

Frequently Asked Questions: **Final Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Statement**

The following questions and answers are meant to respond to common questions about the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Sites Reservoir Project.

1. What is the difference between the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report/Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIR/SDEIS) and the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS)?

The Authority and Reclamation jointly issued the original Draft EIR/EIS in August 2017. The 2021 RDEIR/SDEIS was a complete revision of the 2017 Draft EIR/EIS to reflect changes to the Project that have occurred since the 2017 Draft EIR/EIS was issued. The Final EIR/EIS includes the information from the RDEIR/SDEIS, revisions to the RDEIR/SDEIS based on comments received during the public review period, and the Authority's and Reclamation's responses to those comments.

2. How has the project changed between the RDEIR/SDEIS and Final EIR/EIS?

In addition to the substantial changes to the Project which occurred between the original Draft EIR/EIS and the revised documents, Project refinements between the RDEIR/SDEIS and the Final EIR/EIS include:

- The preferred alternative under CEQA is now Alternative 3, allowing for Reclamation investment in the project of up to 25%;
- The Project's diversion criteria have been revised to be more protective of fish, including revising the Wilkins Slough bypass flow criteria to 10,700 cubic feet per second from October through June;
- Mitigation Measure Fish-2.1 has been incorporated into the Project;
- Design refinements have been made to some facilities;
- Updated modeling results have been incorporated into the document; and
- Corrections and clarifications have been made in response to comments on the RDEIR/SDEIS.

None of these refinements have resulted in new or substantially greater environmental impacts and, in many cases, have been identified to reduce impacts.

3. Would Sites Reservoir divert water from the Sacramento River during dry and critically dry years?

Yes, even during drier years there are times when Sacramento River flows are abundant and water can be safely diverted from the river and placed in Sites Reservoir. All diversions would be subject to the highly protective operating conditions that are currently being proposed for the Sites Reservoir Project. As part of the permitting process, we prepared an [extensive water availability analysis](#) — more comprehensive than any other in California history — that clearly demonstrates there is ample water for Sites, the environment, and senior water right holders under a wide range of water supply scenarios for both current and future uses.

4. Would Sites Reservoir meaningfully address future droughts?

Sites Reservoir is an insurance policy for future droughts. It's purposely designed to adapt to California's changing climate conditions by capturing and storing water during extreme storm events for use during severe dry periods when it is needed the most. Modeling shows that water supply in the Sites Reservoir improves under challenging climate change conditions. Sites Reservoir will inherently adapt to predicted changes in weather, which show most of our future precipitation will come in the form of rain and not snow, and will be operated to improve California's water supply resilience. Having Sites Reservoir would mean we can collect and store more water for use during future droughts.



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5. Would Sites Reservoir decrease Delta flows?

Yes, slightly, when the Project is diverting. However, since diversions would occur only when there are high river flows, any reduction to Delta flows would be minor, leaving ample water in the Sacramento River and Delta for important ecological needs.

6. Will this Project curtail or otherwise reduce allocations for other water right holders?

Sites Reservoir would only divert water when flows in the Sacramento River meet minimum diversion criteria, when the Delta is in “excess” conditions, when all senior downstream water rights have been met, when all environmental permit conditions have been met, and when there is excess capacity within the conveyance facilities, such as the Tehama-Colusa and Glenn-Colusa Canals. The Project would not curtail or otherwise reduce allocations of water for other water right holders.

Our [water availability analysis](#) clearly demonstrated that there is enough unappropriated water in the Sacramento River and Delta system to fill Sites Reservoir while still fulfilling all existing senior water rights and meeting environmental resource needs.

7. Have concerns about the impact of Sites Reservoir operations on the environment been addressed in the current proposal?

The Project operations have been modified substantially since the RDEIR/SDEIS to be more protective of the environment. The current Project operations strikes the needed balance between environmental protections and affordability that is necessary for the Project to proceed. These modifications are described in the below table.

Comparison of the Project’s Operational Criteria between the 2017 Draft EIR/EIS, the RDEIR/SDEIS and the Final EIR/EIS

Location (Listed from North to South)	2017 Draft EIR/EIS	RDEIR/SDEIS with Mitigation Included	Final EIR/EIS
Modeling of Shasta Lake Exchanges	Operated to improve Shasta Lake cold-water pool management	Refined from the 2017 Draft EIR/EIS but generally similar	Operated to improve Shasta Lake cold-water pool, fall flow stability, and spring pulse actions
Operational Dead Pool	120 TAF, although reservoir could be drawn lower for TCCA water supply during drought conditions	Same as 2017 Draft EIR/EIS	60 TAF
Bend Bridge Pulse Protection	Protection of all qualified precipitation-generated pulse events (i.e., peaks in river flow rather than scheduled operational events) from October to May based on the detection of fish presence and migration during the beginning of the flow event. For each event where fish presence and migration is detected, diversions from the Sacramento River would cease for 7 days	Same as 2017 DEIR/EIS	Similar except the following: (1) a qualified precipitation-generated pulse event is determined based on forecasted flows, (2) hourly gage monitoring at Bend Bridge gage detects the predicted flow of 8,000 cfs, and migrating anadromous fish are detected at RBDD, and (3) pulse protection may cease earlier than 7 days if flows at Bend Bridge exceed 29,000 cfs and Project diversions subtracted from Bend Bridge flows continue to be at least 25,000 cfs
Minimum Bypass Flows in the Sacramento River at the Red Bluff Pumping Plant	3,250 cfs minimum bypass flow at all times; rate of diversion controlled by fish screen design	Same as 2017 Draft EIR/EIS	Same as 2017 Draft EIR/EIS



