

Save The Sacramento River – Stop The Sites Reservoir!

Your Comments Needed On Proposed Reservoir That Threatens The Sacramento River

The massive Sites Offstream Storage Reservoir is proposed for the western Sacramento Valley near the small town of Maxwell in Colusa County. The Sites Reservoir would be filled by significant water diversions from the Sacramento River, which could harm the river's dynamic flow-based ecosystems. More than 20,000 acres of federal and state public lands along the river that were acquired to protect and restore the river's riparian and aquatic habitats, could be degraded by the diversions.

In addition to reducing flows in the Sacramento River, the reservoir would drown up to 15,000 acres of existing oak woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, and agricultural land in the western Sacramento Valley. Impacts associated with the reservoir footprint would harm the federally protected bald eagle, a host of other sensitive wildlife species, several rare plants, and significant historical and cultural resources.

The Sites Project Authority, a consortium of water districts and local governments, claim that the reservoir could store up to 1.8 million acre feet of water (making it the seventh largest reservoir in the state) and reliably yield about a half million acre feet of water annually for communities, farms, and the environment. But this yield estimate fails to adequately consider the effects of climate change, chronic drought, and reservoir evaporation on project storage and deliveries.

The project proponents claim that the diversions from the Sacramento River to fill the reservoir are relatively minor and will have no adverse impacts on the river. But this claim is based on inadequate flow standards for the river. During drought years, these inadequate standards could allow Sites to divert more than half of the river's flow and severely reduce fresh water inflow into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta downstream.

Sites proponents claim that their project will provide water "environmental benefits," including cold water for salmon below dams and more fresh water to improve water quality in the Delta. But they fail to acknowledge that the relatively minor and questionable benefits of their project don't outweigh the project's environmental impacts. Sites supporters are essentially proposing to take water away from the environment, while promising to give back a small portion of that water for dubious environmental purposes.

The Sites project's alleged "environmental benefits" seem little more than window dressing to secure public funding through the state water bond (Prop. 1) and to gain the support of gullible politicians. Sites will cost more than \$4.7 billion to build and its supporters hope the taxpayers will cover up to \$1.6 billion of that cost from Prop. 1. Ultimately, the Sites project means business as usual. The reservoir will increase the dependency of southern California

communities on imported water and subsidize more almond orchards in the southern Central Valley for the Asian export market.

Because Sites diversions will take water away from the environment, the project puts at risk the Sacramento River's dynamic flow-based ecosystems, as well as the river's endangered salmon, riparian dependent wildlife species, public lands, and water quality. It will also take fresh water away from the Delta needed to maintain the estuary's water quality and endangered fish. The bottom line is that the Sites project's environmental impacts could be severe and it fails to provide net environmental benefits as required by state law.

What You Can Do:

Public comments on the Sites Project Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement (DEIR/S) and Feasibility Report will be accepted through Monday, January 15, 2018. Please send an email TODAY noting that the Sites DEIR/S fails to fully address the harmful impacts of the project on the Sacramento River and Delta, and demand that the DEIR/S be withdrawn and revised to better address these critical issues, and released for additional public review and comment. Emails or hard copies of your comments must be received by January 15, 2018. Please feel free to use the sample email/letter below:

SAMPLE EMAIL/LETTER

Mr. Jim Watson
Sites Project Authority
P.O. Box 517
Maxwell, CA 95955
Via Email: EIR-EIS-Comments@SitesProject.org

Mr. Mike Dietl
Bureau of Reclamation
2800 Cottage Way, W-2830
Sacramento, CA 95825

Re: Comments on Sites DEIR/S and Draft Feasibility Report

Dear Mr. Watson and Mr. Dietl:

Please accept these comments in response to the Sites Reservoir Project DEIR/S and Feasibility Report. I urge that this inadequate environmental document be withdrawn and revised to better assess and mitigate project impacts on the Sacramento River, downstream water quality (in the river and Delta), and on natural and cultural resources that would drown under the reservoir footprint.

The DEIR/S assessment of impacts on the river are based on the false premise that current flow and water quality standards for the river are adequate. In fact, the current standards fail to protect and restore at-risk fish and wildlife species, are inadequate to maintain the river's dynamic, flow-based ecosystems on which these species depend.

Most major dam and water projects in California were promoted by water agencies and politicians as enhancing and protecting the environment. Decades later, the overall result has been salmon and other fish species declining towards extinction, extensive loss of wetlands and riverside habitat, and degradation of water quality. Because the project will depend on Prop. 1 water bond funding, the Sites DEIR/S must *prove* to the public that Sites will avoid adverse environmental impacts and in fact, provide net public benefits.

The Sites DEIR/S admits that the project will destroy 15,000 acres of oak woodlands, grassland, wetlands, riparian habitat, and croplands, with significant unavoidable impacts on the protected Golden eagle, paleontological and cultural resources, and air quality (through generation of greenhouse gas emissions). Potentially significant impacts on rare plants and other resources appear to have been low-balled in the DEIR.

The project will depend on coordinated operation with Trinity, Shasta, Oroville, and Folsom dams on the Trinity, Sacramento, Feather, and American Rivers to “benefit” endangered salmon downstream of these dams. The idea is that consumptive water supplies will be stored in Sites to allow the other dams to retain cold water for fish downstream. But according to the DEIR/S, coordinated operations between Sites and other dams will on average “improve” salmon runs by a paltry 2-4 percent, at a cost to the taxpayers of at least \$1.6 billion.

Although a major chunk of “environmental” water allegedly produce by Sites is allocated to maintain Delta water quality, there is little evaluation in the DEIR/S as to whether this allocation will successfully restore a river and estuary already degraded by major water diversions. The State Water Board estimates that the Delta needs somewhere between 35-75 percent of its previously unimpaired flows, primarily from the Sacramento River. There is no information in the Sites DEIR/S as to how project diversions and releases will achieve this standard. Further, I believe that the DEIR/S fails to adequately assess the impact of climate change and reservoir evaporation on project yield.

This entire project is based on the false premise that there is “excess” water in the Sacramento River not needed for the environment. I urge that this entirely inadequate DEIR/S be withdrawn and a new environmental document developed and released for public review that fully addresses the impacts of this project on the Sacramento River, Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, threatened and endangered fish and wildlife that depend on the river and estuary, as well as on water quality.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

(name, address, email)

NEXT STEP

Click here to email your comment letter to your Representative and Senators in Congress. Simply note that you are sharing your comment letter and urge them to withhold support from this controversial and potentially environmentally harmful project until its impacts are thoroughly assessed and mitigated.

For more information concerning this alert, contact Steve Evans at Friends of the River, email: sevens@friendsoftheriver.org; phone: (916) 708-3155. For more information, visit these web sites to review the key project documents:

Sites DEIR/Appendices:

<https://www.sitesproject.org/information/DraftEIR-EIS/full.html?fullID=46438>

Sites Draft Feasibility Report:

<https://www.sitesproject.org/information/FeasibilityReport/>

Sites JPA Application for water bond funding to the California Water Commission:

<https://cwc.ca.gov/Pages/WSIP/SitesProject.aspx>