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**Jason Phillips**  
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**Friant Water Authority**

**Testimony for the Hearing Record**  
**Before the United States Senate**  
**Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on Water and Power**

**Legislative Hearing**  
***Support for S. 1179 – Canal Conveyance Capacity Restoration Act***

**May 25, 2022**

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Hyde-Smith, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Jason Phillips, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Friant Water Authority in California's San Joaquin Valley. The Friant Water Authority (Authority or Friant) is a public agency formed under California law in part to operate and maintain the Friant-Kern Canal, a component of the Central Valley Project (CVP) owned by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). In addition to that responsibility, the Authority also advocates on behalf of the entire Friant Division and eastside communities for sound public policy on water management and operations.

**Background on the Friant Division**

The 152-mile-long Friant-Kern Canal and the 36-mile-long Madera Canal, together with Friant Dam and Millerton Lake on the San Joaquin River, form the Friant Division of the Central Valley Project. On average, the canals deliver 1.2 million acre-feet of irrigation water annually to more than 15,000 farms on over one million acres of the most productive farmland in the world. Friant Division deliveries also are vital to meeting the domestic water needs of many small communities in the San Joaquin Valley, as well as larger metropolitan areas, including the City of Fresno – California's fifth-largest city.

The Friant Division was designed and is operated as a conjunctive use project to convey surface water for direct beneficial uses, such as irrigation and municipal supplies, and to recharge groundwater basins in the southern San Joaquin Valley. The ability to move significant water through the Friant Division's canals in wetter years to store in groundwater recharge basins is critically important for the project to work as intended, and these operations sustain the primary

source of drinking water for nearly all cities, towns, and rural communities on the Valley's East side.

### **Friant Water Authority Support for S. 1179**

Friant Water Authority writes in support of the *Canal Conveyance Capacity Restoration Act*, S. 1179, introduced by our senior Senator Diane Feinstein. As water exports through California's Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta have declined over the past 30-years, many San Joaquin Valley water users have had to rely heavily on groundwater supplies to maintain economic viability for their communities. The resulting groundwater overdraft damaged the Friant-Kern Canal, Delta-Mendota Canal, and California Aqueduct and compromised their ability to deliver water in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California. For Friant, the southern third of the Friant-Kern Canal has lost 60% of its capacity, which translates to 100,000 – 300,000 acre-feet of water per year that doesn't flow to farms and communities.

Additionally, by reducing the canal's ability to deliver water to aquifers in the south Valley, the conveyance constriction has also worsened existing water supply and water quality problems in dozens of rural and disadvantaged communities who rely entirely on groundwater. The impact of reduced surface water supplies to over one million acres of productive farmland, as well as to the more than 55 disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged communities within the Friant Division service area is very concerning. All of which are almost entirely reliant on groundwater wells for their supplies. More than 1 million Californians live in these communities, and many of them already have unsafe drinking water or experienced their wells going dry during 2014 and 2015; both problems will inevitably be exacerbated with fewer surface flows infiltrating the valley's groundwater aquifers.

While these hydrologic losses are recoverable if the canal is repaired, time is of the essence, and current drought conditions do not bode well for such challenges. S. 1179 would authorize Reclamation to partner with Friant, the San Luis Delta-Mendota Water Authority, and the State Water Project to provide financial assistance for one-third the cost of repairing these important water lifelines within the State of California. All told, millions of acres of highly productive and nationally important farms and ranches that produce the food the Nation sorely needs right now, as well as a major water source to over 27 million people<sup>1</sup>, depend on these canals being restored as quickly and affordably as possible. The legislation would also provide additional funding to help meet the restoration goals under Section 10004 of the San Joaquin River Restoration Act (P.L. 111-11), in addition to the funding provided under Section 10009 of that Act, to provide the financial balance between investments in water supply reliability and ecosystem restoration required under the San Joaquin River Settlement that Friant is a party to. Finally, the legislation ensures that there are adequate non-federal matching funds (including in-kind contributions) available to meet the cost sharing requirements, and that the requirements of the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) are met.

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<sup>1</sup> [State Water Project \(ca.gov\)](http://StateWaterProject.ca.gov)

In summary, Friant supports the purposes of S. 1179 which are to address the severe subsidence impacts that have substantially reduced the carrying capacity of the water delivery system of the State of California to provide for a more resilient water supply, especially during severe droughts as we have been experiencing these past several years. The legislation would also help us meet our groundwater sustainability goals established under SGMA and provide increased reliability of surface and groundwater supplies to our service area, portions of which serve disadvantaged communities as noted above. For these reasons, Friant Water Authority is in full support of the enactment of S. 1179.

We want to thank Sen. Feinstein for her continued leadership on water issues, and for introducing these two important bills in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our perspective and thoughts on this critical legislation and I would happily answer any questions the Subcommittee might have.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jason Phillips', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jason Phillips  
Chief Executive Officer  
Friant Water Authority