

January 2026

United States Congress
Washington, D.C.

Re: Request for Legislation to Restore Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park

Dear Representatives and Senators:

We write to respectfully request your support for legislation to restore Yosemite National Park's Hetch Hetchy Valley to its original splendor, while ensuring the City of San Francisco's continued, reliable, and undiminished use of water from the Tuolumne River.

Yosemite Valley was first protected in 1864, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant—an unprecedented act that launched the American conservation movement. Naturalist John Muir later led the effort to expand those protections, resulting in the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890. His vision included Hetch Hetchy Valley and the high-country watersheds of the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers. Muir described Hetch Hetchy as “one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples.”, a place of extraordinary beauty worthy of preservation for all humanity.

In 1913, in spite of nationwide opposition, Congress passed the Raker Act, authorizing the City of San Francisco to construct the O'Shaughnessy Dam and related facilities, flooding Hetch Hetchy Valley. This remains the only instance in American history in which a city has been permitted to develop major infrastructure within a national park. No such project would be considered, let alone authorized, today.

We fully recognize the essential role dams play in supporting cities, agriculture, and water security throughout the American West. For more than a century, Hetch Hetchy Reservoir has served as a component of San Francisco's Regional Water System. That system, however, includes eight additional reservoirs, including Cherry Lake in the upper Tuolumne watershed. Multiple studies demonstrate that San Francisco's water and power systems can be improved and modernized in ways that would eliminate the need for the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir—making restoration of the valley possible.

Importantly, San Francisco's total system demand has declined by 19 percent over the past two decades. As a result, even without relying on Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, San Francisco could meet its full water needs by connecting Cherry Lake to its existing conveyance system. Under this approach, the system would retain more than two years of water storage, even during periods of historic drought. (See *Restoring Hetch Hetchy: The Cherry Solution*.)

Simply put, Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is no longer essential for providing a reliable water supply to San Francisco and its customers. The valley can be restored. San Francisco can continue receiving all the water it needs. No other water agencies dependent on the Tuolumne River would be affected in any way.

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We therefore propose amending the Raker Act to allow for the restoration of Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley, while ensuring San Francisco's continued operation of its other facilities within the Tuolumne River watershed. We further suggest that such legislation authorize federal agencies to work collaboratively with San Francisco, to plan and to guide the restoration process, and to establish a funding mechanism through which public and private contributions can be collected and coordinated to help cover restoration costs.

Restoring Hetch Hetchy Valley represents an exceptional opportunity to reconcile infrastructure and conservation. It is a chance not only to restore a treasure in Yosemite National Park, but also to offer the world a powerful example of what thoughtful stewardship, innovation, and shared purpose can achieve. We can meet the needs of today while expanding the natural legacy of our national parks for generations to come.

We look forward to working with Congress on this unique opportunity. Please contact us at restoration@hetchhetchy.org to discuss next steps.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Donald P. Hodel



Lois Wolk



Robert Hanna



Spreck Rosekrans

Donald P. Hodel served as U.S. Secretary of Energy and Secretary of the Interior under President Ronald Reagan. In 1987, he proposed that DOI, with cooperation from others, study whether or not Hetch Hetchy Valley could be restored while preserving the water benefits of San Francisco. The Bureau of Reclamation quickly replied that it could be done. Don asserts "there is no opportunity like this anywhere in the world—to add another Yosemite Valley to our great National Park System."

Lois Wolk served as a Member of the California State Assembly and State Senate from 2002 to 2016. In 2004, she co-authored a letter to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger urging the State to explore restoring Hetch Hetchy Valley while ensuring no loss of water or power—an effort that led to California's formal study on the feasibility of restoration.

Robert Hanna is a public-lands advocate whose work has shaped state and national conservation efforts. He is the great-great-grandson of John Muir.

Spreck Rosekrans is Executive Director of Restore Hetch Hetchy, a nonprofit dedicated to returning Hetch Hetchy Valley to its natural state while safeguarding the water and power needs of all Tuolumne River communities.

Cc: The Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary of the Interior
The Honorable Daniel Lurie, Mayor of San Francisco