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Comparison of the Project’s Operational Criteria between the 2017 Draft EIR/EIS, the RDEIR/SDEIS and the Final EIR/EIS (continued)

Location (Listed from North to South)	2017 Draft EIR/EIS	RDEIR/SDEIS with Mitigation Included	Final EIR/EIS
Minimum Bypass Flows in the Sacramento River at the Hamilton City Pump Station	4,000 cfs minimum bypass flow at all times; rate of diversion controlled by fish screen design	Same as 2017 Draft EIR/EIS	Same as 2017 Draft EIR/EIS
Minimum Bypass Flows in the Sacramento River at Wilkins Slough	5,000 cfs minimum bypass flow at all times as a 3-day average	8,000 cfs April and May and 5,000 cfs during the rest of the year Mitigation Measure FISH-2.1: 10,700 cfs in March through May; 5,000 cfs all other times	10,700 cfs October 1 through June 14; 5,000 cfs September (not diverting from June 15 to end of August)
Fremont Weir Notch Protections	No Specific Criteria	No more than 1% reduction in flow over weir when spill over the weir is less than 600 cfs. No more than a 10% reduction in flow over weir when spills over the weir are between 600 cfs and 6,000 cfs. No restriction when flows over the weir are greater than 6,000 cfs	No longer included. Revised minimum bypass flows in the Sacramento River at Wilkins Slough and Bend Bridge pulse protection provide protections for Fremont Weir Notch
South-of-Delta delivery water year-type restrictions	Releases to south-of-Delta participants limited to Below Normal, Dry, and Critically Dry Water Years, based on January–December California State Water Project contract years using the D-1641 Sacramento Valley 40-30-30 water year index	Same as 2017 Draft EIR/EIS	Releases to south-of-Delta participants may occur in all years as limited by available conveyance capacity
Sacramento River Fully Appropriated Stream	No Specific Criteria	No Specific Criteria	Diversions allowed only when the Sacramento River is not fully appropriated (September 1 through June 14)
Excess conditions, as determined by the Department of Water Resources and Reclamation and defined in 2018 Coordinated Operation Agreement Addendum	Excess conditions implied but not specifically stated	Delta must be in excess for Sites Reservoir diversions	Same as RDEIR/SDEIS
Freeport, Net Delta Outflow Index, X2, and Delta Water Quality	Diversions only be allowed when a Sacramento River flow of 15,000 cfs is present at Freeport in January; 13,000 cfs in December and February through June; and 11,000 cfs in all other months	Operations consistent with all applicable laws, regulations, biological opinions and incidental take permits, and court orders in place at the time that diversion occurs	Same as RDEIR/SDEIS

Key:

TAF - thousand acre-feet
cfs - cubic feet per second
TCCA - Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority



8. Does this Project impact the Trinity River?

The Project would not affect nor result in changes in the operation of the Trinity River Division facilities (including Clear Creek) of the Central Valley Project (CVP). Reclamation would continue to operate the Trinity River Division consistent with all applicable statutory, legal, and contractual obligations. These factors include but are not limited to Public Law 84-386, Public Law 98-541, the Central Valley Project Improvement Act in Public Law 102-575, Public Law 104-143, the 2000 Trinity River Mainstem Fishery Restoration Record of Decision (ROD), the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Solicitor Opinion M-37030, the 2017 Long-Term Plan to Protect Adult Salmon in the Lower Klamath River ROD (Lower Klamath ROD), and Reclamation's water rights.

9. How does this Project impact water quality in the Sacramento River and Delta?

The Project would have some impacts to water quality and would also enhance beneficial uses of water, even improving water quality in some areas. For example, increases in outflow in drier years could reduce seawater intrusion into the Delta. During those same periods, exchanges with Sites water could benefit fish by preserving cold-water supplies from Shasta Lake and Lake Oroville later into the year. The Sites Project Authority would implement best management practices to minimize any potential water quality impacts associated with facility operations and maintenance. These would include actions to prevent spills and reduce runoff that may cause sediment or contaminants to flow into waterbodies. Monthly water quality testing would be performed for discharges moving into and through the Yolo Bypass, and mitigation measures – such as mercury sediment management – would be implemented to reduce impacts to water quality.

10. How will the Project benefit anadromous fish?

The additional water supply provided by Sites Reservoir may provide opportunities for improved management of salmonid habitat, particularly in the Sacramento River above Red Bluff. By delivering water to CVP contractors from Sites Reservoir, Reclamation may maintain supply in Shasta Lake for important periods to support habitat for salmonid spawning, incubation, rearing, and migration. The possible additional water supply in Shasta Lake can then be allocated during real-time management scenarios for a number of uses (e.g., coldwater pool maintenance, spring pulse or fall pulse flow events, increased stability in fall flows) that may provide enhanced anadromous fish benefits.