May 17, 2022

Honorable Gavin Newsom

1021 O Street, Suite 9000

Sacramento, CA 95814

**Subject: Executive Order N-7-22 – State of Emergency – Groundwater Recharge**

Dear Honorable Newsom:

The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors is writing you in response to your Executive Order N-7-22 adopted on March 28, 2022. Specifically, Item 12 of the Executive Order states that “To help advance groundwater recharge projects, and to demonstrate the feasibility of projects that can use available high water flows to recharge local groundwater while minimizing flood risks, the Water Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards shall prioritize water right permits, water quality certifications, waste discharge requirements, and conditional waivers of water discharge requirements to accelerate approvals for projects that enhance the ability of a local or state agency to capture high precipitation events for local storage or recharge, consistent with water right priorities and protections for fish and wildlife.”

Through this Executive Order, you are clearly recognizing the importance of groundwater recharge as a tool to improve and/or sustain the health of water availability, benefits for agriculture, the environment, plant and animal species, communities, and certain surface waters that interact with groundwater. Because of your recognition, and to fully realize your goals, we are requesting that the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) recognize groundwater recharge as a beneficial use to a water right, and secondly, that the State Board support and promote efforts by water rights holders to actively recharge groundwater aquifers.

Siskiyou County, and its water users, have continuously supported efforts to recognize groundwater recharge as a beneficial use of a water right, and to promote groundwater recharge activities. The Scott Valley was one of the first basins in California to utilize a temporary permit to conduct a groundwater recharge project demonstrating the benefits of using high flows for aquifer recharge and in-stream flow improvements. Managed recharge provides a practical, systematic benefit for watershed improvements for agriculture, community drinking water supplies, wildlife, and fisheries. In Siskiyou County especially, winter storms and precipitation provide for high river and stream flows. However, there is limited infrastructure to store excess flow for future use during the summer and fall months, to be released for instream benefits, or to aid in connectivity between ground and surface waters. Groundwater recharge provides for an economically efficient opportunity to store water, with little infrastructure need. There are vast opportunities in various groundwater basins throughout the County to capitalize on this opportunity, and through your leadership the State can be a significant source of support in securing water supplies in drought stricken California.

As is true with all parts of the State, water is a chief natural resource for our County, providing life for agricultural activities, fisheries, recreation, human consumption, and more. Historically, northern California and Siskiyou County have been a main supplier of water to other areas in California and a significant portion of the water supply is provided by groundwater. According to the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act Legislation, groundwater accounts for more than one-third of the water used by Californians in an average year and more than one-half of the water used by Californians in a drought year when other sources are unavailable. As we experience consecutive years of drought, it is vital that we focus our attention to replenishing the groundwater that we continue to rely on at all possible times.

Siskiyou County supports legislative solutions to establish groundwater recharge as a beneficial use of an appropriate legal water right, and additionally streamlining the permitting requirements and lower or eliminate fees for entities who undertake the necessary actions to provide a watershed-wide benefit. The Board of Supervisors strongly supports sustainable water use and we request that this subject is given your highest level of consideration. For further communication and correspondence, please contact Elizabeth Nielsen at 530-842-8012, or by email at enielsen@co.sikiyou.ca.us. This letter was approved by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors on May 17, 2022, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Sincerely,

Brandon A. Criss, Chair

Board of Supervisors