

1 OSHA R. MESERVE (SBN 204240)
 2 PATRICK M. SOLURI (SBN 210036)
 3 SOLURI MESERVE, A LAW CORPORATION
 4 510 8th Street
 5 Sacramento, California 95814
 6 Telephone: (916) 455-7300
 7 Facsimile: (916) 244-7300
 8 Email: osha@semlawyers.com
 9 patrick@semlawyers.com

10 Specially Appearing for Protestant Save Our Sandhill Cranes
 11 for Purposes of Presenting Part 2 Testimony

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**BEFORE THE
 CALIFORNIA STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD**

HEARING IN THE MATTER OF
 CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER
 RESOURCES AND UNITED STATES
 BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
 REQUEST FOR A CHANGE IN POINT OF
 DIVERSION FOR CALIFORNIA WATER FIX

**TESTIMONY OF DAVID YEE
 SAVE OUR SANDHILL CRANES**

1 **I. INTRODUCTION**

2 This testimony describes how the Delta is an important resource for recreation in the
3 form of wildlife observation, education, and conservation, with an emphasis on bird watching. I
4 will comment on how the Delta Tunnels project would be against the public interest because of
5 its negative impacts on recreational birding.

6 **II. BACKGROUND**

7 I have been an avid bird-watcher since the age of 10. I have travelled the U.S., Central
8 America and Southeast Asia extensively to watch and study birds. However, my main focus
9 and passion for birding is in California, and starting in 1981, San Joaquin County and the
10 Central Valley, became my primary interests. Since 1981, I have averaged five hours/week of
11 observing and studying the identification, status and distribution of birds in San Joaquin
12 County. (See also SOSC-73.)

13 As a native to the area, I have been able to observe first-hand the changes in land-use
14 in the Delta over the past 50 years. As a keen observer of wildlife and birds over that time, my
15 testimony discusses why the dramatic changes proposed by the Delta Tunnels project would
16 negatively affect the local birdlife, as well as the public's ability to observe and enjoy it. In
17 addition, I discuss the cultural connections between the local community and the unique
18 environment of the Delta that would be harmed by the Delta Tunnels project.

19 **III. TESTIMONY**

20 It is always tempting to regard the value of recreation in direct dollars produced. For me
21 personally, the term "recreation" has very strong cultural significance. While growing up, what
22 was introduced to me for enjoyment, stimulation, and education was usually a function of both
23 my family/friends and my environment. As a child my father was an avid fisherman. When I
24 was around 10 years of age my father's interest switched to golfing. My brother and I spent
25 countless hours with him and my mother learning how to fish in the Delta, then golfing at the
26 Stockton Golf and Country Club along the San Joaquin River. We became excellent at both.
27 My parents were also avid campers and I remember spending many summers as a child
28 camping up in the Sierra.

1 The fishing, golfing, and camping were not unique to my family. We did those things
2 because they were so available in our community, and nearly everyone else did these kinds of
3 activities as well. Growing up in the Delta, nearly all of my friends did activities that took
4 advantage of the unique environment it provided; fishing, hunting, boating, water skiing,
5 bicycling, year-round gardening, and of course nature-watching. For most, the nature-
6 watching was a natural byproduct of one's activity. But, as in all cultures, the "out-door
7 environment" becomes as important as the activity itself. And in time, it often defines the
8 activity. I can go fishing anywhere in the world, but I always compare it to my best days fishing
9 as a child with my father. Boating on a warm summer day as the sun is setting is wonderful
10 anywhere in the world, but nothing compares to where one was raised doing it, and in my case
11 it was the Delta.

12 My parents loved the outdoors and introduced me to it at a very young age. But they
13 never were bird-watchers, nor did they ever become bird-watchers. Bird-watching for me was
14 a byproduct of living in the Delta and seeing so much wildlife while fishing and golfing with my
15 family. In time it was what I did with my family when we were out doing recreation. It became
16 part of my identity, not only within my family, but also within my community as a person
17 growing up in the Delta. My parents raised me within the context of Delta life. I was educated
18 my entire formative life within the context of the Delta environment. When a farmer talks about
19 the drought affecting their crops, it all makes sense to me, even though I am not a farmer.
20 Because I was allowed and encouraged to spend so much time out in the Delta, the history
21 and significance of the region is within me, and it is mine to keep, cherish and pass on. And I
22 believe this is true for all communities and their cultures.

23 I have a profound love for the Stockton/Lodi area. It is not just because I was born and
24 raised here. Americans, and especially Californians, are very mobile and relocate commonly.
25 The reasons are many and totally valid. It is easy to become disappointed and disillusioned
26 with one's hometown. American communities often change too fast, or too slow. And for
27 those that do not move away, the desire to do so is often very present. There is often a
28

1 disconnect that develops over time. I have felt it many times in my lifetime living here in the
2 Delta.

