Sites Reservoir Project

Community Guide to the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS)

Introduction

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Sites Project Authority (Authority) and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) have prepared a Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) to analyze the potential environmental impacts of construction and operation of the Sites Reservoir Project (Project).

The Authority would construct an offstream reservoir to capture excess water from major storms and store the water until it is most needed during dry periods. These saved water supplies would be used for the environment, people, and farms. Existing water storage facilities were designed to capture snowmelt, but precipitation in present-day California occurs more commonly in the form of rain. This trend is likely to continue into the future. The state's demand for water to serve communities, fuel the economy, and revitalize the environment has increased far beyond what the existing water storage system was designed to support. The Project is one tool in a toolbox of actions to assist the state in achieving the goals of water supply reliability for all users (including the environment) and adaptation to a changing climate.

The Final EIR/EIS includes updates to the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report/Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIR/SDEIS) released in November 2021 and responses to all substantive comments received during the RDEIR/SDEIS public review and comment period. The Authority and Reclamation held two virtual public meetings in December 2021 and received approximately 100 unique letters and communications during the public comment period.

As the final step of the environmental review process, the Authority and Reclamation will consider the environmental impacts and mitigation measures in deciding whether to carry out the Project and their respective actions.

Project Alternatives

The Final EIR/EIS evaluates the potential environmental effects of three action alternatives, as well as a No Project/No Action Alternative. The Authority and Reclamation could decide to approve one of the identified alternatives, or a version that incorporates elements from multiple alternatives.

Primary Characteristics of Project Alternatives

Project Element	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Reservoir Size	1.5 million acre-feet (MAF)	1.3 MAF	Same as Alternative 1
Inundation Area	13,200 acres	12,600 acres	Same as Alternative 1
Dams (scaled to the size of the reservoir)	Golden Gate and Sites Dams; 7 saddle dams; 2 saddle dikes	Golden Gate and Sites Dams; 4 saddle dams; 3 saddle dikes	Same as Alternative 1
Route Connecting East and West Sides of Reservoir	Permanent bridge crossing the reservoir	Paved roadway along south side of reservoir	Same as Alternative 1
Regulating Reservoirs	Funks Reservoir, Terminal Regulating Reservoir (TRR) East	Funks Reservoir, TRR West	Same as Alternative 1
Conveyance Releases	Releases of up to 1,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) into new Dunnigan Pipeline discharging into the Colusa Basin Drain (CBD)	Releases of up to 1,000 cfs into new Dunnigan Pipeline discharging into the Sacramento River with an average of 300 cfs partial discharge into the CBD	Same as Alternative 1
Releases into Funks Creek and Stone Corral Creek	Specific flow criteria to maintain flows to protect downstream water right holders and ecological function	Same as Alternative 1	Same as Alternative 1
Bureau of Reclamation Involvement	Two options: Operational exchanges[1] only (Alternative 1A); ***or*** Funding partner (up to 7% investment) with operational exchanges[1] (Alternative 1B)	Operational exchanges[1] only	Funding partner (up to 25% investment) with operational exchanges[1]
California Department of Water Resources Involvement	Operational exchanges with Oroville and use of State Water Project facilities South-of-Delta	Similar to Alternative 1 (volumes may vary, however)	Similar to Alternative 1 (volumes may vary, however)

[1] Operational exchanges could include within-year exchanges and real-time exchanges.

Contents of the Final EIR/EIS

The Final EIR/EIS evaluates potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on the environment that could result from implementing the Project. In addition, this Final EIR/EIS includes feasible mitigation measures to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, or compensate for significant adverse impacts. This analysis, which is presented in Chapters 5 through 32, includes a description of the existing environmental setting, methods of analysis, discussion of the impact findings, and discussion of any mitigation measures.

The Final EIR/EIS identifies refinements to the Project, both in facilities and operations; includes revised modeling results due to changes in diversion criteria; provides responses to comments received on the RDEIR/SDEIS; and provides any text revisions necessary based on comments and responses or Project refinements. **No new or substantially greater impacts were identified in the Final EIR/EIS.**

Refinements to the Project between the RDEIR/SDEIS and the Final EIR/EIS include:

- The Preferred Alternative under CEQA changed from Alternative 1 to Alternative 3, allowing for a Reclamation investment in the Project of up to 25%. Reclamation identified Alternative 3 as the Preferred Alternative under NEPA in the Final EIR/EIS;
- The Project's diversion criteria were revised to be more protective of fish, including revising the Wilkins Slough bypass flow criteria to 10,700 cfs from October through June;
- Mitigation Measure Fish-2.1 was incorporated into the Project;
- Design refinements were made to some facilities;
- Updated modeling results were incorporated into the document; and
- Corrections or clarifications in response to comments on the RDEIR/SDEIS.

