

**Testimony of
Michael J. Reagan
Solano County, California
Member of the Board of Supervisors
Before the
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee's
National Parks Subcommittee Hearing: Miscellaneous National Parks Bills**

Hearing on S. 29, To establish the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Heritage Area

March 7, 2012

Good afternoon, Chairman Bingaman, and members of the Committee. My name is Michael J. Reagan and I am a member of the Board of Supervisors of Solano County, California. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today in support of S 29, to establish the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Heritage area.

We have long recognized the Delta as a unique and vital place both within my County and to the State of California. It also extends over portions of the Counties of Sacramento, Yolo, San Joaquin and Contra Costa, in Northern California. It is highly appropriate and justified that we recognize what a treasure it is and do everything we can to preserve and enhance its future. Senator Feinstein's *Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area Establishment Act* (S. 29) is a strong step in this direction, and for this reason Solano County is pleased to support this important bill.

My supervisorial district includes part of Solano County's portion of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. I have actively engaged in Delta related activities during my 8 years on the Board of Supervisors and for several years prior to that as a Senior Policy Advisor to a State Senator representing the area. I am currently the County's representative on the State's Delta Protection Commission, serving as Vice Chair. I also serve, on behalf of the County, on the Delta County Coalition (DCC). The DCC is a coalition of five counties: Sacramento, Yolo, San Joaquin, Solano and Contra Costa, cooperatively representing our collective local interests in discussions with the State and the Department of Interior officials.

The Delta, a Rare and Unique Place

The Delta is an amazing natural system and a major contributor to California's vitality and evolution over many decades. The vast size, unique shape, and geographical location of the Delta have contributed to its importance as an ecological and cultural landscape. It is a rare inland/inverse Delta, at the confluence of five rivers, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Mokelumne,

Cosumnes, and Calaveras, through which waters flow from a vast watershed covering about 40% of California's land area. The impressive Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is essentially the center of California from which rivers and streams flowing hundreds of miles from the north, south, east and west...from the far reaches of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada to the Coast Range... **ALL** drain through the Delta and Suisun Marsh to the Carquinez Strait and into the San Francisco Bay.

The sheer size and distinctive shape of the Delta's landscape is unmatched anywhere in the world. The Delta's flat landscape includes about 1,000 miles of channels and levees protecting islands, and is the only inland delta in the United States. The Bay-Delta region is the largest estuary on the West Coast of the Americas, and the second largest in the United States after the Chesapeake Bay.

Today it is home to more than 3.5 million residents, serves a \$36 billion agricultural industry comprised of family farms and supplies water to more than 23 million Californians and 3 million acres of agricultural land. The entire area is supported by more than 1000+ miles of levees protecting 60 distinct islands.

Historically, the Delta has a multi-cultural landscape with Native American Indian settlements and history from the California gold rush era. A number of minority groups including Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, East Indians, Portuguese, and Italians have established communities in the Delta and made significant contributions in shaping the Delta into the agricultural landscape that it is today.

The high fertility of the Delta's peat soils, the high water table, and an available water supply, has enabled the Delta to be an extremely productive agricultural region since reclamation. There have been and are a variety of crops grown in the Delta including peaches, plums, cherries, tomatoes, onions, peas, celery, spinach, melons, wine grapes, olives, blueberries, pears, sugar beets, seed crops and more. Crops from the Delta have been shipped throughout the nation, as well as other parts of the world for quite some time.

In addition, the rare Mediterranean climate of the Delta supports unique plant and animal species and provides habitat for more than 750 species of plants and wildlife and 55 species of fish.

State Legislative Support for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

The State of California Legislature has long recognized the importance and significance of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and passed the Delta Protection Act of 1992 delineating a Primary and a Secondary Zone of the Delta which consist of approximately 500,000 acres and 238,000 acres, respectively. The Primary Zone is the area protected by State law from urban development, and includes waterways, levees, and farmed lands, extending over portions of five counties: Solano, Yolo, Sacramento, San Joaquin and Contra Costa. The Delta Protection Act

is a unique approach to large scale protection of a valuable multi-resource landscape and lead to the establishment of the Delta Protection Commission.

The Delta Protection Commission is governed by 15 members, with representation from cities,, counties, special districts, and the state of California. While I am a member of the Delta Protection Commission, I am not here testifying on their behalf . I do want to indicate the State's level of involvement and commitment to keeping the Delta a unique and viable region in California.

Specifically the 15 members of the delta Protection Commission are as follows:

- Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
- Central Delta Reclamation Districts
- Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
- North Delta Reclamation Districts
- San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors
- South Delta Reclamation Districts
- Solano County Board of Supervisors
- Business, Transportation and Housing Agency
- Yolo County Board of Supervisors
- Department of Food and Agriculture
- Cities of Contra Costa and Solano Counties
- Natural Resources Agency
- Cities of Sacramento and Yolo Counties
- State Lands Commission
- Cities of San Joaquin County

In the fall of 2009, the California State Legislature passed a comprehensive package reforming governance of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and related aspects of statewide water management. In Section 85301 of Senate Bill X7-1 (SBX7-1), the Legislature charged the Delta Protection Commission (DPC) with developing:

“A proposal to protect, enhance, and sustain the unique cultural, historical, recreational, agricultural, and economic values of the Delta as an evolving place....The Commission shall include in the proposal a plan to establish state and federal designation of the Delta as a place of special significance, which may include application for a federal designation of the Delta as a National Heritage Area.”

