



For Immediate Release

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California Water Commission Staff Undervalues Public Benefits of New Storage

Sites Project receives initial public benefit score of "0.4"

Maxwell, CA – The California Water Commission today announced initial public benefit scores to the 11 project applicants for Proposition 1 funding. Surprisingly, none of the projects were judged to have greater public benefits than the requested investment amount, and many were judged to have no public benefits. The Sites Reservoir Project, being developed by the Sites Project Authority, received initial public benefit credit for wildlife refuge improvements, flood control, and recreation. But, the Water Commission staff requested more information before recommending a public benefit score for the project's significant environmental benefits for salmon and delta smelt.

"Proposition 1 provided a new model for the state, allowing California for the first time to evaluate and invest in the public benefits associated with storage infrastructure projects," said Sites Project Authority Chair Fritz Durst. "Although the Water Commission staff's initial evaluation substantially undervalues the project, we think there is a great opportunity moving forward for an updated analysis to allow the state to make substantial investments in the environmental benefits the project can provide."

"The Sites Project Authority is confident that the project provides unique environmental benefits that will improve conditions for salmon and delta smelt," continued Durst. "We are looking forward to a serious commitment from the state to benefit the stressed environmental resources in the Sacramento Valley watershed."

Through the passage of Proposition 1 in 2014, California voters called for state investments in new storage facilities to provide public benefits to the ecosystem, water quality improvements, flood control, emergency response, and recreation. To receive this funding, projects must meet certain criteria established by the California Water Commission. Although it's just one part of the Water Commission's overall scoring process, the public benefit score makes up one-third of an applicant's overall score. There are three other components that still need to be scored before a total score can be established as the basis for the Commission to make a conditional funding award.

"Given some of the unique aspects of our proposal, the Sites Project Authority had planned to use the appeal process to help clarify benefits, such as dedicating 710,000 acre-feet of the usable storage capacity in the reservoir for the state to manage over the 100-year plus expected life of the reservoir. For comparison, that's $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total storage capacity of Folsom Reservoir to be used solely for environmental benefits," said Sites Project Authority's General Manager Jim Watson.

“Now that we have received staff’s initial technical review and results, we will work with the Water Commission to gain a better understanding of the methodologies and criteria used to score our project and adjust accordingly. The Authority believes the Sites Project provides a new water management tool that will be essential during the next drought and will help respond to future changes in hydrology.”

Sites is an offstream reservoir proposed north of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where it would not dam a major river or block fish migration in any watershed. The project provides unique environmental benefits during dry and critical water years, and especially during extended drought periods, by conserving coldwater releases for salmon and delivering water through the Yolo Bypass to support delta smelt. By capturing storm runoff not required to meet environmental regulations or other priorities, the project would provide the state with a water budget of approximately 200,000 acre-feet to be used flexibly to provide more protection to environmental benefits.

The Sites Project Authority will submit its appeal on February 23, with final public benefit scores expected this summer.

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About Sites

The Sites Project is an innovative and environmentally-focused offstream water management solution. It creates a unique opportunity for direct and real benefits to instream flows, the Delta ecosystem, and water supply. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.sitesproject.org>. Follow the Sites Project on social media @SitesProject.