

Sites Reservoir Project
Draft Environmental Impact Report/
Environmental Impact Statement

December 5, 2017

1:00 p.m.

Public Comment

1 MARK COWAN: I'm an Irishman. I moved here
2 recently from Ireland to get married, so I have a
3 passionate familiarity with rainstorms and flooding.

4 I live in a town called Athlone, which is on
5 the River Shannon, so because of the town where I'm from
6 on the River Shannon, and Ireland is a very agricultural
7 nation, has been for the past 800 years, there are very
8 few floodplains for the water to be collected, natural
9 deposits, or reservoirs.

10 So out of a concern for this happening here in
11 Sacramento and the ever present danger of flooding, I
12 would like to wholeheartedly express my support for the
13 Sites project.

14 Thank you.

15 REGINA CHICHIZOLA: So I'm going to write
16 written comments because I'm sure there are some issues
17 I will find out that I'm wrong about or get more
18 information about as I'm able to finish more and more of
19 the EIS, which is pretty extensive, obviously.

20 I drove here today from the Klamath River where
21 the Trinity meets it, so I have a lot of concerns as far
22 as what impacts could be to the Trinity River.

23 And I also work for the Pacific Coast
24 Federation of Fisheries Association, and I represent
25 some community groups on the Trinity and Klamath Rivers.

1 I've actually worked on trying to remove some
2 dams on the Klamath River for a long time now. They're
3 actually on the river and block it.

4 So one is I think there's a lot of information
5 that -- I feel like there's a lot of information that is
6 going to be coming out in the next couple of years that
7 should be -- the project should be basing itself on.

8 That has not happened yet, which makes me feel
9 like the EIS is slightly premature. It feels like it's
10 moving very quickly, even though the, for instance,
11 Water Rights Application has not gone forward yet, even
12 though the Phase II Delta changes have not happened yet,
13 which are going to increase winter flows hopefully in
14 the Sacramento River.

15 As you said, there is a lot of science coming
16 out based on floodplains and what floodplains means to
17 fisheries. And what wet water years means to fisheries.

18 As people who depend on fisheries, both through
19 the union that I work for that represents commercial
20 fishermen and for people on the Klamath and Trinity
21 River, which is extremely rural, I think that a lot of
22 the science on what floodplains means and what high
23 flows mean, needs to come out, and also what standards
24 are needed for the flows in the Sacramento River to help
25 fish need to come out before we can decide how much

1 should be diverted.

2 I also think that consultation with fish and
3 wildlife service, government to governments with tribes,
4 things like that should have happened already.

5 Because how are you going to read an EIS when
6 you don't have all the information.

7 Another issue I have with this -- and I'm not
8 saying that I think that this has to be a detriment to
9 the environment or has to be good for the environment, I
10 just think there is a lot of information that I find is
11 missing at this point.

12 One thing that I really did not like when I
13 read the -- when I read the EIS, or the parts of it that
14 I've been able to get through, is this assumption that
15 in the baseline that contracts are like -- contracts
16 are -- that water use is going to increase a lot and
17 contracts are met.

18 There are very few years where contracts are
19 met, and if you're assuming that the contracts are met
20 to the Sacramento River, then you're assuming that a lot
21 more water is being used currently than is actually
22 being used because in many years those contracts aren't
23 met.

24 Some information that I've read in the document
25 that I find to be conflicting or should be explained

1 better in the final EIS is that there are -- in the
2 fisheries assessment there are things said like, they'll
3 be an eight -- eight percent decrease in wet water years
4 of fish production, but a 14 percent --

5 These are not the actual numbers because
6 obviously different years there's different numbers, but
7 a 14-percent increase in dry water years.

8 Well, in wet water years, there's a lot more
9 fish than in dry water years, so what are those actual
10 numbers?

11 Is -- is the decrease 20,000 fish, but the
12 increase is only a thousand fish because you're going
13 five percent inches?

14 This is the kind of information we would need
15 to know to be able to support a project like this. And
16 so without knowing that, right now it's hard to support.

