June 30, 2003

Mr. Marc Van Camp
MBK Engineers
2450 Alhambra Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95817

Re: **SSWD's Diversion Expansion Project and Related Flow Improvement Ideas**

Dear Marc:

We write to follow-up on our February meeting regarding South Sutter Water District's (SSWD's) canal/siphon expansion project currently underway. (*Initial Study and Proposed Negative Declaration, State Clearinghouse #2002082010.*) We would appreciate the opportunity to meet again with you to describe some ideas that we've been developing since that time: one that could help to improve flow and temperature conditions in the lower Bear River in conjunction with the above-referenced project; and one that could help to protect and restore flows in several important creeks that traverse the District.

As we explained previously, our interest in these initiatives stems originally from our involvement in efforts to (re)introduce and sustain salmon in the Yuba River system via the Upper Yuba River Studies Program (UYRSP) collaborative. This effort includes, among other agreements, various "keep whole" commitments for downstream (and down-canal) interests in the heavily inter-plumbed Yuba-Bear-American Rivers system.

During the course of our UYRSP-related investigations, we have become familiar not only with SSWD's diversion expansion project plans, but with some important aquatic resource values in the lower reaches of the system *and* with the fact that SSWD receives anywhere from 5,000-20,000 acre feet of "surplus" or "supplemental" water each year from the Nevada Irrigation District (NID) via the Bear-Halsey-Wise canal system.

The first idea that we would like to explore would be to re-route some portion of these supplemental NID supplies through the lower Bear River for delivery to SSWD via the expanded canal/siphon system below New Camp Far West (NCFW) Reservoir. Doing so would of course require the cooperation of NID and possibly other entities as well, though our research to-date suggests that this idea might well be accomplished at little or no net cost, and with little or no loss in associated hydropower generation.

Of course, in addition to potential costs this strategy would feature a number of important potential benefits. For example, flows in the lower Bear River could be improved by as much as a factor of 10 over the typical six-month period of minimum releases, which could also help reduce stranding during the now-sudden ramp downs from winter to summer season releases. These improvements could be accompanied by increases in hydropower output at NID's Combie South power plant, and at South Sutter's NCFW power plant as well. Because increased main stem flows would help to cool summer/fall

low-flow period water temperatures, such flows could help to limit the production of bio-available forms of mercury in NCFW Reservoir. This, in turn, could reduce the bio-accumulation of mercury in reservoir-resident fish, downstream salmon, and other species of concern, with associated benefits to public health.

The second idea we would like to explore involves protecting and improving watershed flows in several of the major creeks that traverse the District. As you know, these creeks today are part of the same intertwined water management system discussed above, and are important for salmon as well as other species of interest. We thus wish to ensure that their flow-related needs are addressed through comparable re-management strategies or other means, ideally in conjunction with several important local watershed initiatives already well underway (e.g., the Auburn Ravine/Coon Creek Watershed CRMP with Placer County, the City of Lincoln, and others; and the Nevada County-Placer County Bear River CRMP). We understand that SSWD has had at least some participation in these efforts to-date, so we are anxious to get your thoughts on how, and where, our ideas might best fit in.

Finally, from recent press accounts we are aware that you are hoping to secure state funds in order to complete the final phase(s) of your canal/siphon expansion project. If the appropriate agreements and understandings can be reached, we would certainly do our best to be helpful in this regard as well.

We are anxious to follow up on all of the above as soon as possible, and would suggest another meeting at your offices in Sacramento in early July. Please let us know what you think, and when you might be available, at your earliest convenience.

With best regards,

David Yardas
Environmental Defense
11895 Frond Road, Office Annex
Truckee, CA 96161
(530) 582-9585

Allan Eberhart
Sierra Club
24084 Clayton Road
Auburn, CA 95949
(530) 268-1890

cc: Tamara Gallentine, Nevada County RCD
Katie Maloney, Placer County RCD
Les Nicholson, Nevada Irrigation District

bcc: Terry Mayfield, NID
Kevin Goishi, PG&E
Janet Cohen, SYRCL
Rich Gresham, District Manager, Placer Co RCD
John Nelson
Mike Tucker
Cesar Blanco