



EASTERN SIERRA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (ESCOG) Joint Powers Authority

July 23, 2021

California Citizens Redistricting Commission
C/O Public Comment
721 Capitol Mall, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 2020 California Citizens Redistricting

Dear Honorable California Citizens Redistricting Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on California's 2020 redistricting process. Following regional discussions with the Mono County Board of Supervisors, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors, the City of Bishop, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes, the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) would like to request the following considerations be made to better configure representation for our area to align with our shared culture, geography, and issues.

The first priority of the ESCOG is that Eastern Sierra counties, specifically Inyo and Mono Counties, should be defined as a community of interest with shared state and federal representation. Currently, Mono County is represented by State Assembly District 5 served by Assemblyman Frank Bigelow and Inyo County is represented by Assembly District 26 served by Assemblyman Devon Mathis. Both Counties are represented by California Senate District 8. Historically, our constituents in both Counties have felt underrepresented at the State level, largely due to our geographic isolation on the east side of the Sierra Nevada. No State representative maintains a local office in either Inyo or Mono County.

Eastern California Districts are currently connected to greater population centers on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada and Central Valley that do not share any of those characteristics in common with the east side of the Sierra Nevada. Access to the Eastern Sierra from the west side of the Sierra Nevada requires traversing the 14,000 foot mountain range over high mountain passes – travel that is lengthy and circuitous in

summer months, and significantly extended when mountain passes close for winter months.

Indeed, these mountains present such a formidable barrier between the Central Valley and Eastern Sierra that no roads cross the Sierra Nevada for a span of approximately 250 miles between Sherman Pass to the south and Tioga Pass to the north. When residents of Inyo and Mono Counties need to access urban amenities such as an international airport or a big-box retailer, they tend to travel south to the Los Angeles area or north to the Reno area, as traveling west over the mountains is inefficient and difficult. Thus, the ESCOG feels that it makes little sense and dilutes the voice of the residents of Inyo and Mono Counties to tether east-side residents to west-side counties that are so geographically divided from the Eastern Sierra.

The Eastern Sierra is foremost defined by its proximity to the striking eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada. The region represents unique geology and ecology in California, as the westernmost valley of the Great Basin region in the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada. The Eastern Sierra, known as Payahuunadu or Panawe, has been and continues to be the ancestral home of the Paiute (Nuumu), Shoshone (Newe) and Timbisha peoples for over ten thousand years. Eastern Sierra counties have a shared history of pioneers, prospectors, farmers, and ranchers.

More contemporarily, the region is defined by a shared frontier culture that celebrates its connection to the mountains, to its rural identity, and the abundance of outdoor and adventure recreation opportunities in our mutual backyard. Inyo County and Mono County have regionally connected economies centered on shared resources and integrated tourism markets. Bishop, in Inyo County, serves as the regional hub for federal and state services. Mammoth Lakes, in Mono County, is home to the premier ski resort destination for greater southern California, which continues to be a primary driver for business opportunities along the Highway 395 corridor. Inyo County is a gateway to Death Valley and Kings Canyon – Sequoia National Parks. Mono County is a gateway to Yosemite National Park. Many visitors travel through the region to enjoy each park in succession, and tourism travel is a shared base economy for both Counties.

The Eastern Sierra region has unique and unifying regional issues that would benefit from united regional state representation. Both counties are characterized by significant percentages (>90%) of federally owned and managed land, as well as water exportation and land management by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. No other county in the State of California is characterized greater than 50% of private land owned by California municipality outside their boundaries. Both Counties have less than 5% of their land area available for private ownership or development – a shared community and economic development constraint impacting shared regional housing and retail development opportunities.

As a second priority, Inyo and Mono Counties would like to share regional representation with other Sierra Nevada counties, including Mariposa County, Tuolumne County, Calaveras County, Amador County, Alpine County, and past of El

Dorado County, Placer County, Nevada County and Sierra County to form an Sierra Nevada district defined by shared issues, geographies, watersheds, histories, and cultures.

The ESCOG respectfully requests the Honorable California Citizens Redistricting Commission redraw representational boundaries to include Inyo and Mono Counties within the same State Senate and Assembly Districts. The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments further requests the Honorable California Citizens Redistricting Commission provide for shared representation for all counties with the Sierra Nevada, and in particular, within the eastern watersheds of the Sierra Nevada. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the cornerstone of our United States and State of California democracy, which is local representation.

Please feel welcome to contact me with further questions at kschwartz@cityofbishop.com.

Sincerely,

Karen Schwartz
Chair, Eastern Sierra Council of Governments