17 Another concern that I personally have is that
18 a lot of these tributaries that you're saying have extra
19 water or that you can get water rights for are some of
20 the most important tributaries to the Spring Chinook
21 Salmon, and the Spring Chinook Salmon are doing really
22 terrible right now, and because these are not --

23 I don't see how there's anything above Sites
24 Reservoir that -- a lot of the areas above Sites
25 Reservoir seem like they are not going to be helped by

1 this. Maybe they can be, maybe you're trying to figure
2 out where they can be, but at this point, the Spring
3 Chinook spawning tributaries are not going to be helped
4 like this; instead you're claiming water.

5 And I understand you'll be taking in the
6 winter, but like I said, those winter flows are very
7 important. And they're not just very important in one
8 storm event because I did see that. You said you would
9 protect flows during certain storm events, but they're
10 important a lot of the time.

11 The times that we have good fisheries, and we
12 are making money is the times when there are wet water
13 years and how water is allowed to flow down the river.

14 I mean, floodplain inundation is very
15 important, so I just don't see how the fish are being
16 protected, and I don't want to be rude, but I have a
17 hard time thinking that the Sites Project Authority is
18 going to always be protecting the fish as the lead
19 agency because it is so many irrigators and farmers.

20 And I don't see who the person who speaks for
21 the fish on the Authority is, and without a biological
22 opinion out yet, and without all this information from,
23 you know, the Phase II process out yet, and the State
24 Board weighing in on that, I just have a hard time
25 believing this is going to be a benefit.

1 I hope it is, and I hope we can go forward and
2 figure out ways to make it a benefit, but I have a lot
3 of concerns, and I feel like this feels premature
4 because those concerns have not been addressed in the
5 fishing community.

6 And then the last thing I wanted to say, is I
7 think there should be hearings in more areas that are
8 impacted besides just in the communities that are
9 farming communities.

10 I mean, obviously people in the Trinity River
11 have a lot of questions. You know, are the extra flows
12 that we get to keep the Klamath Salmon alive, are they
13 protected in this project? Is that considered in this
14 project?

15 There are people in the upper Sacramento who
16 probably have a lot of concerns too, so if you're going
17 to alleviate those concerns and make sure everyone feels
18 involved, you should probably open the process up a
19 little more and provide some more information on
20 consultations.

21 Thank you very much.

22 STEVE EVANS: So my name is Steve Evans. I'm a
23 consultant for Friends of the River, which is a
24 Statewide river conservation group. We've been
25 following this project for several years.

1 I personally have lived near and along the
2 Sacramento River for over 30 years. So -- and --

3 As my wife points out to me, every time we
4 drive over a river, I remark about how high or how low
5 the flows are, and she thinks I'm kind of a nut, but it
6 does give me interesting background.

7 For example, the premise that Sites will
8 largely be storing water from tributaries of the
9 Sacramento River rather than water from the Sacramento
10 River, which is largely owned by the Bureau of
11 Reclamation, and other existing entities, that sort of
12 makes sense, but one of the issues is during drought,
13 say the third year of a drought when Shasta Reservoir is
14 very low, and there's not a lot of water coming in above
15 Shasta Reservoir to fill that reservoir, and you get a
16 storm event, that means the reservoir starts filling,
17 flow releases from Shasta Dam are relatively limited so
18 the reservoir will fill, so most of the flow in the
19 river will be from its undammed tributaries, which is a
20 good thing. It keeps the river alive.

21 But these are the flows that the Sites JPA are
22 proposing to defer to store in the Sites, and that's a
23 big concern in multiple drought years.

24 I know DWR is not part of this project anymore,
25 but they had an example on their website a couple of

1 years ago during 2014, height of the five-year drought,
2 saying that --

3 If you'll recall, 2014 started out very dry,
4 and then we had a lot of rain in December for about a
5 three-week period, and DWR said, under current
6 environmental standards, we could have diverted X amount
7 of water into Sites, under that, and that's true.

8 That's because the environmental standards,
9 both flow standards and biological opinions on the
10 Sacramento River are inadequate. If they were adequate,
11 we wouldn't have to claim fisheries heading towards
12 extinction.

13 So, in fact, during that exact period, I
14 crunched the numbers and found that diversions from the
15 Sacramento River fill sites in December 2014 would have
16 diverted more than half the flow of the river for a
17 three-week period, more than half the flow of the river.

18 That's a huge impact. It's hard to quantify
19 because ecosystems are not only more complex than we
20 think, they're more complex than we can think, so we
21 don't have all the answers.

