



April 22, 2021

Mr. Don Bunts, PE
Deputy General Manager
Santa Margarita Water District
26111 Antonio Parkway
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688
Work: 949-459-6602
donb@smwd.com

Re: Letter of Support for funding Santa Margarita Water District's San Juan Watershed Project Application to the United States Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART: Title XVI WIIN Water Reclamation and Reuse Projects Program for FY 2021, FOA No. R21AS00429

Dear Mr. Bunts:

On behalf of the South Orange County Economic Coalition (Economic Coalition) Board of Directors, I understand that the Santa Margarita Water District ("SMWD" or "District") is submitting an application to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program for Title XVI water reclamation and reuse projects for fiscal year 2021.

The Economic Coalition fully supports the Upper San Juan Creek Stormwater Capture, Infiltration, and Potable Reuse Project ("Project") and the District's efforts to enhance local water supply reliability, stormwater capture and reuse, and groundwater recharge in the San Juan Groundwater Basin. This is precisely the kind of innovative project we have come to anticipate from the District. It's importance to the long-term sustainability and water supply reliability of this part of the county cannot be overstated and this grant will go a long way toward project implementation.

We are aware that virtually all of the potable water in the area is imported from the San Francisco Bay-Delta or the Colorado River. This means, of course, that our supply is almost completely reliant on water coming to us from hundreds of miles away. To be more self-reliant, reduce costs, and in the event of a disaster that would sever our access to water supply, we need local solutions that will reduce our reliance on imports. This project is clearly focused on developing that kind of locally-sourced supply.

The District, the second-largest in the county, has a long history of providing safe, reliable drinking water, recycled water, and wastewater services to over 165,000 residents in the south Orange County cities of Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita, and soon to San Juan Capistrano. The unincorporated areas of Orange County also



served by the District include the communities of Coto de Caza, Las Flores, Ladera Ranch, the Village of Sendero and Esencia, and the Talega development in the City of San Clemente.

The District's plans to construct infiltration basins, rehabilitate existing wells, repurpose pipelines, and construct a new water treatment plant are ambitious and demonstrate sound planning for the future. The initial 1,600 acre-feet/year ("AFY") yield of locally-sourced water that will be integrated into District's potable water system is a great step forward toward the 8,240 AFY that will be available from subsequent phases.

Again, we enthusiastically support your application for this grant. Should you require additional information from us, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Thank you for your continued efforts to provide our citizens with a reliable and resilient supply of water.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara J. Thomas".

Barbara J. Thomas
Executive Director