



October 17, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

There is no denying the majesty of the Sierra Nevada or the importance of ensuring its forests, streams and meadows are available for use and enjoyment for future generations of Americans. But for many in California's Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada are more than just breathtaking and scenic areas to be enjoyed as tourist destinations; they are also the source of water supply for hundreds of thousands of Valley residents, farms and businesses.

Our two organizations, the Friant Water Authority and the Friant North Authority, collectively represent many of the Californians who depend on the 2.5 million acre-feet of water that annually flow from the forest floor to the Merced, San Joaquin and Kings rivers. We represent 15 water districts and California's fifth-largest city, more than 15,000 small farms and half a million people, and just over one million acres of farmland – all of which rely on San Joaquin River water held at Millerton Lake as their primary source of supply. Our communities sustain and support the highest-producing agricultural areas in the nation.

Recently, we learned of a campaign to establish 1.3 million acres of the Sierra National Forest as a National Monument. We oppose such an action because the resulting restrictions on land use would interfere with forest and fire management activities in the Sierra forests, and could also limit the ability of water users to develop new water storage.

A recent Public Policy Institute of California report warned that California's headwater forests face extreme risk due to wildfires, noting that "Over the past century, California's forested upper watersheds have become dense and unhealthy. Today, the economic, social, and environmental costs of extreme wildfire pose the greatest management challenge in these areas," (*"Protecting Headwaters," October 2016*). The report also warned that "A changing climate is compounding these problems," which was clearly evident in 2016 – after multiple years of drought, more than 22 million trees in California's forests have died within the past year alone, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Without the ability to responsibly manage forests, the risk of reduced runoff and degradation of water quality increase.

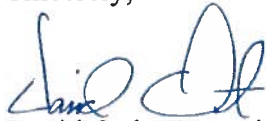
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Additionally, establishing the Sierra National Forest as a National Monument would affect future opportunities to build additional storage in the upper watersheds. This includes Temperance Flat Dam and Reservoir, a project the Department of the Interior has spent more than \$40 million studying over the past 15 years in cooperation with Friant Division water contractors. As you are aware, most climate models predict that the Sierra snowpack will continue to decline in the future, with most precipitation falling as rain rather than snow. Under those circumstances, the ability to capture and store runoff will be critical to ensuring a sustainable supply of water. By preventing new or expanded storage in the upper watershed, a National Monument designation will limit the tools available to help us adapt to a new climate future.

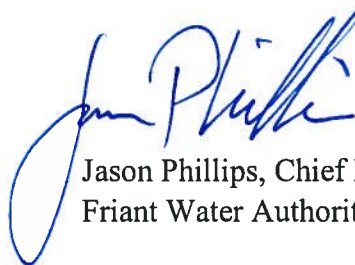
We understand the motivation those who are advocating for protecting the Sierra forests because we, too, share a reverence for those places. While we understand that it is within the President's discretion to declare a National Monument, as Secretary of the Interior you have an important advisory role in his decision. We urge you not to support establishment of such a monument, as it would have potentially devastating effects on water supply for those who – like our communities – depend on these watersheds for their lives and livelihoods.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



David Orth, Executive Officer
Friant North Authority



Jason Phillips, Chief Executive Officer
Friant Water Authority

cc:

Honorable Sen. Dianne Feinstein
Honorable Sen. Barbara Boxer
Honorable Rep. Kevin McCarthy
Honorable Rep. Jim Costa
Honorable Rep. Tom McClintock
Honorable Rep. Devin Nunes
Honorable Rep. David Valadao