22 But there are huge questions associated with
23 the operation of this project that need to be answered.

24 And first of all, I think you have to consider
25 that the water development industry in California has a

1 credibility problem when it says that we're going to
2 build this dam, and it's going to provide environmental
3 benefits.

4 In fact, every major dam in the Central Valley
5 was premised on providing environmental benefits.
6 Salmon runs in the Trinity and Sacramento River would
7 not only be unharmed by Shasta and Trinity Dams, they
8 would be improved.

9 Well, we know that hasn't happened.

10 So, you know, it's a big issue particularly
11 when you're seeking State taxpayer bond money to build
12 part of this project in terms of, are you going to
13 actually provide a level of benefits that are being
14 claimed, and --

15 And you may have the intent as the proponents
16 of this project to do so, but others have a say on
17 whether you meet that goal.

18 Congress, for example, which continues to pass
19 writers and laws that weaken the environmental -- the
20 endangered species protection and biological opinions
21 for Sacramento River Salmon and Delta Chinook, and so
22 you can say that this project will provide X number of
23 benefits, but ultimately Congress can do something in
24 the future the negates those benefits.

25 So this is a big issue. It's one that you

1 really need to address with a certain level of
2 certainty, and I'm not sure that's being done in the
3 EIR.

4 I'm very concerned about flow impacts on the
5 Sacramento River, as I mentioned. Not only the ability
6 of Sites to reduce flood flows, which are essential for
7 the Sacramento River ecosystem, but also the fact that
8 Sites can actually reduce flows during drought years to
9 minimum levels.

10 As I mentioned, the flow standards for the
11 Sacramento River are inadequate, and this assessment of
12 impact in this EIR are largely based on inadequate
13 standards of biological opinions and flow standards for
14 the river. So in many ways, I think the assessment of
15 impacts is inadequate because of that.

16 Interestingly enough, a scientific journal just
17 recently, just last month, the end of last month came
18 out with a study report on the flood needs of riparian
19 ecosystems, and I'd like to quote part of the abstract
20 for that.

21 This is from a paper called, Flow Regime
22 Alteration Degrades Ecological Network for Riparian
23 Ecosystems by JD Tonkin. It's published in the Journal
24 of Nature Ecology and Evolution, November 27th, 2017.

25 Rivering ecosystems are governed by patterns of

1 temporal variation in river flows. This dynamism will
2 change due to climate change in the near-ubiquitous
3 human control of river flows.

4 The most influential component of flow
5 alteration was flood reduction, with drought and flow
6 homogenization, both having greater simplifying
7 community-wide consequences than increased flooding.

8 These findings suggest that maintaining floods
9 under future climates will be needed to overcome the
10 negative long-term consequences of flow modification on
11 riverine ecosystems.

12 So if Sites wants to provide an environmental
13 benefit for the Sacramento River, it really needs to
14 look at ensuring that the Sacramento River floods often
15 enough to maintain its ecosystems.

16 You're giving me -- can I have 30 more seconds?
17 Okay.

18 And just as an example of my concern about
19 flows, I was going through a pending 6B in the DEIR,
20 which identified, for example, Alternative C, will
21 reduce average monthly flows in the Sacramento River
22 below Keswick Dam from March through October by up to
23 five percent, and that's the average over the 80-year
24 period that was assessed, but during dry and critically
25 dry years by more than 17 percent in the month of April.

1 That may not sound like much, but if I suddenly
2 had 17 percent less money in my bank account, I'd be
3 concerned.

4 There are a lot of other examples of that
5 nature, and I'll put them in my written comments.

6 I do want to mention one thing. I think
7 there's a number of irregularities in DEIR, and it comes
8 from the basis of this document coming from DWR
9 originally, and -- and we'll be noting areas that need
10 to be cleaned up.

11 But one last thing.

12 The DEIR does admit, it's not certain how
13 Alternative C will affect the shaded riverine and
14 aquatic habitat that occurs along the banks of the
15 Sacramento River.

16 And that's getting back to my point about what
17 are the impacts of this project on the Sacramento
18 River's ecosystem?

19 Thank you.

20 JEREMY SMITH: Thank you for the opportunity to
21 speak today. My name is Jeremy Smith. I'm here on
22 behalf of the State Building and Construction Trades
23 Council of California. We represent throughout
24 California over 400,000 construction workers.

