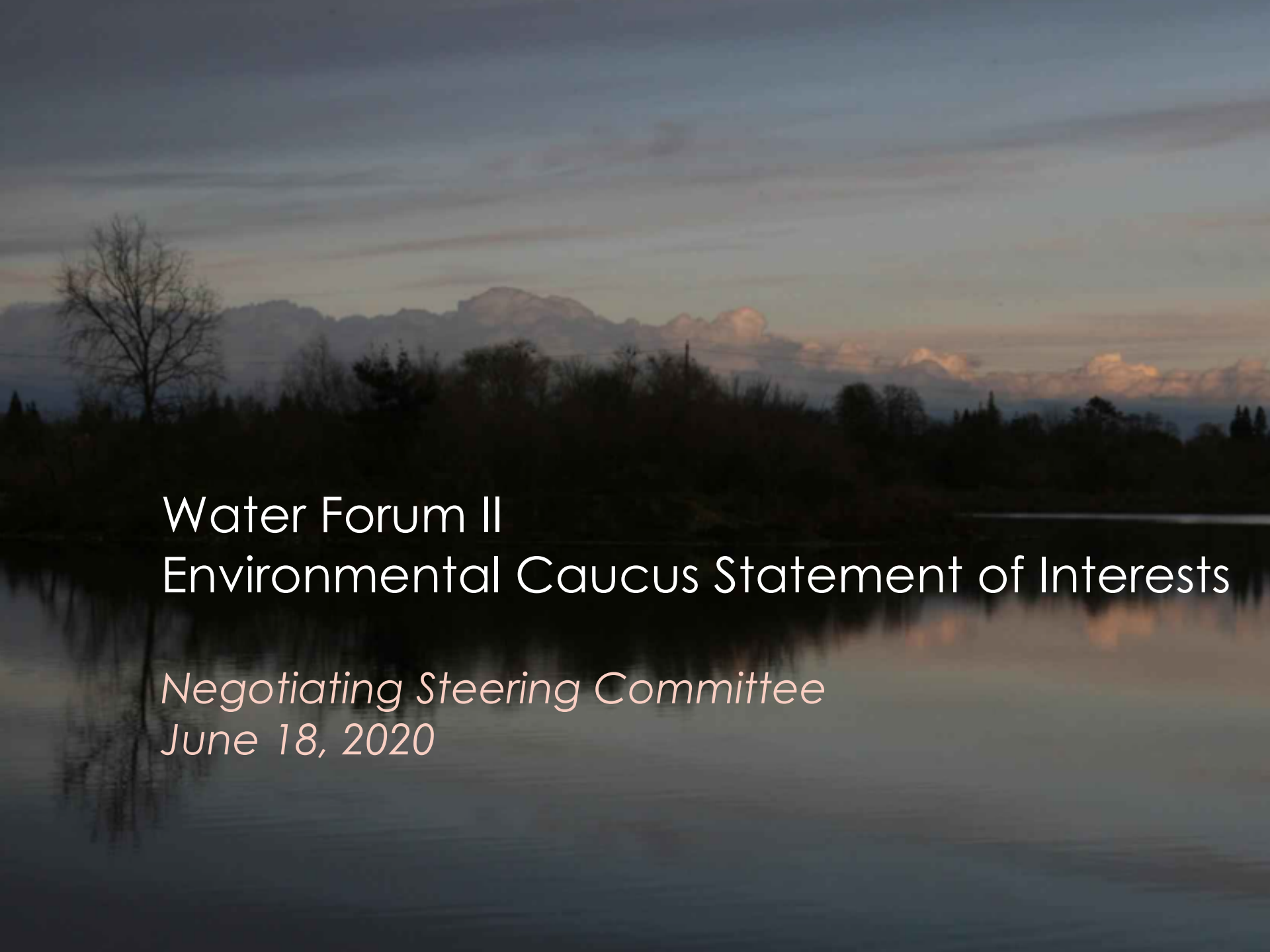

Water Forum II
Environmental Caucus Statement of Interests

Negotiating Steering Committee
June 18, 2020

CO-EQUAL OBJECTIVES

The Environmental Caucus supports the dual, co-equal objectives specified in the Year 2000 Water Forum Agreement.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Work with water agencies within the region to ensure they integrate the most current climate change* science and impacts including long range forecasts into water planning and resource management decisions; and coordinate the use of consistent methodologies and analytical tools throughout the region.

*Climate change will increase variability, uncertainty, and complexity of flows in the American River and groundwater levels. The Water Forum needs to fully understand ongoing climate change over time and the implications for the Water Forum's dual objectives.

SURFACE WATER DIVERSIONS

- The Environmental Caucus is concerned that there is too much reliance on the modest-sized American River and that a better connection to the Sacramento River could help address this concern.

