





March 17, 2025

Submitted Via Position Letter Portal

The Honorable Isaac G. Bryan
Chair, Assembly Natural Resources Committee
1021 O Street, Room 4610
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 43 (Schultz) – Protecting California’s Wild & Scenic Rivers

Dear Chair Bryan and Committee Members,

We, the undersigned organizations, urge your support for AB 43 (Schultz), which ensures state protection of rivers in California in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. AB 43 removes the expiration date on provisions enacted under AB 2975 (2018) as memorialized under Public Resources Code (PRC), Division 5, Chapter 1.4, section 5093.71, allowing California to add federally designated wild and scenic rivers to the state wild and scenic river system if the federal government weakens or removes protections. Without this legislation, California will lose its ability to safeguard its most cherished free-flowing rivers from federal actions that would allow dams, diversions, and other harmful water projects.

California’s wild and scenic rivers are essential to the state’s natural heritage and tourism economy, providing affordable, clean drinking water, sustaining fisheries and wildlife, and offering unparalleled recreational opportunities. The federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Act was created to protect these waterways. Yet, multiple attempts have been made in Congress to strip protections from rivers such as the Merced, opening them to expanded reservoirs and destructive water development. In response, California passed AB 2975 in 2018 to provide a safety net, ensuring that any federal rollback of river protections could trigger state protection. However, that provision is set to expire on December 31,

2025, leaving California's nationally protected rivers vulnerable. AB 43 eliminates this sunset and guarantees that the state could continue to protect its rivers regardless of federal actions.

The urgency of AB 43 is heightened by the fact that the federal administration has already signaled its intent to remove environmental safeguards to fast-track marginally effective water storage and infrastructure projects, including those threatening California's rivers. A January 24, 2025, executive order¹ directed federal agencies to identify regulatory barriers that prevent water development, putting wild and scenic river protections at direct risk. This follows a troubling precedent from President Trump's first term, during which his administration attempted to weaken numerous environmental laws, roll back public land protections, and support efforts to dismantle federal safeguards for waterways. We can expect additional congressional attempts to strip wild and scenic protections from rivers like the Merced and many others. Without AB 43, California will lose its mechanism to quickly respond if fast-moving federal efforts succeed.

Current law (PRC 5093.71) as modified by AB 43 applies only to the 819 miles of federally designated rivers in California that do not currently enjoy state protection. This includes segments of the Middle Fork Feather River, Tuolumne River, Merced River (including its South Fork), Kings River (including its South and Middle Forks), Kern River (North and South Forks), Big Sur River, Sisquoc River, Sespe Creek, Piru Creek, Owens River Headwaters (including Glass and Deadman Creeks, Big Springs), Cottonwood Creek, Surprise Canyon, Amargosa River, Whitewater River (including its North, Middle, and South Forks), Deep Creek (and its tributary Holcomb Creek), North Fork San Jacinto River, Fuller Mill Creek, Bautista Creek, and Palm Canyon Creek.

Protecting free-flowing rivers is necessary for a sustainable water future and a commitment to future generations. California's wild and scenic rivers are vital for clean water, tourism, wildlife, and recreation, and once they are lost to dams and diversions, they become very difficult to recover and restore. AB 43 is a simple, proactive measure that ensures the state retains control over protecting its waterways. Making AB 2975 (2018) provisions permanent strengthens California's leadership in river conservation and sends a clear message that our rivers are not for sale.

We urge your aye vote on AB 43 to ensure California can protect its rivers from federal rollbacks.

Sincerely,

¹ Presidential Executive Order of January 24, 2025: MEASURES TO PROVIDE WATER RESOURCES IN CALIFORNIA AND IMPROVE DISASTER RESPONSE IN CERTAIN AREAS IN CERTAIN AREAS:
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/emergency-measures-to-provide-water-resources-in-california-and-improve-disaster-response-in-certain-areas/>



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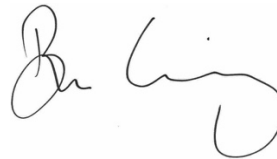
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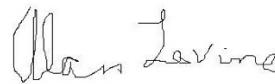
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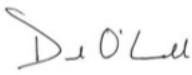
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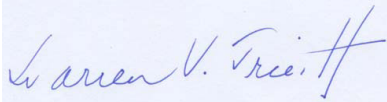
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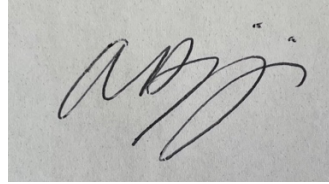
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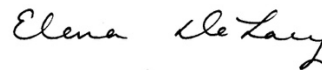
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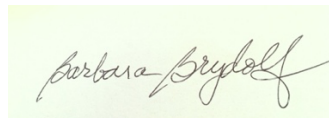
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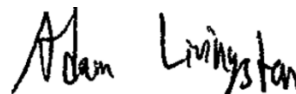
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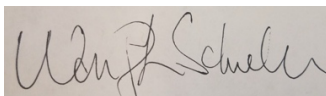
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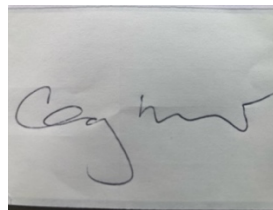
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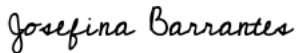
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