25 We're here to support the project, obviously

1 for reasons that are relevant to our industry in terms
2 of construction.

3 But there's a bigger idea here too that I want
4 to leave the two of you with, and folks in the room.

5 Adding capacity to the State's water system as
6 a whole helps construction throughout the State because
7 State law requires an identified water source before you
8 build -- before anybody wants to build anything public
9 or private, residential or commercial, so --

10 And ensuring for the many, many reasons that
11 there's added reservoir capacity for ecological and
12 environmental reasons, it's important to remember that
13 the construction of the project will help the local
14 economy through construction workers being put to work
15 and help construction throughout the State so that we
16 always have identified water sources for anything that
17 doesn't involve a water project that needs to be
18 constructed over the next hundred years or so.

19 So for those reasons, we're here to support the
20 project, and thank you both for your hard work on this
21 project and the DEIR.

22 Thank you.

23 ANDREW MEREDITH: Thank you. My name is Andrew
24 Meredith. I live up in rural Tehama County located
25 about two-and-a-half -- two hours north -- north of

1 Sacramento here.

2 I live on the west side of I-5 along one of the
3 major tributaries that feeds into the Sacramento River
4 called Thomas Creek.

5 I'm here today in full support of the project.
6 I am a representative of the Northeastern California
7 Building and Construction Trades Council.

8 I want to talk for a couple of minutes about
9 the socioeconomic benefits that this project will have,
10 but I first want to touch on the personal stuff as
11 somebody living, you know, kind of along the shadow of
12 some of these tributaries.

13 Hearing the speaker get up and talk about how
14 we need to let the Sacramento River flood more often is
15 an argument that I don't think is going to carry a lot
16 of weight with voters in California that overwhelmingly
17 supported the Water Bond.

18 I want to commend Mr. Watson for the work that
19 he's done on this project. This project is essentially
20 what the voters were asking for when they passed the
21 Water Bond. This checks the boxes.

22 This provides environmental benefits to the
23 fish and other species downstream. It provides flood
24 control protections for an area of California that's
25 already been identified by agencies as one of the most

1 at-risk of catastrophic flooding downstream. That's
2 right here in the City of Sacramento.

3 It also provides recreational opportunities for
4 the hundreds of thousands of people that live north of
5 Sacramento and live -- patronize a facility like this.

6 But more importantly is it provides water
7 storage for all of California.

8 Mr. Watson and the people that are affiliated
9 with the JPA have done a tremendous job of bringing
10 together bipartisan support and support from all parts
11 of California. The Central Valley, the Southern part of
12 California, and even the North State.

13 The -- the farmers up north have stepped up,
14 and they've -- they've gone in line to purchase water.
15 I think that's a tremendous -- that's a tremendous
16 testament to how much support is out there for this
17 project.

18 And I think something like Sites Reservoir is
19 essentially the culmination of decades of lobbying from
20 the environmental community that said, if we have new
21 water storage, it needs to be off stream.

22 This project site, if you haven't seen it, it
23 is essentially a basin that will require very little
24 damming to make this basin turn into a reservoir. It
25 almost looks, when you look at it on a map, like it was

1 designed to be a reservoir. It's --

2 It's a site in California that you're not going
3 to find to -- to replace. There aren't locations like
4 this in California left where you're going to be able to
5 build a facility like this, store the amount of water
6 that we'll be able to store here, and displace so few
7 people and so few environmental species.

8 So on a socioeconomic front, back when Shasta
9 Dam was constructed, it was unbelievable in terms of the
10 economic benefit that it had on the Redding community.

11 The benefits of Shasta Dam are still being --
12 they're still being experienced by the people that live
13 up in that area.

14 This construction project being close to a \$5
15 billion construction project is going to be monumental
16 for one of the poorest parts of California.

17 And let's not forget that the communities that
18 surround this reservoir are some of the poorest zip
19 codes, with some of the highest unemployment rates, some
20 of the lowest median incomes in the entire State of
21 California.

22 And I want to commend the Sites Reservoir JPA
23 for stepping up and saying that they are going to build
24 this construction project with local workers, they're
25 going to pay them a living wage, to make sure that not

1 only is this project benefitting fish, it's not
2 benefitting farmers, and it's not just benefitting water
3 users downstream, it's going to benefit the construction
4 workers that get to work on this project for seven
5 years.

