



July 5, 2024

Board of Directors  
Santa Clara Valley Water District  
Board@valleywater.org  
CC: Roseryn Bhudsabourg  
RBhudsabourg@valleywater.org

Subject: July 9, 2024 Item #3.5 Support for Water Resources Protection Zone Ordinance

Dear Valley Water Board of Directors,

The undersigned organizations write to express our strong support for the proposed Water Resources Protection Zone Ordinance No. 24-XX. We commend the Santa Clara Valley Water District for taking a proactive stance to safeguard our water resources, natural habitats, and the safety of our communities.

Our organizations have a strong interest in the protection of waterways, riparian ecosystems, wetlands and the San Francisco Bay. For more than a decade, we have been advocating for measures that would distance homeless encampments from creeks, and create shelter that houses people without polluting our creeks and our bay. Additionally, our groups have collaborated to clean up creeks, where Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful has removed 545,000 pounds of trash just in the past eight years with nearly 10,000 volunteers, and South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition in the past 11 years has removed 1,448,000 pounds of trash with the generosity of 30,250 volunteer hours.

As stewards of the environment, we recognize the critical importance of protecting our water resources and the ecosystems that depend on them. This ordinance is a significant step in ensuring the health and sustainability of our waterways and the broader environment in Santa Clara County. Here we outline the reasons this ordinance is essential and the positive impacts it will have.

#### Protection of Water Quality and Riparian Ecosystems

The ordinance addresses the pressing issue of encampments near waterways and water supply facilities. These encampments often result in significant environmental degradation, including trampling of riparian vegetation and native plants, illegal disposal of biowaste, accumulation of trash and contamination of water sources. Such activities not only harm the immediate environment but also threaten the broader ecosystem that relies on clean and healthy waterways.

The prohibition of camping and other disruptive activities within the Water Resources Protection Zones (WRPZ) will help to mitigate these adverse impacts. By reducing the presence of unauthorized encampments, we can better protect water quality, improve fish passage, and preserve the habitats of endangered species that are crucial for maintaining biodiversity.

#### Living Along Waterways is Potentially Life Threatening

As the Valley Water Environmental Creek Cleanup Committee has acknowledged in the 5-17-24 Memorandum, “encampments of unsheltered people along waterways are both a human and an environmental tragedy, causing deaths and negative health outcomes for unsheltered individuals. Currently, more than 700 people are estimated to be living on Valley Water property and easements. The health and safety of unsheltered individuals utilizing creeks and waterways are at risk from unhygienic and unsafe living conditions and frequent fires, as well as exposure to the weather. Waterways are often prone to flash floods, causing rapidly rising water that is a serious hazard to unsheltered people living in the channel”.

#### Public Safety

The increase in security incidents and fire-related occurrences linked to encampments poses a significant risk to both Valley Water staff and the surrounding communities. Fires, in particular, can have devastating consequences for riparian habitats and local wildlife, in addition to endangering human lives and property. By enforcing prohibitions within the WRPZ, the ordinance helps to reduce these risks, thereby enhancing the safety of Valley Water’s operations and the public.

#### Encouragement of Community Engagement and Compliance

We appreciate that the ordinance provides a clear framework for what constitutes a violation and the associated penalties. This clarity not only helps in effective enforcement but also serves

as a deterrent to activities that could harm the environment and public safety. Furthermore, it encourages community members to participate in preserving our water resources by adhering to the guidelines and supporting Valley Water's efforts.

We believe that this ordinance is a vital tool in protecting our water resources and natural habitats, ensuring public safety, and upholding the values of environmental stewardship. We encourage the Board of Directors to adopt this ordinance and to continue their commitment to safeguarding the natural and water resources of Santa Clara County.

Sincerely,

Shani Kleinhaus, Environmental Advocate  
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Katja Irvin, Guadalupe Group Conservation Chair  
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

Deb Kramer, Founder and Executive Director  
Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful

Steve Holmes, Founder and Executive Director  
South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition

Alex Von Feldt, Co-Executive Director  
Grassroots Ecology

Carin High, Co-Chair  
Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge

Alice Kaufman, Policy and Advocacy Director  
Green Foothills

Judy Fenerty, Conservation Chair  
California Native Plant Society Santa Clara Valley Chapter

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