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Federal Environmental Report Supports Twin Tunnels

Fountain Valley, CA (June 26) – Two federal environmental agencies on Monday signed off on a plan to build two tunnels beneath the California Delta to carry drinking water to Southern California, saying the California WaterFix would not negatively impact any federally protected species.

The findings of the extensive study, known as a biological opinion, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, is a major step forward for the twin-tunnel project. The long-studied plan would route water beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, eliminating the impacts of moving water the environmentally sensitive region.

“The findings that the California WaterFix will not jeopardize any endangered species is great news not only for the agencies that work 24 hours a day to ensure a reliable water supply, but also for more than 19 million Southern California residents who depend on that water,” said Wayne S. Osborne, president of the Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC), a wholesale agency serving 2.2 million residents through 28 cities and retail agencies. “It’s not the final step, but it is a very important step forward for the twin tunnels.”

A 2017 Water Reliability Study by MWDOC found that California WaterFix is the single most cost-effective large-scale project to ensure future water reliability for Orange County.

The California WaterFix does not increase the amount of water Southern California is entitled to, but would ensure a more consistent delivery. Now, the pumps in Northern California are turned off for a variety of regulatory reasons. On average, Southern California receives 60 percent of its allocation, and during the drought received as little as 5 percent.

The twin tunnels would act as a stormwater-capture program. The intakes for the system will be moved from the southern end of the Delta to the north, where they will collect high water flows from the Sacramento River, then move it to the pump stations at the southern end of the Delta through two pipes each 35 feet in diameter.

Independent state studies have already determined the California WaterFix, endorsed by Governor Jerry Brown, is the best plan to improve water reliability and restore the Delta. The next important step comes in December, when large water agencies – including the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California – vote to pay for the project. The cost of the WaterFix is estimated to be \$15 billion, or about \$5 a month for each customer using the water.

For more information, see www.californiawaterfix.com