



# Sites Reservoir: Bond fund proposal must be ready in August

Bill Husa-Enterprise Record file photography A few buildings dot the landscape in the valley proposed for the Sites Reservoir.

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Maxwell. The plans to build a new reservoir near Maxwell have been a long time in coming. At this point, 30 agencies throughout the state are on the list to help pay for planning efforts and later receive a share of an estimated average yield of 500,000 acre-feet of water (see below).

The next step is to apply for partial funding through Proposition 1 funds, the statewide water bond approved in 2014. Within the \$7.5 bond amount, \$2.7 billion is set aside for water storage projects.

The deadline to apply for the water project bond funding is Aug. 14, followed by review by several agencies that oversee projects like this, and a final decision on funding from the state Water Commission, explained Jim Watson, general manager for the Sites Joint Powers Association, [www.sitesproject.org](http://www.sitesproject.org).

The review by public agencies is extensive, Watson said. California Fish and Wildlife has responded to the preliminary plans with 303 questions that need to be answered. Another 140 questions will be answered for the state Water Board. Reviews will include modeling for climate change and cost benefits.

A public meeting will take place sometime in the fall, probably in September, he said.

## Moving ahead

Having a share of the state bond fund would move the project along. Yet, just as the Sites JPA is working on an application, others are as well. Other new reservoir proposals include Temperance Flats near Fresno and a plan to enlarge [Los Vaqueros Reservoir](#) in eastern Contra Costa County. Other projects may or may not be submitted for consideration when the Aug. 14 deadline arrives.

Whether the state Water Commission will approve some, all or none of the Sites Project is very much unknown. Planners on Sites note that public benefits, paid for through bond money, would include availability of cold water for fish, water supply flexibility, water for wildlife refuges and recreation.

“Our game plan is to give the state the first right of refusal for up to 50 percent of the project,” Watson said. Then priorities will be set, depending on what state agencies see as the most important. It may be water is earmarked for cold water for salmon, or wildlife habitat, or water supply for fish in the delta, as examples.

There could be entirely different priorities in the future, he said.

For water districts that would also be investors, the benefits are water supply for crops and cities.

## Plans, money and time

The reservoir would store up to 1.8 million acre-feet, again with an average yield of 500,000 acre-feet.

One acre-foot of water is 325,851 gallons, or enough water to cover one acre of land with one foot of water.

The total project could cost \$4.8 billion, Watson said. That number keeps rising as time passes.

Once approved, it could take 7-8 years for construction.

The Water Commission will consider proposals and deliver decisions on proposals in June 2018.

### **Difference in dams**

All eyes have been focused on problems at Lake Oroville these past few months, while the Sites JPA continues with the planning process and bond proposal.

One key difference between the Sites proposal and other dams is that Sites would be “off-stream storage,” Watson said. This means water would be diverted from the river, but the river itself would not be blocked.

“We don’t fill by Mother Nature,” Watson said.

However, the “lessons learned” aspect of the scrutiny of Lake Oroville may end up impacting design of Sites Reservoir, he said. As the Division of Dam Safety learns more about what went wrong at Oroville, new information and rules may apply to any new construction, including Sites.

For example, when radial gates failed at Folsom Dam, new rules for reservoir gates were applied elsewhere.

### **Opposition**

The proposal for Sites is controversial. The biggest water agency on the list (see sidebar) is Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which pledged \$1.5 million toward planning in April. Residents of Northern California are frequently wary when projects involve moving water from north to south.

Water is a shared resource, and when private investors pay for project they buy into a share of that resource. Dams also cover habitat with water.

*Contact reporter Heather Hacking at 896-7758.*

### **Sites Reservoir participants**

The following groups have signed on to be participants of Phase 1 in the development of the Sites project as of May 24.

#### **Sacramento Valley water agencies**

- Colusa County - 10,000 a/f
- Colusa County Water District – 32,111 a/f
- Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District – 20,000 a/f
- Orland-Artois Water District – 20,000 a/f

- Proberta Water District – 3,000 a/f
- Reclamation District 108 – 20,000 a/f
- Western Canal Water District – 3,500 a/f
- Westside Water District – 25,000 a/f
- 4M Water District – 500 a/f
- Cortina Water District – 300 a/f
- Davis Water District – 2,000 a/f
- Dunnigan Water District – 5,000 a/f
- LaGrande Water District (pending) – 1,000 a/f
- City of American Canyon – 4,000 a/f

#### Non-Sacramento Valley

- Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency – 2,000 a/f
- Castaic Lake Water Agency – 5,000 a/f
- Coachella Valley Water District – 26,500 a/f
- Desert Water Agency – 6,500 a/f
- Metropolitan Water District (pending) – 50,000 a/f
- San Bernadino Valley Municipal Water – 30,000 a/f
- San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency – 14,000 a/f
- Santa Clara Valley Water District – 24,000 a/f
- Westlands Water District (pending) – 20,000 a/f
- Wheeler Ridge-Maricopa Water – 20,000 a/f
- Zone 7 Water Agency – 20,000 a/f

#### Others

- California Water Service (pending) – 35,000 a/f
- Carter MWC – 1,000 a/f
- Garden Highway MWC – 4,000 a/f

- Pacific Resources MWC – 20,000 a/f