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is both a hard working landscape and a place of great environmental sensitivity. It features highly productive farmlands, unique historical communities of diverse cultural roots, urban centers, miles of serene and wandering waterways, a complex levee and flood control system, key water distribution infrastructure both large and small, a myriad of fish, bird, animal and plant species along with unique habitats, traditional drawbridges, distinctive architecture and beautiful vista. It is truly the convergence

zone of California's majestic mountains, sea and valley areas; a land where you can be in an urban center one moment and 10 minutes away feel like you are reconnected to nature. It is difficult to comprehend the Delta landscape in one drive through. I have been in the region for years and continue to discover new opportunities and adventures in the Delta.

Why should the Delta be a National Heritage Area?

Why is this important to the State and the five counties covered by the proposed National Heritage Area? The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is in the heart of one of the most productive agricultural areas. The climate and soils of our area allow for growth of many crop varieties over a long growing season. The county's agricultural sector is a vital part of the county's overall economic base. Many of our communities directly serve the agricultural activities and are critical to their existence and agriculture is essential to Solano County.

It is also worth noting that within Solano County and with the proposed National Heritage area is the 116,000 acre Suisun Marsh, the largest contiguous brackish water marsh remaining on the west coast of North America. The marsh is carefully managed for habitat, and includes considerable bird and duck habitat, a number of hunting clubs, and a unique herd of introduced Tule Elk and a number of protected species.

Also included within the proposed boundary area under consideration is the Carquinez Strait. A main waterway for transportation and commerce, the Carquinez Strait shares a rich history with the Delta. Agricultural goods produced in the Delta were processed and stored in grain warehouses and mills that once flourished on the shores of the strait. It was also home to numerous fishing fleets and canning facilities which supported the Delta's fishing industry. Today the Strait continues to support a unique and diverse Bay/Delta ecosystem by providing passage for native fish species and thousands of migratory birds traveling along the Pacific Flyway.

There is a strong interconnectedness between our agricultural economy and other economic sectors. We believe the current efforts of the delta counties to support agritourism initiatives to further showcase the Delta's agricultural and wildlife friendly farming practices are demonstrating how Delta farmland and habitat can coexist.

As important as the Delta is, it is subject to many stressors, including environmental, as well as lying at the center of California's water resource challenges. There is much debate on how to restore the Delta's health into the future. These deliberations will be carried out over time and accompanied by volumes of analysis. How the communities and ecosystem of the Delta will evolve in the future will depend on a strong National and State commitment to the needed investment and reinvestment. That said, we believe the legislation you are considering (S 29) transcends that debate and represents a clear and constructive way to do something positive for the Delta, and within a reasonable time frame. We are hopeful that establishment of a National Heritage Area will provide further enlightenment and recognition of the Delta as a

unique and valued place; and that studies provide a better understanding of its socio-economic complexity; and can serve as a catalyst for investing in its future.

A review of the description of a National Heritage Area reveals how clearly the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta area fits under the description and criteria necessary for a NHA designation. The designation of a National Heritage Area embraces a defined place where:

“natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. These areas tell nationally important stories about our nation and are representative of the national experience through both physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved within them”.

The Delta of today contains the requisite elements and the landscape tells the story. One only has to travel down the spine of the Delta through legacy communities such as Hood, Courtland , Clarksburg, and Walnut Grove to get a sense of the meshing of culture and natural landscape. The story unfolds before your eyes.

We fully recognize the potential benefits of a National Heritage Area designation. We acknowledge the fact that it has a local orientation and allows the various local entities to retain land use jurisdiction. Additionally, we like that it reinforces the regions identity under a unifying theme while respecting the variables that exist between various areas of the Delta. Even the ability to use the National Park Service Arrowhead symbol has a symbolic significance and value.

We recognize that funding associated with this designation would be limited. Nonetheless, we do appreciate the immense value of federal investment as we look for “seed” money and to leverage opportunities. We truly believe that if we target those dollars in a strategic way we can generate many multipliers that will benefit the region. The educational opportunities alone could provide many returns to our efforts.

The establishment of a Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area would further efforts to protect, and restore, the valuable natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historic attributes in the Delta, including recognition that the Delta as a place merits national recognition.

Status of Feasibility Study

As the Committee members are aware, there has been a National Heritage Area designation feasibility study, funded in part by grants from the California Endowed Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the California State Parks Foundation. In January of this year a draft feasibility study was released by the California Delta Protection Commission for a five week public review after which a revised draft was transmitted to the National Parks Service for

their review. The California Delta Protection Commission has received their response and is incorporating their suggestions. We anticipate formal adoption of the revised Study by the Commission within this quarter. Upon acceptance of this feasibility study by the Delta Protection Commission, it will be submitted to our Congressional Representatives for presentation to Congress for consideration.

Furthermore as part of the continuing local efforts on behalf of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta region numerous letters of support and partnership commitment were acquired from a wide variety of organizations including: historical societies, chambers of commerce, county boards of supervisors, recreation groups, historic preservation organizations, city councils, and more. There is a desire and willingness for us to work as partners in the region.

In closing, the merits of a Sacramento-San Joaquin NHA are clear. NHA designation would bring significant added value to our collective efforts. Recognition and validation of the significance of the Delta's nationally through the NHA designation will bring focus and leadership to new partnerships and collaborations that would otherwise not take place. On behalf of the Solano County Board of Supervisors I come as their representative today share that we strongly support S.29 and urge approval of this legislation.

In concluding, I would like to thank the Chairman and other members of the Committee for conducting this important hearing. I also would like to thank Senator Feinstein for introducing and Senator Boxer for cosponsoring S. 29. Additionally, I would also like to extend my appreciation to the House members who introduced companion Delta NHA designation legislation, including Representatives John Garamendi, George Miller, Doris Matsui, Jerry McNerney, and Mike Thompson. We in the Delta are grateful for their efforts and we look optimistically for a successful conclusion to this process.

Thank you. Have a good afternoon.