



April 23, 2026

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Subject: Support for H.R. 8259, the *Federal Water Projects Consultation Improvement Act of 2026*

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman,

The Tri-Counties Workgroup writes on behalf of the Counties of Siskiyou and Modoc, California, and Klamath, Oregon to express our strong support for H.R. 8259, the *Federal Water Projects Consultation Improvement Act of 2026*. This legislation represents an important and long overdue step toward balance, transparency, and meaningful collaboration in the implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) impacting federal water projects across the West.

Water management is a year-round concern for Western farmers and ranchers, made more urgent by this year's significantly below average snowpack. They make critical decisions about how to manage limited irrigation water supplies to sustain their operations, their families, and their communities, while also producing affordable food and fiber for the Nation. Yet, despite being the parties most directly affected by ESA consultations involving federal water projects, these farmers and ranchers are too often excluded from the decision-making processes that could ultimately impact those water supplies.

Under current law, federal agency consultations under Section 7 of the ESA can result in significant reductions in water deliveries with little to no input from local stakeholders. Water contractors are not bystanders in this process; they are essential partners. They have invested in, paid for, and sustained these federal water infrastructure projects through construction, operation, and maintenance charges, regardless of the level of water deliveries each year. It is both fair and practical that they have a genuine "seat at the table" when agency decisions directly affect their operations.

H.R. 8259 addresses this gap in a balanced and constructive manner. It would require federal agencies to provide water contractors with ongoing opportunities to engage in ESA consultations, improve transparency around biological assessments and opinions, and clearly explain the scientific and legal basis for actions that could reduce water deliveries. It would also allow affected entities to review and comment



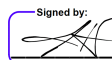
on draft biological opinions and ensure meaningful participation in developing alternatives that may impact water supplies. These provisions would enable local water users to contribute practical knowledge and expertise to the regulatory process.

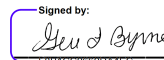
Importantly, this legislation does not rewrite the ESA, alter federal authority, or undermine the protections afforded to listed species. It simply ensures that those most directly affected, with firsthand experience and a real stake in water management, have a meaningful voice in the process. Collaborative decision making should not be optional; it is essential to achieving lasting outcomes that protect endangered species, our shared natural resources, and the agricultural communities that depend on them.

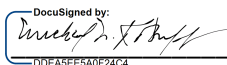
H.R. 8259 reflects the kind of pragmatic, solutions-oriented approach we believe is necessary to ensure reliable water access, support rural economies, and foster cooperative relationships between water users and federal agencies.


We thank you both for your continued leadership on natural resource policy, and we urge you and your colleagues on the Committee and across the full House of Representatives to support the swift passage of H.R. 8259.


Sincerely,

Signed by: 
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Jess W. Harris, District 1
Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors

Signed by: 
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Geri Byrne, District V
Modoc County Board of Supervisors

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Michael N. Kobseff, District 3
Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors

Signed by: 
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Derrick DeGroot
Klamath County Commissioner

Signed by: 
374E7C150FA0405...
Ned Coe, District I
Modoc County Board of Supervisors

CC: Congressman Cliff Bentz
Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Jeff Merkley
Senator Alex Padilla
Senator Adam Schiff
Rural County Representatives of California
Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange