

Gov. Newsom appoints farmer, conservationist Bill Lyons as special adviser on agricultural, water issues

By Mark Looker, Looker Communications Consultant

Governor Gavin Newsom announced Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2019 that William (Bill) Lyons, 68, of Modesto, has been appointed Agriculture Liaison in the Office of the Governor. Lyons, a third-generation farmer who served as Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture under Gov. Gray Davis from 1999 to 2004, oversees his family's 95-year-old farming and cattle ranching operation in Stanislaus County and has received numerous awards for his environmental stewardship and conservation efforts.

Lyons was selected as the western regional finalist for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation 2010 Conservationist of the Year Award and received the United States Department of Agriculture National Environmentalist Award. He has an extensive background in agriculture and water policy. This position does not require Senate confirmation.

Lyons said, "I'm grateful for this opportunity to serve Gov. Newsom and his Administration. I'm committed to exploring balanced, common-sense and science-based solutions for the critically complex water and agricultural issues facing the state."

Lyons noted his family farming operation produces a wide range of agricultural commodities, including almonds, walnuts, tomatoes, corn, wheat, oats, rye, alfalfa, beans and wine grapes, as well as beef cattle. "I understand the issues and concerns of California agriculture when it comes to production issues, as well as environmental and water policy issues," said Lyons. "I look forward to reaching out to the California agriculture and water communities, and the community at large, to listen to their concerns and bring those issues forward to the Governor and his staff so agriculture has a strong voice in Sacramento."

Lyons served from 1984-1993 as a director on the Modesto Irrigation District, which serves over 100,000 electrical and water customers, providing him a unique perspective on the issues facing both agriculture and urban water and electrical customers.

As a conservationist, Lyons has been recognized by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for his conservation and environmental efforts and has received the United States Department of Agriculture National Environmentalist Award. He was selected as the western regional finalist for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation 2010 Conservationist of the Year Award.

Lyons and his family worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in bringing back the Aleutian Cackling Goose and the Riparian Brush Rabbit back from the brink of extinction. The goose was removed from the Endangered Species list in 2001. Today, over 100,000 geese and migratory fowl use the ranch during the winter.

Lyons was instrumental in working with the River Partners, the Department of Water Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Tuolumne River Trust on the Dos Rios Ranch project, the largest public-private floodplain restoration project in California. The 1,600- acre Dos Rios Ranch is located at the confluence of the Tuolumne and San Joaquin rivers and is the largest contiguous riparian and floodplain conservation area in the Central Valley.

Lyons was the recipient of the California Exposition and State Fair 2010 Agriculturalist of the Year Award. This competitive award recognizes distinguished service in the promotion and advancement of agriculture in California.

Bill's alma mater, California State University at Chico, honored Bill in 2000 with the Distinguished Alumni Award. He and his wife, Suzy, have been married for 40 years and have four children and five grandchildren.

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