ATTACHMENT TO NOTICE OF EXEMPTION
California Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), through its Wildlife Branch has approved the California Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program (Project). The Project incentivizes rice growers to flood harvested fields in the winter to benefit migrating and wintering waterbirds (waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds). CDFW staff have overseen the Project since 2019 and will contract with the California Rice Commission for implementation. The Project not only provides waterbird habitat but is also beneficial for landowners and improves California's climate resiliency by recharging groundwater, allowing flexibility during drought scenarios, reducing flood risk, decomposing rice straw, and improving recreation benefits for rural communities. For purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Public Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.) CDFW approved the Project, relying on the Class 7 and 8 Categorical Exemptions, respectively. (CEQA Guidelines, §§ section 15307, section 15308.) Each exemption relevant to the Project is discussed below.

Class 7 Categorical Exemption
CDFW finds the Project to be exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15307, the exemption for "Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources". Class 7, as relevant here, consists of "the maintenance, restoration, or enhancement of natural resources where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment." The Project falls within the class because it involves enhancing agricultural fields that may not otherwise be flooded during specific times of year. The Project engages agricultural producers to create surrogate wetland habitat in the Central Valley where over 90% of wetlands have been lost, to benefit and bolster migratory and resident waterbird populations.

Class 8 Categorical Exemption
CDFW finds the Project to be exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15308 the exemption for "Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the environment." Class 8, as relevant here, consists of "the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment." The Project falls within the class because it involves enhancing agricultural fields that may not otherwise be flooded during specific times of year. The Project engages agricultural producers to create surrogate wetland habitat in the Central Valley where over 90% of wetlands have been lost, to benefit and bolster migratory and resident waterbird populations.