3 One of the very important aspects that keeps me living here and wanting to stay here is
4 the culture of the area. And this culture is not defined by my family and friends alone. It is the
5 entire environment. My desire to work here, be productive, and give to the community is tied
6 directly to the environment. And when it wanes even after spending time with my family, I just
7 drive out into the Delta to observe and appreciate the thousands of Sandhill Cranes and
8 waterfowl that are spending their winters here with me. On warm summer days, I witness the
9 threatened Swainson's Hawk nesting in my favorite Valley Oak or visit my favorite colony of
10 the declining Burrowing Owl just outside of Stockton in the Delta farmlands, and all is good.
11 This is home.

12 Not only is it important for these birds and the wildlife of the Delta to be present, but
13 they need to be easily accessible, at all times. Without them, part of my identity with the
14 community suffers. And it is not just because I "miss" them. They are constant reminders of
15 my connection to my past with the region. They educate me about the history of the Central
16 Valley and in particular the Delta. They convince me to continue to lay down my roots in this
17 area for future generations. And they convince me that continuing to live here is better than
18 anywhere else in the world.

19 When I take local people on birding field trips out into the Delta, whether retired adults
20 or elementary kids, I am passing this legacy on. It is so important for children in particular to
21 be able to easily observe and appreciate what the Delta has to offer them as part of their
22 cultural identity. So when it is time for them to make a decision to stay in the community and
23 become one of its productive members, the value of the environment and its wildlife can be
24 considered. And when I take folks from out-of-town out on birding trips out into the Delta, I am
25 able to instill an appreciation for not only its wildlife, but the culture that has protected and
26 conserved it. And this in turn helps them to at the very least support the region as a regular
27 tourist. It might even encourage them to come and make it home, just like I have for all of my
28 life.

1 One of the best illustrations of birding use in the area of the project is provided by eBird.
2 The eBird project records bird sighting reports by an individual at a particular site into an online
3 database and allows it to be available to the public. With a data request to eBird, we were able
4 to isolate individual bird reports within the immediate region of the project during the period of
5 November 2016 – March 2017. The resulting data in relation to the proposed project footprint
6 is illustrated in Exhibit SOSC-77. (See also LAND-3 and LAND-120 [intake and project
7 overview figures].)

8 However, it's important to understand that eBird is used primarily by very serious birders
9 who comprise only a small percentage of the 18 million bird-watchers censused by the U.S.
10 Fish and Wildlife Service (2016) who make at least one annual birding trip away from their
11 home. The total number currently using eBird in the U.S. is estimated to be about 300,000
12 individuals. This represents only about 1.7% of the estimated bird-watchers within the U.S.
13 (See SOSC-76.) For the purposes of the illustrated map in SOSC-77, the eBird reports for the
14 project region were multiplied by 10 to give at least a minimum conservative estimate of the
15 actual number of bird-watchers that visited the region of the project.

16 As you can see from the map in Exhibit SOSC-77, the region that would be affected by
17 the Delta Tunnels construction and operation is a very significant region for bird watching,
18 even using a very short sample timeframe with limited birding reports. The longevity of the
19 construction—up to 14 continuous years—and the scale of the construction—the largest
20 project on record for our region—would dramatically impact the ability of birders to enjoy much
21 of the Delta and the excellent opportunities that it provides for world class bird watching. This
22 project would create an unreasonable impact on wildlife and would be contrary to the public
23 interest. (See SWRCB-110, CEQA Findings and SOC [overriding significant and unavoidable
24 Impacts Rec-2 and Rec-3 relating to reduced recreation and navigation opportunities as a
25 result of the project]; see also SWRCB-102, FEIR/S, Chapter 15.)

26 **IV. CONCLUSION**

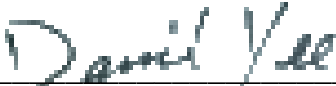
27 The dollar values created by bird-watching recreation are rather easily explained by
28 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service charts and graphs. One can extrapolate how many of these

1 dollars are annually spent in the Delta Region of the Central Valley by taking numbers from
2 known sources such as eBird, bird festivals, breeding bird surveys, and Christmas Bird
3 Counts. The economic value of bird-watching recreation to the Delta Region is undeniable. Of
4 equally, and perhaps greater significance, are the cultural values of wildlife viewing recreation
5 in the Delta. The economic value of developing and maintaining happy and productive family
6 units within a community are clearly priceless.

7 The areas within the Delta where one can easily observe and appreciate birds and
8 wildlife has greatly diminished over the past 50 years. Public access issues to these
9 increasingly few areas are always in flux, and access has become harder, especially in recent
10 years. The reasons are many. Some are valid and reasonable. Many are not.

11 Because of the negative impacts on birds and other wildlife and the impact on birding
12 and birding tourism in the Delta, as well as the impacts on the cultural connection to a place
13 enjoyed by residents and visitors to the Delta, this project would have unreasonable impacts
14 on wildlife and be contrary to the public interest.

15
16 Executed on the 30th day of November, 2017, at Sacramento, California.

17
18 
19 David Yee

20 REFERENCES

21 Map - Recreation Birders in Delta Tunnels Project Area from eBird Data, Winter 2016.

22 [SOSC-77]

23 Statement of Qualifications for David Yee. [SOSC-73]

24 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2017. 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-
25 associated Recreation: National Overview. [SOSC-76]