- Ensure that surface water diversions from the American River watershed uphold the co-equal goal of protecting the river. If surface water diversions are adverse to the protection of the river* and its environs, ensure that any damage caused from those diversions is fully mitigated, including flows and temperature.

****River protection defined:*** The Environmental Caucus wants the American River and the American River Parkway to be protected, preserved, and enhanced, including river flows, temperatures needed for fisheries, riparian habitats, recreation, and aesthetics of the Parkway; and for salmonid and other adopted restoration goals to be in accordance with California and federal laws.

FLOW STANDARD

- Support the existing Flow Management Standard (which includes flow, temperature, and storage protections) and its long term implementation.
- Acknowledge that the minimum flows included in the Flow Standard are just that: minimums, and that a variety of higher flows are needed at certain times and locations to protect the river and fisheries. Those higher flows need to be determined under both historical flows and projected flows under climate change.
- Utilize adaptive management to optimize ecosystem health and support healthy fish populations, as needed.
- Uphold the recommendation consistent with the Year 2000 Water Forum Agreement which specified that all signatories agree they will, “recommend to the State Water Resources Control Board an updated flow standard and an updated Declaration of Full Appropriation to protect the fishery, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic values of the American River.”

DRY YEAR PRINCIPLES

In dry and critically dry years, ensure that water purveyors make appropriate cutbacks in surface water diversions and take other flow augmentation actions to protect the river and to manage both surface and groundwater systems to assure adequate water supplies for all beneficial uses.

WATER CONSERVATION

- Design water conservation programs and practices for the benefit of river ecosystem health that promote lower landscape water usage, have a regional focus, and draw upon best practices in water-use efficiency, water recycling, water loss control, and water conservation.

- Water conservation state minimums may not sufficiently achieve the desired conditions described above. As a result, regional water conservation programs may need to exceed minimum requirements specified in state laws in order to reduce the need and cost for increased surface water diversions and groundwater extractions.

GROUNDWATER: Focal Area

The Environmental Caucus would like to focus on integrative surface water and groundwater management as an interconnected system to improve regional sustainability and achieve ecosystem goals.

This focus will require a deep dive to fully understand the relationship and interdependence of groundwater and surface water systems.

GROUNDWATER: Water Bank

Coordinate with the Region's water agencies to ensure their water banking agreements achieve positive benefits to any affected aquifer(s)* including increased basin storage, increased subbasin operating flexibility, increased flows and decreased temperatures for regional rivers, and improved conditions for groundwater dependent ecosystems.

*The Environmental Caucus recognizes that the three regional groundwater subbasins are interconnected and that actions in any one subbasin could affect the other.

GROUNDWATER: Inter-basin Coordination

The Water Forum plays a leadership role in facilitating collaboration and resolving cross-boundary groundwater issues to foster effective regional implementation of SGMA.

Note: The Environmental Caucus acknowledges that under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), each Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) has the primary responsibility to develop plans to correct imbalances in supply and demand for its groundwater basin.

Water Forum II: Groundwater Element & SGMA

The evolution of groundwater management in SGMA has created the authority to address regional groundwater-dependent ecosystem health, including the Cosumnes River and its environs, in water management decision-making — as well to improve aquifer conditions for water-supply reliability. The Environmental Caucus proposes that the Water Forum acknowledge regional ecosystems in addition to the American River, and promote a multi-benefit approach to sustainable water management that includes those ecosystems*.

* Acknowledgment of regional ecosystem importance (including the American, Cosumnes, and Sacramento Rivers, Pacific Flyway wetlands, groundwater dependent riparian forest, etc.) could be included in the Water Forum website and Regional Water Bank public outreach materials, for example. A multi-benefit approach to sustainable water management could include making certain areas near key groundwater/surface water ecosystems off limits for production wells for the Regional Water Bank — or it could mean reconnecting floodplains to high river flows to increase recharge to the S. American and Cosumnes sub-basins and so on.

INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT

Facilitate the region's water agencies efforts to ensure that groundwater and surface water are jointly managed to achieve the co-equal objectives of the Water Forum, and to protect the river and ecosystems of regional waterways.

HABITAT

Maintain and build upon the Water Forum's existing Habitat Management Element to enhance recreation, fish spawning and rearing habitat including floodplains, side channels, and riparian vegetation. Foster and participate in similar programs for the other river systems in the region when funding and partnerships are available.

LANDUSE/GROWTH

- Ensure that land use decision-makers have a clear, complete and objective assessment of current and future water availability when considering new growth and land-use designation changes with significant water-use implications; and for water availability assessments to sufficiently protect the health of regional rivers and groundwater sub-basins in a way that accounts for increased drought intensities and uncertainties introduced by climate change.
- Ensure that new growth is contingent upon– among other requirements– substantial guarantees for water conservation in new and existing developments, especially during droughts.

Other Overarching Issues

Address additional issues that affect water supply and rivers: homeless impacts, water quality, public right to water, adjacent habitats along rivers, and flood management.


Questions?