Department of Boating and Waterways is preparing a boating needs assessment which will be completed in May 2000. Hopefully, this new information will, with the assistance of the Committee, be incorporated into the CALFED planning process.

Proposed North Delta Bundle of Actions:

The Ad Hoc Committee met with CALFED staff to review the proposed North Delta bundle of actions. CALFED staff described the key projects including: resolution of the local flooding associated with the Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers, and habitat restoration along Georgiana Slough and on McCormack Williamson Tract downstream of the confluence of the Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers. In addition, studies will be started evaluating the possibility of a new intake on the Sacramento River near Hood and delivering water in the non-flood seasons to the Mokelumne River. These studies will also evaluate operation of the Delta Cross Channel gates.

Existing Recreation in the North Delta Area:

There are a number of marinas in the Walnut Grove area on the Sacramento River and on the Mokelumne River. In addition, there is a public fishing access site (Sacramento County) on Georgiana Slough, and the Delta Meadows State River Park is on Snodgrass Slough (between Locke and McCormack Williamson Tract), including about 250 acres of water-covered lands just acquired by State Parks. These water-covered lands are very popular for summer mooring by houseboats and other boats. The North Delta study area is also popular for fishing from shore and from boats, and canoeing. The Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is within the study area; the Refuge has no permanent facilities for public use but does provide docent-guided access from time to time.

Comments of the Ad Hoc Recreation Committee:

The Committee urges CALFED, in cooperation with the Committee and other interested entities, to work with local, State and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to enhance recreation on public and private landholdings in the North Delta study area. The Committee would like CALFED to address the following general and specific comments.

General Comments:

- Protect existing travel routes for boats; navigability of North Delta channels must be maintained.
- Protect against unreasonable and inappropriate speed zones and other restrictions on recreational boating.
- Develop, in cooperation with specific Committee recreation planning efforts, a Deltawide recreation vision/master plan.
- Strive to fully understand existing recreation activities, facilities, and uses in the North Delta planning area, by utilizing the experience and knowledge of the Committee in the recreational planning processes for the North Delta bundle of actions.
- Ensure that proposals that would impact surface water elevations will not adversely impact recreational uses, existing recreation facilities, water quality, or water temperatures.
- Protect and enhance the water quality in the Delta for aquatic habitat and for water contact recreation.
- Take advantage of publicly owned lands and publicly owned facilities to provide facilities for the general public.
- Partner with private facility owners/managers to provide needed facilities for the public, with the private facility owners/mangers providing oversight and maintenance.
- Partner with private interests, local governments, and special districts to provide needed recreational facilities in the North Delta, noting that local governments do not have adequate funds for operation and maintenance of recreation facilities. CALFED could provide assistance in establishing an endowment fund or a regional entity to utilize in operating and maintaining recreation facilities.
- Coordinate between water quality actions proposed under the CALFED Program and water quality improvement efforts of recreational boaters, such as funding pumpouts, waste disposal facilities, and restrooms.
- Ensure that plans to enhance habitat for a single species would not be detrimental to other species of fish.
- Protect and enhance the habitat of important warm water game fish in the North Delta, such as Black Bass, Striped Bass, and Catfish.

Specific Comments:

- Encourage and possibly assist in the funding of improvements at existing Sacramento County facilities at Georgiana Slough (better restroom; fishing access; picnic facilities; trails); the County could manage improvements.
- Encourage and possibly assist in the funding of public facilities at McCormack-Williamson Tract (wildlife viewing; trail; fishing access; restrooms); Nature Conservancy could manage improvements.
- Encourage and possibly assist in the funding of public facilities at Delta Meadows River Park (small boat launch ramp; boating trails; pumpout facility; fishing access; trails; restroom; parking lot; camping areas; mooring areas); improvements could be managed by the State Park.

- Encourage and possibly assist in the funding of public facilities at Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (visitor's center; parking lot; restrooms; trails; wildlife viewing; educational programs); Fish and Wildlife Service could manage improvements.
- Coordinate with Sacramento County's effort to update its regional trails concept plan, which identifies possible multi-use trails that could be constructed in the North Delta area, and possibly assist in the funding of some of these improvements; Sacramento County could manage new trails and facilities.
- Encourage and possibly assist in the funding of a bicycle/pedestrian trail and restrooms around the Delta Loop; Delta Loop business owners or Sacramento County could manage improvements.
- Encourage and possibly assist in the funding of docks/landings in Delta waterfront communities to allow access from the waterways to the communities and their visitor-serving facilities; local communities could manage improvements.

The Delta Ad Hoc Recreation Committee looks forward to working with the CALFED staff to provide new recreation enhancements in the Delta as part of the North Delta bundle of actions. The Committee appreciates CALFED staff's assistance in this cooperative effort, and looks forward to continuing this working relationship.

Sincerely,

Bill Curry, Chairman
Delta Ad Hoc Recreation Committee

cc: Rob Cooke