6 Although it will probably be the largest Public
7 Works project west of the Mississippi River.

8 So I don't think that we can ignore that. I
9 understand that projects by and large like this are
10 never going to be completely perfect. You can't expect
11 them to be, but just remember, we've -- we've attempted
12 to conserve our way out of the water crisis in
13 California for almost five decades, and it's not
14 working.

15 The population continues to increase. We've
16 done a tremendous job as Californians trying to conserve
17 water, but the plain reality is, we have to create more
18 storage.

19 And I do not think that you will ever find a
20 more better example of a project to accomplish all of
21 these things in terms of environmental benefit,
22 recreational benefit, farming and irrigation benefit and
23 be able to generate this much flood control diversion
24 and this much water storage. I just don't think that
25 those locations exist anymore.

1 So, again, I'm wholeheartedly in support of
2 this project, and I'm -- I'm ready to break ground on it
3 tomorrow.

4 Thank you.

5 MARK MULLINER: My name's Mark Mulliner.
6 Business Manager, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union
7 228.

8 I'm go to speak first on a personal note.

9 I live on the Sacramento River, Woodson Bridge.
10 I've had a fishing guide license for a couple of years.
11 I fish Salmon fish up there. I've raised a family of
12 six up there on the river. I park my boat on the river
13 right behind my house, and the river means a lot to me,
14 on a personal note.

15 I have a lot of friends that are fishing
16 guides. I have a lot of different types of friends
17 that -- recreational use on the Sacramento.

18 I want to say that I'm here -- and I'm here
19 supporting this because, one, it is a good project.
20 Environmentally I believe it's an excellent project,
21 and, two, because, yes, they've committed to have
22 skilled workers.

23 My training facility is going to -- is -- for
24 several years is going to be bringing in new members
25 that are going to be from the area. Tehama County is

1 one of the -- one of the hardest places to work and live
2 in construction.

3 Glenn County, Colusa County, they're all very
4 complicated places to live, raise a family, and have
5 something good for your family, something to look
6 forward to.

7 And this is a project that a lot of our kids
8 are going to be able to work on, and a lot of graduates
9 from local high schools are going to get to join
10 apprenticeship programs, and this project alone is going
11 to bring a very big windfall for probably within, I
12 would say, an hour every direction of this project.

13 That being said, there's no way that you're
14 ever going to convince -- and I'm a welder, I'm not a
15 scientist, but if you're saving water in high flows and
16 storing it over here, and when you need that water,
17 you're adding it back to a river, there's no way you're
18 going to convince me this isn't a good project, just
19 based on, if you don't save the water, it's going to go
20 out to the ocean, and it's not going to be used.

21 So from a simple practical standpoint, I
22 believe this is an excellent project.

23 I hope that all of us continue to work together
24 to push this project through. I hope that we can get
25 the opposition to recognize that it's never going to be

1 a perfect project, but it's going to be all in all a
2 positive project.

3 And if California, who has set the standard for
4 environmental for this whole country doesn't recognize
5 when it's time to put apart and make concessions at
6 certain times for good projects, California is going to
7 hurt itself and continue to hurt itself economically and
8 environmentally by not saving and not storing and not
9 looking ahead for the future.

10 So that being said, the UA Local 228 is for
11 this project, the Building Trades is for this project,
12 and I'm glad to be here as a part of this project.

13 Thank you.

14 CHRIS GREANEY: My name is Chris Greaney. I'm
15 with the Sacramento Building Trades, and I'd just like
16 to speak that we are strongly in favor of this project.

17 It will be beneficial to the community and all
18 parties involved and very, very detailed as far as
19 information. It's going to be great as far as water
20 control, and we're -- we're a hundred percent behind
21 this highly anticipated project.

22 Thank you.

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, CATHERINE D. LAPLANTE, a Certified Shorthand Reporter for the State of California, do hereby certify:

That I am a disinterested person herein; that the foregoing was reported in shorthand by me, CATHERINE D. LAPLANTE, a Certified Shorthand Reporter of the State of California, and thereafter transcribed into typewriting; that the foregoing is a true and correct record given.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereby certify this transcript at my office in the County of Placer, State of California, this 18th day of December, 2017.

Catherine D. Laplante

CATHERINE D. LAPLANTE, CSR #10140



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