

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Coalition Demands Action on Lake Hodges Dam Before Crisis Becomes Catastrophe

Friends of Lake Hodges and Partner Organizations Address Both the City of San Diego and the San Diego County Water Authority, Urging Immediate Commitment to Dam Replacement

SAN DIEGO, CA — The Friends of Lake Hodges, joined by the Rancho Bernardo Community Council, Friends of San Diego Lakes, RaiseLakeHodges.org, and the North County Climate Alliance, has delivered formal remarks to both the City of San Diego and the San Diego County Water Authority, calling on both bodies to commit immediately to replacing the Lake Hodges Dam—a 108-year-old structure rated “Unsatisfactory” by the California Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD) and identified as the worst-condition dam in the state.

The State of California has mandated that construction of a replacement dam begin no later than 2029. The coalition is urging all responsible parties—the City of San Diego, the San Diego County Water Authority, the Rancho Santa Fe and San Dieguito Water Districts, and state and federal agencies—to collaborate and move forward without further delay.

“Every month we wait, construction costs rise and the risk of catastrophic failure increases. This is a current crisis—not a future problem.”

Remarks to the San Diego County Water Authority

In remarks delivered to the Water Authority board, the coalition called on members to reverse their recent decision to withdraw cost-share funding for the dam replacement. While acknowledging the board’s stated concern for ratepayers, the coalition argued that inaction carries far greater long-term costs.

The Water Authority has already invested \$208 million in the Hodges Pumped Storage Facility—described by the coalition as the region’s largest clean energy battery. With the lake level artificially suppressed due to the dam’s unsafe condition, that facility sits idle, costing ratepayers an estimated \$3 million per year in lost revenue and leaving electricity generation for approximately 26,000 homes untapped. The coalition noted that the Water Authority’s estimated cost share of dam replacement, spread over the structure’s projected 100-year lifespan, amounts to roughly \$2.5 million per year—less than the annual value of the electricity that would be generated once the pump storage facility is back in operation.

The coalition also warned of serious public safety risks. A dam failure would flood Rancho Santa Fe, the San Dieguito River Valley, and threaten Del Mar. The artificially low lake

level has also exposed approximately 500 acres of lakebed, now overgrown with invasive grasses in a proven fire corridor—the same path taken by the Witch Creek and Cocos fires. A wildfire here could destroy thousands of homes and cost billions of dollars.

The coalition reminded the board that the Water Authority owns half the storage rights to the reservoir and the pump station next door. “You are a partner in this region, not just a bystander,” the coalition stated. “The decisions you make in the coming months will echo for generations.”

Remarks to the City of San Diego

In separate remarks to the City of San Diego, which is currently evaluating its options for the dam replacement project, the coalition expressed strong support for a new dam of the same height as the current structure—but at least sufficient to allow the full operation of the Pumped Storage Facility and enable water from San Diego’s largest watershed to serve the entire region. The coalition called for construction to begin no later than 2029 as mandated by the State.

With the pump storage facility restored to full operation, lake levels would stabilize, eliminating the large fluctuations that currently harm wildlife and allow invasive vegetation to flourish. Recreational access—including fishing from the existing boat ramp—would return. And rainwater stored at Lake Hodges, described by the coalition as the lowest-cost water available to the region, would once again be reliably available to the Rancho Santa Fe and San Dieguito Water Districts.

The coalition painted a stark picture of the consequences of dam failure: downstream communities flooded, Lake Hodges reduced to a stagnant pool, wildlife destroyed, water supply to downstream districts lost, periodic flooding during winter storms, and significantly higher future construction costs. “If the dam fails tomorrow, we lose everything—the water, the wildlife, the infrastructure, and the ability to protect downstream communities,” the coalition warned.

Across both sets of remarks, the coalition called on all parties—the City of San Diego, the San Diego County Water Authority, the Rancho Santa Fe and San Dieguito Water Districts, and state and federal agencies—to set aside bureaucratic and budgetary obstacles and collaborate on a solution that protects public safety, preserves a critical water supply asset, and honors more than a century of investment in the Lake Hodges watershed.

About Friends of Lake Hodges

Friends of Lake Hodges is a non-profit community organization that supports local government efforts to improve Lake Hodges dam safety and capacity, water quality, wildlife habitat, and public access for the benefit of the community.

The coalition includes the Rancho Bernardo Community Council, Friends of San Diego Lakes, RaiseLakeHodges.org, and the North County Climate Alliance.

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