The comments on the RDEIR/SDEIS covered a broad range of policy and environmental issues. Major topic areas that elicited frequent comments included stakeholder engagement and public process; the alternatives description and operations of the alternatives, surface water quality impacts, aquatic biological resources impacts, terrestrial wildlife and vegetation impacts, and cumulative impacts. The responses to comments provided in Volume 3 represent the Authority's and Reclamation's best effort to carefully and objectively review and consider the comments and any supporting evidence provided by commenters.

The Final EIR/EIS includes three volumes:

- **Volume I** – Chapter Sections: Select chapters from the RDEIR/SDEIS that required revisions
- **Volume II** – Appendices: Appendices from the RDEIR/SDEIS that required revisions
- **Volume III** – Responses to Comments: Responses to comments on the RDEIR/SDEIS, including both master responses (MR) to address thematic issues raised in comments and individual responses to all comments received
  - MR1, CEQA and NEPA Process, Regulatory Requirements, and General Comments
  - MR2, Alternatives Description and Baseline
  - MR3, Hydrology and Hydrologic Modeling
  - MR4, Water Quality
  - MR5, Aquatic Biological Resources
  - MR6, Vegetation, Wetland, and Wildlife Resources
  - MR7, Tribal Coordination, Consultation, and Engagement
  - MR8, Trinity River
  - MR9, Alternatives Development

Summary of Potential Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The Final EIR/EIS includes an analysis of the Project's potential impacts on a range of environmental resource areas. No new, different, or greater impacts or mitigation measures were identified. A summary of the impacts that include mitigation measures are listed in the adjacent table. Under CEQA, no mitigation measures are required when an impact is determined to be beneficial or less than significant. Under NEPA, a federal agency can use mitigation to reduce the potential adverse environmental effects of its actions, but an agency is not required to adopt mitigation.

The full list of the environmental resource areas addressed can be found in the Executive Summary (Table ES2) of the Final EIR/EIS.

Environmental impacts associated with the following resource areas would be less than significant/no effect or no adverse effect: surface water, fluvial geomorphology, groundwater, minerals, recreation, energy, noise, population and housing, public services and utilities, and public health and environmental hazards.

Resource Area (Chapter Number)	Impacts That Include Mitigation Measures
Surface Water Quality (5)	**All Action Alternatives** – Increased methylmercury concentrations downstream of Sites Reservoir during construction and operation; metal concentrations and effects in Stone Corral Creek during operation; metal and pesticide concentrations and effects in Yolo Bypass during operation.
Vegetation and Wetland Resources (9)	**All Action Alternatives** – Construction effects on special-status plant species, wetlands, and potential conflicts with Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)/Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP); operational effects on special-status plant species, riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community, and wetlands.
Wildlife Resources (10)	**All Action Alternatives** – Construction effects on special-status wildlife species, potential conflicts with local policies and HCPs/NCCPs, interference with movement of species/wildlife corridors; operational effects due to use of pesticides and herbicides, interference with movement of species/ wildlife corridors.
Aquatic Biological Resources (11)	**All Action Alternatives** – Construction effects on fish and aquatic biological resources; operations effects on longfin smelt and delta smelt.
Geology and Soils (12)	**All Action Alternatives** – Construction effects on paleontological resources.
Land Use (14)	**Alternative 2** – No feasible mitigation identified to address South Road physically dividing Lodoga and Maxwell.
Agriculture and Forestry Resources (15)	**All Action Alternatives** – Permanent conversion of farmlands and Williamson Act lands.
Navigation, Transportation, and Traffic (18)	**Alternative 2** – No feasible mitigation identified to address increase in school bus travel time between Maxwell and Lodoga.
Air Quality (20)	**All Action Alternatives** – Increase in criteria pollutant for which region is in nonattainment during construction; recreational boat emissions during operation; expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.
Greenhouse Gas Emissions (21)	**All Action Alternatives** – Generate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but would achieve net-zero emissions through a GHG Reduction Plan.
Cultural Resources (22)	**All Action Alternatives** – Impacts to historic and archaeological resources from construction and operation; disturbance/relocation of human remains due to construction and operation.
Tribal Cultural Resources (23)	**All Action Alternatives** – Substantial adverse change in the significance of Tribal Cultural Resources through the loss of resources due to construction and reservoir inundation.
Visual Resources (24)	**All Action Alternatives** – Substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the reservoir inundation area. **Alternative 2** – Substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the Sacramento River at the discharge structure location.
Environmental Justice and Socioeconomics (30)	**All Action Alternatives** – Construction and operation disproportionately and adversely affecting minority and low-income populations.