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February 26, 2014

Assembly Local Government Committee
Legislative Office Building, 1020 N Street, Room 157
Sacramento, CA 94249

RE: AB 2453 – Oppose Unless Amended

Dear Chairman Achadjian and Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Sierra Club's 2,000 members in San Luis Obispo County to thank you for your effort to create a water management district for the Paso Robles groundwater basin. While we applaud the intent of AB 2453 in creating a water district, we have serious concerns about the voting structure proposed for the formation of the district and the election of directors.

These concerns were best expressed in an exchange between San Luis Obispo County Supervisor Caren Ray and Debbie Michael, senior consultant for your Committee, at the February 18 meeting of the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Michael described the legislature's preferred structure for such districts:

Michael: These types of issues bring a lot of support and opposition based on resident voting and land owner voting.... The general trend over the last hundred years, I would say, in spite of irrigation districts, is to move away from landowner-based districts and voting. So I don't know –

Ray: And toward...?

Michael: And toward resident voting, or one person per parcel, one person per vote. Away from land owner but more a registered voter type designation.

The proper management of the Paso Robles groundwater basin is of critical importance to us due to its environmental role as the largest source of groundwater in San Luis Obispo County. The proposed hybrid mechanism for the water district would effectively disenfranchise the majority of the affected residents and create an inequitable permanent majority and minority on the district's board of directors. We urge amendment of AB 2453 to ensure that the creation of the district and election of directors conforms with the district norm of one person, one vote, as established by the legislature over the last century.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,

Michael Jencks,
Chapter Chair

cc: Kathryn Phillips, Sierra Club California