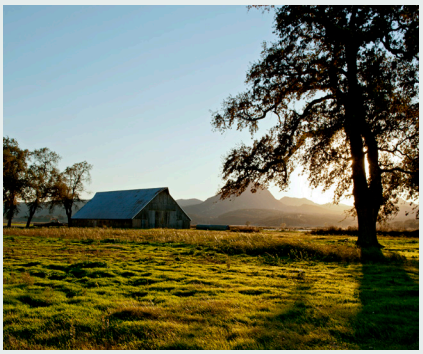
Sites

Sites Project: Frequently Asked Questions



The following questions and answers are meant to respond to the most common questions about the Sites project.

Q: How would Sites benefit California?

A: California operates one of the most extensive and sophisticated water storage and conveyance systems in the world. However, the basic elements of California's water delivery system have remained virtually unchanged for 40 years, while the population of the state has nearly doubled. These facts, coupled with the effects of drought, climate change, and growing environmental and agricultural needs, are putting the system under considerable pressure. Sites Reservoir, as a place to store extra water, provides increased operational flexibility to our water delivery system. Sites is a cost effective way to deal with the growing demands on California water, does not dam an existing river, or require expensive retro-fitting of existing facilities.

Sites will provide a needed backstop to help the state's primary water delivery system react to the potential impacts of climate change, which is expected to bring less snow runoff and flashier storms. During drought years, Sites can be refilled from just one or two high flow storm events. For instance, in the drought year of 2014-15, Sites could have captured 410,000 acre-feet from just two storm events that winter. If Sites were operational this past 2015-16 rainy season, it would have added over one million acre-feet from the El Nino storms. In an average water year, Sites will be able to add 500,000 acre-feet of water to be used by California homes, farms, and businesses, and the ecosystem. During critical dry years, Sites would boost water available to California during the summer by an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 additional acre-feet.

As an offstream storage project, Sites will increase environmental flows for fish while providing much needed operational flexibility to deliver water for consumptive and economic uses. In addition, hydroelectric power generated at Sites during outflows could compensate for fluctuations in wind and solar power generation.

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FAQs

Q: How will Sites benefit the environment?

A: Sites is the only proposed storage project that combines the public benefits of water storage with the ecosystem benefits of increased environmental flows in the Sacramento River. Up to half of Sites' annual water supplies can be dedicated to environmental flows, which will improve water quality for endangered fish, reduce salinity levels in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta), and enhance Pacific Flyway habitat for migratory birds and other native species. If Sites had been operational in 2015, an additional 240,000 acre-feet of cold water would have been available to support critical salmon migration in the Sacramento River. In dry and critical years, Sites will provide an additional 250,000 to 300,000 acre-feet of cold-water pools to help endangered Salmon populations.

Q: How will Sites improve water quality?

A: Aside from its ability to store water, Sites provides much needed operational flexibility to California's water system. Sites will be designed to fill during "high flow events" in the wet season. During these high flow events, Sites will capture water that can then be used during summer months to improve water quality in the Delta when it is at its worst, and provide environmental flows when it is needed most.

Q: Under what conditions would Sites divert water?

A: Diversions to Sites Reservoir would only be possible if specific criteria are met:

1. After senior water rights holder demands have been met;
2. When Delta flows are in "excess" according to DWR's operations control office; and
3. If Sacramento River flows at Freeport and Delta diversion locations are greater than the required minimums.

Q: How will Sites impact water supply availability?

A: Currently, there are a limited number of reservoirs that hold water above the Delta in Northern California, and they must maintain water quality standards, salinity levels, and environmental habitat protection during dry summer months. The Delta is the state's biggest water bottleneck, home to a rigid (and some argue outdated) system that does not respond well to crisis. Sites would increase North of Delta storage by 23 percent, giving water managers more flexibility to meet the state's water needs while ensuring habitat protection and improving environmental conditions.

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Q: Would public money fund Sites?

A: Up to 50 percent of Sites may be paid for by California's Proposition 1 Water Bond funding. If the project receives Proposition 1 funding, the money will pay for the public benefits of the project and create a source of water that is specifically earmarked for the environment. In addition, the water provided by Sites will help augment a statewide water system that provides safe drinking water to 25 million Californians, supports a productive agricultural economy, and will make additional environmental water available during critical summer months.

Q: If the state funds Sites, would the benefits outweigh the costs?

A: Sites is projected to cost $4.4 billion in 2015 dollars. Recent studies of Sites Reservoir estimate that its overall return on investment for the state would be from $61 million to $71 million per year. In addition, outside investment from water districts around the state has increased and the Sites Project Authority has secured committed investors. Although all of the financing aspects are not finalized, the Sites Project Authority has used a conservative cost estimate and fully intends to drive costs down by using alternative delivery methods and potentially a low interest loan program from the federal government. More importantly, when considering a future of scarce water supplies, the benefit of Sites far outweighs the cost.

Q: Are dams and reservoirs effective methods of addressing drought?

A: Sites Reservoir is a modern solution to California's water challenges. Today, California's water system is extremely rigid and has very little room for error. Sites will provide needed flexibility for the state to respond to future crisis. It will also be the first surface water storage project in California to create a dedicated source of water specifically for public benefit – to improve environmental conditions in the Sacramento River and Delta. The unique location of Sites and status as an "offstream" reservoir will allow it to capture huge storm surges on the Sacramento River and store that water for dry summer months – without blocking fish migration or damming an existing river.

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