August 26, 2022

Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor,  
State of California  
1021 O Street, Ste. 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Toni Atkins  
President pro Tempore,  
California State Senate  
1021 O Street, Room 8518  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Anthony Rendon  
Speaker,  
California State Assembly  
1021 O Street, Room 8330  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Major floods are on the horizon in California. Fund additional flood management now.

State resource agencies have projected an increase in the occurrence and severity of major floods in California as climate change progresses. A recent peer reviewed study by Huang and Swain found that climate change has doubled the likelihood of a catastrophic flooding event, and that runoff estimates from such an event could be 200% to 400% higher than historical values\(^1\). The cost of such an event could approach $725 Billion, which is 3 times the cost of a catastrophic earthquake with similar likelihood\(^2\). These findings were picked up by the New York Times and other major news publications, increasing public awareness of this risk. However, plans to mitigate these disasters remain underfunded by the State of California. Current budgetary proposals are not enough to protect Californians from the danger or the cost of the coming extreme flood events.

With very few days remaining to finalize the State budget, the legislature has a crucial opportunity to limit the loss of life and property by allocating a portion of the budget surplus toward flood and floodplain management. If the State is going to live up to the Governor’s 2020 Water Portfolio “Be Prepared” vision, floodplain management funding is needed. The legislature has an unprecedented additional opportunity to leverage these State dollars for federal funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s BRIC grant program (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities).

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\(^1\) Huang, X., & Swain, D. L. (2022). Climate change is increasing the risk of a California megaflood. Science Advances, 8(31), eabq0995.

Adequate flood protection will require a portfolio of projects, including reservoir management, multi-benefit and nature-based solutions, urban flood control, flood mitigation, and levee setbacks. Such projects can be found in the Central Valley Flood Protection Board’s Central Valley Flood Protection Plan. Although this plan has achieved wide support, it is critically underfunded and therefore can’t meet its goals.

Multi-benefit flood protection projects should be prioritized for funding because they:

- Reduce flood risks and protect vulnerable communities by giving rivers more room to swell
- Improve precious water supply during dry years through groundwater recharge
- Increase populations of threatened and endangered fish species of both commercial and cultural significance
- Increase riparian habitat which hosts many sensitive species and is one of the most highly degraded habitat types in the state
- Saves money through resilient and lasting solutions and preventing catastrophic damage

The signatories of this letter strongly encourage the legislature to invest in a resilient water future for California by increasing funding for flood and floodplain management projects.

Sincerely,

Jann Dorman  
Executive Director  
Friends of the River

Amy Merrill  
California Regional Director (Interim)  
American Rivers
Dierdre Des Jardins  
Director  
California Water Research

Julie Rentner  
President  
River Partners

CC:
Ann O’Leary, Chief of Staff, Governor Newsom  
Irene Ho, Chief of Staff, Assemblymember Ting  
Nick Hardeman, Chief of Staff, Senator Atkins  
Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
Senator Jim Nielsen, Vice Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
Assemblymember Vince Fong, Vice Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget  
Kip Lipper, Senior Policy Advisor, Senator Atkins  
Alf Brandt, General Counsel, Assemblymember Rendon  
Hazel Miranda, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom