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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Governor's executive order could degrade water quality for millions of Californians**

(Sacramento)- Today the Governor issued an executive order declaring a state of emergency in nine California counties due to water shortages.

The executive order calls for the unprecedented transfer of groundwater through the California aqueduct, re-operation of the State Water Project and expedited water transfers. The Governor's press statement also included a call for an \$11.9 billion bond measure that would direct billions to new dams.

State law and water contracts normally prohibit the transfer of low-quality groundwater through the California Aqueduct. Groundwater contaminants including salts, nitrates and selenium have the potential to degrade the quality of water within the aqueduct, which provides drinking water to millions of Californians. The California Aqueduct is a source of water for residents in Southern California, including the cities of Los Angeles, San Diego, and Riverside.

While the Governor's emergency declaration affects nine counties, most of the actions called for by the executive order primarily benefit agricultural interests in the western San Joaquin Valley within the Westland Water District.

The Westlands Water District is one of the largest irrigation districts in the country and serves agricultural businesses that receive the some of the largest water, energy and crop subsidies in the nation. The lands irrigated in Westlands Water District are severely drainage impaired. As these lands are irrigated salts and contaminants including toxic levels of selenium build up in the soils, producing unfavorable conditions for plants and highly toxic agricultural runoff. Westlands Water District has long sought to secure more water to serve its drainage impaired lands, even though there are currently no identified solutions that address the critical drainage issues within the District. Others, including the Planning and Conservation League have argued that agribusiness within Westlands Water District is unsustainable. Just this month, the United States Geological Survey issued a report that projected that salt and contamination build-up within Westlands Water District will result in unusable soils and groundwater in as little as 25 years. The USGS report further found that land retirement within the Westlands Water District is a key strategy for addressing the drainage problems and that retirement of 300,000 acres of land within the Westlands Water District would eliminate the drainage and contamination problem altogether.

Jonas Minton, water policy advisor for the Planning and Conservation League issued this statement in response to the Governor's emergency declaration: "Today's events confirm that

California is drifting deeper into a water crisis. It is unfortunate that the response proposed today will result in the degradation of water for millions of Californians and the overhaul of California's environmental laws and water quality protections, all for the benefit of a small number of powerful agribusinesses. California can not afford to create new problems while we attempt to address emergencies that result in part from unreasonable demands on a system in crisis. While we share the Governor's concerns about California's economy, we urge long-term solutions that help create a sustainable agricultural economy in balance with other beneficial uses of California's water.

“This emergency is an opportunity for our leaders to move forward with progressive new solutions that can produce sustainable water when, and where, we need it most.”

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The Planning and Conservation League, [www.pcl.org](http://www.pcl.org), partners with hundreds of California environmental organizations to provide a voice in Sacramento for sound planning and responsible environmental policy.