

RE: Request for Funding the Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake in the 2025-2026 State Budget

Members of the California Legislature:

The undersigned stakeholders of Clear Lake humbly request your support of Assembly Member Cecilia Aquiar-Curry's request to fund the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake in the 2025-26 State Budget. (Attached)

Clear Lake is in crisis, and so are the communities that depend on it. Once a jewel of Northern California, this ancient lake is now choking on past pollution and toxic blooms, which require immediate action. What's at stake isn't just the lake's beauty, but the health, heritage, and water security of an entire region.

For nearly 50 years, harmful algal blooms have plagued Clear Lake due to nutrient pollution and warming temperatures. These blooms are more than just unsightly and exceedingly malodorous. They pose real and growing risks to the people who live around the lake and depend on it every day.

According to a CDC / Cal-WATCH study from 2021, more than 50% of tested homes drawing drinking water from Clear Lake had detectable levels of cyanotoxin, posing risks ranging from skin irritation to liver damage. These toxins can cause serious illnesses and disproportionately impact families who may not have the resources to seek alternative sources. We are no longer dealing with a future threat. The damage is already here, and it is affecting drinking water, public safety, and the broader health of our communities.

The decline of Clear Lake also puts Native heritage and regional biodiversity at risk. The Clear Lake hitch (or Chi as it has been referred to by native peoples since time immemorial), a native fish species that holds deep spiritual and cultural significance for local tribes, is now at risk of extinction. The Chi/hitch once swam in large numbers through the lake and its tributaries during its annual migration, sustaining both the ecosystem and Indigenous lifeways. Today, its population has plummeted due to habitat destruction, water diversions, and degraded water quality.

This crisis has been decades in the making, but solutions are within reach. In 2017, the California Legislature established the Blue-Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake through Assembly Bill 707 championed by Assembly Member Cecelia Aguiar-Curry. The Committee includes a diverse coalition of voices: Tribal representatives, Lake County officials, agricultural leaders, scientists, and state agency partners. We've worked together for years to identify solutions that reflect local priorities, environmental needs, and scientific insight.

The Solutions: Science-Backed, Community-Endorsed, and Shovel-Ready

The Blue-Ribbon Committee has identified and approved 12 shovel-ready projects designed to restore Clear Lake's health, all based on years of scientific research, community input, and proven methods.

These include:

- In-lake phosphorus sequestration to reduce the nutrient pollution in sediments driving poor water quality, including blooms of toxic algae.
- Hypolimnetic oxygenation — a technique that adds oxygen to deeper lake waters, helping reduce phosphorus release from sediments and creating a healthier environment for fish and aquatic life.
- Early warning systems to detect harmful algal blooms before they become public health emergencies.

These aren't abstract ideas or wishful thinking. These are tested, targeted, and ready-for-implementation solutions, the kind that could begin making a difference in the next year, not the next decade.

The Need: \$15.4 Million to Turn the Tide

An investment of \$15.4 million would begin to better protect the health of thousands, preserve Tribal lifeways, and help avoid growing costs from the lake's impaired status. We are now calling on state leaders to invest in these projects. This investment will allow us to launch restoration efforts that are cost-effective, targeted, and urgently needed.

Importantly, these restoration efforts also reflect years of public engagement. The Blue-Ribbon Committee has held regular meetings in Lake County, ensuring the public has had the chance to participate, ask questions, and guide the process. Through partnerships with UC Davis and the Tahoe Environmental Research Center, the Committee has supported both cutting-edge research and outreach programs that help local residents understand and engage with the lake's health.

This transparency and inclusivity are especially critical when it comes to working with Tribal communities. The Committee includes Tribal voices at the table and supports initiatives that incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge, protect cultural heritage, and address long-standing environmental justice concerns. Any long-term solution for Clear Lake must be grounded in respect for the region's Indigenous history and leadership.

What happens to Clear Lake doesn't stay in Lake County. The lake is part of a larger network of water systems that support the health, agriculture, and drinking water needs of surrounding regions, including Yolo County and the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta. Allowing Clear Lake to further deteriorate risks triggering a domino effect that would be felt across Northern California.

We have the science, the plans, and the partnerships. What is needed now is the funding, and the political will, to act to prevent further damage to the lake and surrounding communities.

Clear Lake can be restored. It can once again be a thriving hub for recreation, biodiversity, and culture. But every season we wait, the path forward becomes steeper. Investing in this lake today means safeguarding public health, preserving cultural identity, and protecting the future water security of our region.

Clear Lake doesn't need another study or another season without restorative management. It needs support from the State to act and fund the first step in restoring Clear Lake. Communities around the lake have done their part. The future of Clear Lake, and all it sustains, depends on what happens next.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a total of \$15.4 million from State General Fund and/or Proposition 4 Bond funds for the purposes identified by the Blue Ribbon Committee.

Sincerely,

Eric Sklar
Chair
Blue Ribbon Committee for the
Rehabilitation of Clear Lake

Rebecca Harper
Executive Director
Lake County Farm Bureau

Daniella Santana
Environmental Director
Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake

Luis Santana
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Robinson Rancheria

Brad Rasmussen
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Sarah Ryan
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