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Introduction

Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.R. 4970, the Orland Project Water Management Act. My name is Bill Vanderwaal, and I am the General Manager of the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority (TCCA).

The TCCA is a Joint Powers Authority, a public agency created under California law, that delivers water to seventeen water agencies throughout a four county (Tehama, Glenn, Colusa, Yolo) service area along the westside of the Sacramento Valley. Pursuant to a contract with the United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), TCCA operates and maintains a large dual canal water delivery system commonly referred to as the Sacramento Canals Unit of the Central Valley Project (CVP). These facilities provide irrigation water to over 156,000 acres of prime farmland, generating more than $1 billion of regional economic benefit annually. Throughout our rural agricultural region, farming is the foundation of our economy, and any interruption in the ability to deliver water to these crops could have significant and long-lasting impacts.

Peak irrigation season in the TCCA service area typically occurs from early April though September. Post-harvest irrigation typically continues throughout the months of October, and November, and sometimes longer until the rains set in. Also, post-harvest water plays an important role in our region to decompose rice straw, recharge groundwater and to provide critical habitat for a variety of wildlife, waterfowl, and shorebirds.

Bureau of Reclamation's Orland Unit

The Orland Unit was developed in the early 1900s by the Bureau of Reclamation to provide irrigation water to agricultural users for 21,000 acres in Glenn County. The project includes East Park and Stony Gorge Reservoirs and over 150 miles of canals Since its first water deliveries in 1910, the Orland Unit has continued to play a vital role in supporting farming and regional water management in the northern Sacramento Valley.

The Orland Unit was authorized and constructed several decades before the Central Valley Project (CVP) and operates as a separate unit from the CVP. As a result, the Orland Unit cannot transfer water to nearby CVP contractors like the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority (TCCA),

except in years when the Governor declares a drought emergency. This restriction applies even though the Orland Project has surplus water available for delivery or transfer in most years.

Hydrology

The Orland Unit is located in the Stony Creek watershed, which is hydrologically independent from the primary watersheds that feed the CVP. The project's water supply originates entirely from local precipitation captured in East Park and Stony Gorge Reservoirs. These reservoirs are operated independently of the CVP and are not interconnected with CVP storage or conveyance facilities. As a result, water transferred from the Orland Unit to the CVP service area would represent a new and supplemental supply, not a reallocation or diversion of existing CVP resources. This hydrologic separation ensures that facilitating transfers from the Orland Unit will not negatively impact CVP operations, deliveries, or allocations elsewhere in the system.

The surplus water from the Orland Unit generally becomes available during the fall and winter months, when major storm events can quickly fill East Park and Stony Gorge Reservoirs. Because this coincides with California's wet season, agricultural demand in the Sacramento Valley is typically at its lowest, and the reservoirs often reach capacity or have to be drawn down to meet flood control restrictions. Once full, excess water must be released down Stony Creek, but by that time the creek is often running high with storm runoff and surrounding soils are saturated. As a result, the additional flows simply "ride on top" of existing stormwater, offering little incremental recharge benefit. In practical terms, this means surplus Orland water is released at the time of year when it has the least value for irrigation or groundwater sustainability, rather than being captured and used later in the dry months when demand and recharge opportunities are greatest.

H.R. 4970, Orland Project Water Mangement Act

H.R. 4970 would amend the *Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991* (P.L. 102-250) to authorize the Orland Unit to transfer water to the CVP—including TCCA contractors—regardless of water year type.

California water districts are under a mandate to reduce reliance on groundwater to comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and improve the resiliency of their water deliveries. Moving groundwater-reliant lands to a surface water supply is an important tool in that process. Within the TCCA service area, individual water districts are facing a demand to annex new lands that are currently relying solely on groundwater to allow those lands to access surface water through the TCCA. This annexation process does not increase the TCCA contractor's overall CVP allocation; rather, it allows the contractor to serve that allocation to more acreage when water is available.

Water transferred from the Orland Unit plays a dual role: it provides a supplemental surface water supply for these newly annexed lands, and it creates opportunities for groundwater

recharge during wetter years when CVP deliveries can meet irrigation demands. Beyond these immediate benefits, such transfers also strengthen regional water supply reliability by distributing water resources more efficiently across districts. This flexibility helps reduce localized groundwater overdraft, protects drinking water wells in vulnerable communities, and supports the long-term sustainability of agricultural production. In addition, leveraging surface water transfers can reduce pumping costs for growers, lessen energy demand associated with groundwater extraction, and provide environmental benefits through improved streamflow and aquifer health. Collectively, these outcomes make Orland Unit transfers a critical tool in advancing both water supply resilience and sustainable resource management within the Sacramento Valley.

Conclusion

Facilitating water transfers of this kind is critical to advancing regional management objectives. By enabling existing CVP supplies to be put to their highest and best use, these transfers reduce reliance on stressed groundwater basins, strengthen agricultural and community resilience to drought, and ensure compliance with state and federal sustainability mandates. They represent a cost-effective, environmentally responsible strategy to maximize the value of existing federal infrastructure, while also fostering collaboration among local districts. In doing so, water transfers from the Orland Unit to the TCCA not only safeguard the long-term viability of water supplies in the Sacramento Valley but also serve as a replicable model for sustainable resource management throughout the West. TCCA looks forward to working with the Committee to advance this critical piece of legislation. I'd like to thank Congressman LaMalfa for introducing this bill and urge the Committee to support H.R. 4970.

Orland Project Water Management Act
Vicinity Map