



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

**MAY 07 2015**

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

I am responding to your letter of March 12, 2015, on behalf of Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, requesting the Department of the Interior's (Department) response to four questions on water supplies for wildlife refuges designated under the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA). Thank you for your interest in and continuing commitment to preserving wildlife refuge areas designated under the CVPIA. Drought conditions in California are creating many challenges to fulfilling our commitments under the CVPIA. I am pleased to provide our responses to your questions below:

1. Does the Department of the Interior prioritize available CVPIA refuge funding for the conveyance and delivery of Level 2 refuge water supplies?

**Response:** Funding for conveyance and delivery of Level 2 refuge water supplies has been and continues to be among our highest CVPIA program priorities. This is evidenced by the fact that in no year since CVPIA was enacted has the Department failed to fund conveyance of available Level 2 refuge supplies. We recognize your commitment to protecting Federal obligations to CVPIA refuges.

2. Does the Department of the Interior acknowledge that it has a nondiscretionary obligation to provide Level 2 refuge water supplies as set forth in CVPIA?

**Response:** The Department believes that the CVPIA is clear in its mandate that the Department provide Level 2 water to CVPIA-designated refuge areas. Continuing drought conditions are presenting challenges to meeting our obligations, and we are working with refuge managers to optimize limited water supplies and provide for public health and safety needs.

3. Should the State recover from the drought, does the Department of the Interior agree that the goal of securing full Level 4 water supplies for CVPIA refuges is an essential component of achieving final CVPIA compliance?

**Response:** Yes. The Department remains committed to meeting our obligation to secure full Level 4 water supplies for CVPIA refuges through completion of construction work necessary to deliver full Level 4 refuge water supplies and development of a sustainable water acquisition program that reduces reliance on spot-market refuge water acquisitions and focuses more on long-term arrangements for meeting CVPIA refuge demands. Planning efforts on this strategy have continued through the ongoing drought and have involved refuge managers and non-governmental organizations having an interest in refuge water supplies.

4. Will the Department of the Interior's CVPIA implementing agencies agree to continue working with refuge stakeholders to identify opportunities for funding and water supplies that will over the long term ensure the Department of the Interior reaches full compliance with its refuge water supply obligations under the CVPIA?

**Response:** The Department continues to work with refuge managers and stakeholder groups to address funding and refuge water supply challenges in an effort to reach full compliance with the mandates under CVPIA. The Department considers involvement of refuge stakeholders as critical to our future strategy.

I hope I have adequately responded to your questions and facilitated a better understanding of the Department's position on meeting our obligations to CVPIA-designated refuges. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael L. Connor", written in a cursive style.

Michael L. Connor