March 25, 2019

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

As the new Congress begins, we look forward to working with you and the committee on an infrastructure package that will benefit all Americans. On behalf of the thousands of Western farmers, ranchers and businesses we represent who provide the food our nation relies upon on millions of acres of productive land, as well as agencies who supply water to Western urban, suburban and rural residents, we urge you to use any infrastructure package to help address severe hydrological conditions in the West.

Water challenges in the West are significant and daunting. Despite wet conditions this winter, the Colorado River Basin has experienced the longest dry spell in recorded history and one of the driest in the past 1,200 years. According to research evaluating tree rings, hydrological conditions in California in the mid-2010s were the worst to hit the region since the 13th century. Drought conditions in the Pacific Northwest over the last half-decade have been severe. As such, we are encouraged by statements that Chairman DeFazio has made that any infrastructure package include water projects.

As a nation we must continually invest in the Western water infrastructure necessary to meet current and future demands. Our existing water infrastructure in the West is aging and in need of rehabilitation and improvement. Water conservation, water recycling, watershed management, conveyance, desalination, water transfers, groundwater storage, and surface storage are all needed in a diversified management portfolio.

- **Water conservation**, one of the most cost-effective actions, needs to continue to be aggressively pursued in conjunction with new storage and other actions.

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• We need new water storage – both above or below ground – in order to adapt to a changing hydrology and develop usable and sustainable supplies to meet growing demands for water. Surface storage, in particular, provides a degree of operational flexibility and significant water supply volumes that cannot be provided by other management actions. However, we also need new tools to assist in achieving groundwater use sustainability across the West.

• Failing to improve water infrastructure and expand useable supplies will inevitably result in more conflict as pressure grows to ‘solve’ urban and environmental water shortages by moving water away from Western irrigated agriculture. The federal government must become a more active partner in solving these water problems in the West either through direct funding to help meet these needs or develop and expand federal financing mechanisms that have a very low cost to the Treasury and to taxpayers. In short, water resource infrastructure investments should be made more attractive and affordable for non-federal interests.

• Beyond monetary assistance, the federal government should also bring forward policy changes that help ensure that water projects are built in a timely fashion. Making funding available for projects is useless if projects take decades to be approved. In the past, Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, put forward significant efforts to streamline environmental regulations and permitting processes. Any infrastructure package should address this concern by streamlining the regulations and permitting processes for water projects.

• Today, on average, seven to eight million acres of forests and grasslands burn annually, about double the figure from three decades ago. Today’s wildfires are often larger, more catastrophic, and deadlier. Wildfires in several western states are being impacted by decades of fire suppression, longer fire seasons, pest/insect infestations, reduced snowpack in high elevation forests and increasingly severe droughts. Modernized watershed and active forest management tools are just as important as traditional water infrastructure projects to Western water supply reliability. We urge Congress to seek bipartisan measures that streamline projects to thin forests and reduce the fire threat across our National Forest watersheds, which are so important to all Western water users.

• Finally, in order to respond to current and future water shortages, Congress must also provide federal agencies with more flexibility under existing environmental laws and regulations to encourage a more cooperative approach toward achieving multiple goals. And, where such flexibility currently exists in law, Congress should demand that agencies use those flexibilities to act with the urgency and promptness that this drought crisis demands.

We need you to ensure that Western water users have every tool available to survive and recover from years of drought and to prepare for the hard, dry years the future may hold. Congress must use any infrastructure package to not only address our nation’s chronic needs surrounding roads and bridges, but to also include water infrastructure needs for storage and conveyance.
Sincerely,

**National and Regional Organizations**
American Agri-Women
Family Farm Alliance
Irrigation Association
Klamath Water Users Association (CA/OR)
National Onion Association
National Water Resources Association
Northwest Horticultural Council
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rural & Agriculture Council of America
United Fresh Produce Association
United States Cattlemen's Association
Western Agricultural Processors Association
Western Growers

**Arizona**
Agribusiness & Water Council of Arizona
Arizona Cotton Growers
Arizona Farm Bureau
Arizona Farm & Ranch Group
Arizona Nursery Association
Central Arizona Water Conservation District
Electrical District No.8 of Maricopa County
Electrical District No. 3 of Pinal County
Maricopa Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District
New Magma Irrigation and Drainage District
Salt River Project
United Dairymen of Arizona
Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation & Drainage District
Yuma Fresh Vegetable Association

California
Association of California Water Agencies
Byron-Bethany Irrigation District
California Agricultural Irrigation Association
California Alfalfa & Forage Association
California Bean Shippers Association
California Cattlemen’s Association
California Citrus Mutual
California Cotton Ginters and Growers Association
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Fresh Fruit Association
CA Milk Producers Council
California Rangeland Trust
California Tomato Growers Association
California Warehouse Association
California Wool Growers Association
California Women for Agriculture
Central California Irrigation District
Central Valley Project Water Association
Family Water Alliance, Inc.
Friant Water Authority
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties
James Irrigation District
Lava Beds-Butte Valley Resource Conservation District
Northern California Water Association
Pacific Egg and Poultry Association
San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority
San Luis Canal Company
San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority
Solano Irrigation District
Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority
Tulelake Irrigation District
United Water Conservation District
Western United Dairymen
Westlands Water District

Colorado
Colorado Dairy Farmers
Colorado Farm Bureau
Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Colorado Grange
Colorado Nursery & Greenhouse Association
Colorado Pork Producers Council
Colorado Sugarbeet Growers
Colorado Wool Growers Association
Dolores Water Conservancy District
Pothook Water Conservancy District
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association

Idaho
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Idaho Water Users Association  
Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District

Kansas  
Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District

Montana  
Montana Farm Bureau Federation

Nebraska  
Farwell Irrigation District  
Sargent Irrigation District

New Mexico  
Elephant Butte Irrigation District  
Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District  
New Mexico Chile Pepper Association  
New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau  
New Mexico Water Resources Association

Nevada  
Nevada Farm Bureau  
Truckee-Carson Irrigation District

Oregon  
Oregon Association of Nurseries  
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association  
Oregon Farm Bureau
Oregon Water Resources Congress

Utah
Utah Farm Bureau
Strawberry Water Users Association of Utah

Washington
City of Yakima
Columbia Basin Development League
Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District
Kittitas Reclamation District
Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District
Roza Irrigation District
Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District
Washington Farm Bureau
Washington State Potato Commission
Washington State Tree Fruit Association
Washington State Water Resources Association
Yakima Basin Joint Board
Yakima Tieton Irrigation District

Wyoming
Little Snake River Conservation District
Savery-Little Snake Water Conservancy District
Wyoming Farm Bureau
Wyoming Stock Growers Association