Senator Jeff Bingaman December 5, 2012
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Washington DC 20510

Re: Oppose measures to de-designate the Merced Wild & Scenic River!

Dear Senator Bingaman:

The undersigned coalition of conservation and recreation organizations, businesses, and tribes urge you to uphold permanent protection of the Merced Wild & Scenic River and oppose any attempt to remove these safeguards for a segment of the river in order to fulfill

the Merced Irrigation District's (MID) speculative proposal to expand the McClure Reservoir and thereby flood a segment of the river.

Currently pending in your committee is H.R. 2578, a compilation of many of anti-conservation bills, including Title I, Lower Merced River, that would roll-back Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protections for a portion of the Merced River in California to allow the enlargement of Lake McClure Reservoir. A similar Senate-sponsored bill may be introduced, as well. Any proposal to strip away protection sets a dangerous precedent for Wild and Scenic rivers across the country and would undo the promise that you and the Congress made in 1992 to ensure that the Merced River "…be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations."

If sanctioned by Congress, MID's expanded reservoir would permanently destroy a portion of the river that is enjoyed by thousands of rafters, kayakers, hikers, and other visitors annually. Additionally, the expanded reservoir would drown the threatened limestone salamander, a wildlife species protected by both the California Endangered Species Act and the State Fully-Protected Species statute. Significant public lands would also be flooded, including a portion of the Merced River Wilderness Study Area, which is currently protected by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

Rescinding federal protection for the Merced River to allow for speculative reservoir expansion makes little sense. Expanding the reservoir and inundating the river upstream would produce little or no actual increase in useable water yield in this reservoir that has never actually filled and spilled. The proposed operation of the expanded reservoir raises safety questions because it would block off nearly all of the dam's emergency spillway. The possible consequences of such a proposal include potentially catastrophic overtopping of the dam under extremely high flows. Finally, the costs of such a scheme have not been disclosed and may require an expensive raise of the Highway 49 Bridge over the reservoir.

Like our National Parks, the National Wild & Scenic River System is one of "America's best ideas." Our Wild & Scenic Rivers are as important as our National Parks and equally deserving of truly permanent protection.

On behalf of present and future generations, we ask you to have mercy on the Merced River (*El Rio de nuestra señora de Merced*) and reaffirm that all of the Merced Wild & Scenic River shall remain free flowing forever.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(groups)

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