



August 27, 2026

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Director Caroline Thomas Jacobs
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
3650 Schriever Avenue
Mather, CA 95655

Subject: Request for Immediate State Action (Executive Order) to Protect Central Coast Communities Before the 2026–27 Winter Season

Dear Governor Newsom and Director Thomas Jacobs:

On behalf of the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency, the County of Monterey, the County of Santa Cruz, the City of Watsonville, the Monterey County Water Resources Agency, the Santa Cruz County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and the Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority, we respectfully request immediate state action to help Central Coast communities prepare for the impending 2026–27 winter storm season. Specifically, we urge you to issue an Executive Order similar to Executive Order N-10-23 to expedite urgent vegetation management, debris removal, sediment management, and related flood-risk reduction activities within vulnerable river channels, tributaries, and flood-control corridors.

The Executive Order request is especially urgent in light of the already record-breaking Super El Niño conditions in the equatorial Pacific and the now-certain forecast for excessive wet weather this upcoming winter. It is now very likely that Central California will experience stronger and more persistent storms, including repeated atmospheric river events throughout California. Given these risks, our region must not delay action until severe weather is already underway. Proactive preparation for a worst-case scenario is essential, as failure to address known vulnerabilities now could endanger lives, homes, agricultural lands, transportation infrastructure, public facilities, and critical services. Immediate action is required to safeguard our communities against these heightened threats.

Despite local agencies' best attempts with maintenance, waterways throughout the Central Coast are grappling with persistent issues such as excessive vegetation growth, sediment buildup, and debris. These conditions significantly reduce channel capacity, heightening the risk of overbank flooding during major storm events. Communities situated along the Pajaro River, Salinas River, and their tributaries are especially at risk due to these vulnerabilities. The impact of recent disasters has underscored the severe human and economic repercussions that can arise from levee failures and overwhelmed waterways. Consequences have included widespread road closures, substantial agricultural losses, mandatory evacuations, and extended periods of displacement for affected residents. These events make clear the urgent need for proactive measures to address channel maintenance and flood-risk reduction, ensuring the safety and resilience of Central Coast communities.

Executive Order N-10-23 delivered crucial regulatory flexibility for emergency operations in waterways impacted by the 2022–23 winter storms, notably the Salinas River, Pajaro River, and other Central Coast channels. The order underscored the importance of completing vegetation management, sediment removal, and debris clearing ahead of the rainy season, with the intent to minimize risks associated with subsequent high-flow events. At the same time, it ensured that appropriate environmental protections remained in place throughout these urgent activities.

Many of those same conditions persist today. Local governments, flood-control agencies, landowners, and resource managers need certainty, adequate resources, and sufficient time to mobilize equipment, secure contractors, complete required reviews, and implement priority projects before significant winter storms arrive. Issuing a new Executive Order during late summer would provide critical lead time and enable local agencies to begin work immediately in coordination with state and federal partners.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that your Administration:

1. Issue an Executive Order authorizing expedited vegetation management, debris removal, sediment management, channel-capacity improvements, and related flood-protection activities in waterways presenting significant flood risks;

2. Provide regulatory streamlining consistent with the emergency authorities exercised under Executive Order N-10-23, while maintaining appropriate environmental protections;
3. Temporarily suspend applicable requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and its implementing regulations for specifically identified emergency and preventive flood-risk reduction projects, to the extent permitted by law, where compliance would delay the timely completion of essential work before the winter storm season. Any such suspension should be narrowly tailored to urgent activities necessary to protect life, property, critical infrastructure, agricultural lands, and public safety;
4. Include preventive and response provisions for California Coastal Act and California Endangered Species Act, which we absent from N-10-23;
5. Direct state agencies to prioritize and expedite permitting, consultation, and technical assistance necessary to complete these projects before the winter rainy season; and
6. Direct the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and other appropriate state agencies to provide all available funding, equipment, personnel, technical support, emergency-planning assistance, and other resources to help local communities prepare for a worst-case flooding scenario this winter.

We further request that Cal OES work directly with local jurisdictions to identify funding and resource gaps, strengthen evacuation and emergency-response planning, support community preparedness and public outreach, and pre-position critical state resources wherever feasible. Our most vulnerable communities, including low-income neighborhoods, farmworker families, rural residents, seniors, and individuals with limited transportation, must not be left unprepared.

The window for preventive action is rapidly closing. Taking decisive action now will help safeguard California communities, agricultural resources, transportation networks, and public infrastructure from potentially catastrophic flooding. Early intervention is far less costly, and far less disruptive to families, than emergency response and disaster recovery after flooding occurs.

We appreciate your continued leadership in advancing California's resilience to extreme weather. We stand ready to work collaboratively with your Administration, Cal OES, and other state and federal partners to reduce flood risks and protect Central Coast communities before the approaching winter season.

Sincerely,

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Ari Parker, Chair
Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency



Sonia de la Rosa
County Administrative Officer
County of Monterey



Monica Martinez, Chair
Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Cruz

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Tamara Vides, City Manager
City of Watsonville



Ara Azhderian, General Manager
Monterey County Water Resources Agency

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Matt Machado, District Engineer
Santa Cruz County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

Signed by:



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Maura Twomey, Executive Director
Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority

Cc:

U.S. Senator Alex Padilla

U.S. Senator Adam Schiff

Congressmember Zoe Lofgren

Congressmember Jimmy Panetta

State Senator John Laird

Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas

Assemblymember Dawn Addis

Assemblymember Gail Pellerin