Will Sites Reservoir help increase water supplies in future droughts?

Yes. Sites Reservoir would provide California with additional water storage capacity as hotter and drier weather is predicted to diminish our existing water supply. Sites Reservoir is a rain-fed storage solution designed to adapt to future climate conditions, which are predicted to bring California more extreme storms that generate heavy rainfall. Currently, we don't have sufficient existing infrastructure to benefit from these storms, but Sites Reservoir is specifically designed to capture this water and store it for future use during dry periods. It's a flexible storage solution that can release reserves based on our water needs. Capturing water in Sites Reservoir during times of high flow in the Sacramento River for use during drought periods is part of the statewide strategy for climate change adaptation and a flexible statewide water management system.

Will Sites Reservoir divert water from the Sacramento River even during critically dry years?

It depends. Sites Reservoir operations are based on real-time, in-river conditions, and 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 currently 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.

Will Sites Reservoir decrease Delta flows?

Yes, slightly, when the Project is diverting water. 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.

Is there enough water in the Sacramento River and Bay Delta to support Sites Reservoir operations?

Yes. Operations would not curtail or otherwise reduce allocations of water for other water right holders. Sites Reservoir would only divert water when Sacramento River flows meet minimum diversion criteria, when the Delta is in excess conditions (when all beneficial uses are being met with un-stored water), when all senior downstream water rights have been met, when all environmental permit conditions have been met, and when there is capacity within the conveyance facilities, such as the Tehama-Colusa and Glenn-Colusa Canals.

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.

Does Sites Reservoir have a Water Right Permit?

In June 2023, the Sites Project Authority (Authority) received notification from the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) that the Sites Reservoir water right application was deemed complete. Accordingly, the Sites Reservoir Project is moving forward to the next step in the process of receiving a new water right

permit for the Project. A water right permit will provide the Authority legal authorization to divert water within certain conditions, for a specific purpose, and for use within a specified area. The Authority will be the State designated steward of the water right for the Sites Reservoir Project. We anticipate that a decision on the Sites permit will be made in late 2024.

How much would have been diverted and stored in 2023?

A 2023 analysis projected Sites Reservoir could have stored over 700,000 acre-feet during the 2023 Water Year. Sites will not divert any water until all other water rights and regulatory requirements are met, but during some conditions, like heavy rainstorms, it could still store water while meeting diversion criteria that protect fisheries and the environment.

A 2024 analysis projected that from December 2023 to mid-February 2024, approximately 300,000 acre-feet could have been diverted and stored in Sites Reservoir.

How will Sites Reservoir operations impact the environment?

Working closely with our federal partners, the Authority has completed three iterations of an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement, each progressively more protective of the environment and communities surrounding the project. Project operations were modified substantially through this process to be more protective of the environment, including specific mitigation measures to offset the project's impacts. The current Project operations strike the needed balance between environmental protections and affordability that must exist for the Project to proceed.

Is Sites Reservoir compliant with Proposition 1?

In December 2021, the California Water Commission determined that Sites Reservoir will continue to be eligible for funding through the State's Proposition 1 Water Storage Investment Program. Even with the Project changes that have occurred since the original award in 2018, the Sites Reservoir Project continues to meet the Proposition 1 conditions and feasibility requirements for investment by the State. It will provide the public benefits the California Water Commission conditionally approved for the Project in State Proposition 1 funding in 2018.

Is Sites Reservoir eligible for streamlining provisions under SB 149?

On Nov. 6, 2023, the Governor certified the Sites Reservoir Project under SB 149. Earlier that year, the Authority applied for certification and provided detailed information on the Sites Reservoir Project and how the Authority is complying with each requirement in SB 149. The certification of Sites Reservoir under SB 149 strikes the right balance—saving time and reducing costs for delivery of critically important water projects like Sites Reservoir, while still ensuring key safeguards for our communities and our environment. The Authority is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the applicable provisions of the law.

How will Sites Reservoir address greenhouse gas emissions from construction and operations?

Sites Reservoir is a 21st century project that will have an overall positive outcome for society and the environment as we face the impacts of climate change. Regarding greenhouse gas emissions specifically, the environmental document for the project finds that, without mitigation, greenhouse gas emissions could be significant. However, the Authority commits to a "net zero" threshold for greenhouse gas emissions over the life of the project. This is a high bar for any project and means actions will be taken by the Authority to avoid and minimize emissions resulting from the project construction and operations, and when needed to offset for actual emissions in excess of baseline conditions.

Does Sites Reservoir depend on construction of new tunnels or other water infrastructure?

The only new conveyance envisioned is the inlet/outlet works for the reservoir and the four miles of 10-foot diameter pipeline to convey water back to the Sacramento River between the Tehama-Colusa Canal and the Colusa Basin Drain. Extending the performance of existing infrastructure is good public policy, good business practice and makes for a more sustainable footprint by reducing the environmental impact of the constructed work. The Project will use existing facilities and infrastructure to a great extent and the existing topography of the project site itself is a natural bowl perfectly situated to accommodate a water reservoir. A significant portion of the more than 100 miles of conveyance (canals and pipelines) involved in the Project will be existing facilities.

Does Sites Reservoir rely on new Delta conveyance?

No. The project is not dependent on the construction of Delta tunnels. Sites Reservoir will function independently, with or without a new Delta conveyance system.

Is Sites Reservoir a private reservoir?

No. Sites Reservoir is funded 100% by local, state, and federal public dollars. The constituents served by the public agencies funding the Project will directly benefit from their investment through its beneficiary-pays structure. There are environmental, recreational, and flood control benefits—as well as new dry year water supplies for public agency ratepayers throughout California. Participation in Sites is broad and diverse, including the Bureau of Reclamation, State of California, urban areas of Southern California and the Bay Area, as well as public irrigation districts in the Sacramento Valley and San Joaquin Valley.

Who benefits from Sites Reservoir?

The Sites Reservoir Project is led by a Joint Powers Authority made up of irrigation agencies, water districts, cities, and counties in the Sacramento Valley area. The Project is being developed on a beneficiary pays principle, which means that a participant that has paid for the Project will receive the benefits created by the Project. The beneficiaries of Sites Reservoir include the federal government, state government, and local public agencies. The water generated by the Project will be used for agriculture, meeting water demands of businesses and residents, and serving the needs of the environment throughout California.

Is the Sacramento Valley well represented in the Sites Reservoir Project and are there opportunities for other local agencies to participate?

Yes. Sites Reservoir is locally led, and the Sites Project Authority is governed by Sacramento Valley participants. The Authority established a goal of ensuring at least 25% of Sites Reservoir participants were based in the Sacramento Valley, and that goal is being met. There is strong participation across California, but there are prioritization criteria to maintain Sacramento Valley participation. Currently, there is a waiting list for participation; interested parties can contact the Authority to be added to that list. The Authority expects to finalize participation commitments in 2025.

What do participants get in exchange for their investment in Sites Reservoir?

The Sites Reservoir Project is based on a beneficiary pays principle, which means that a participant that has paid for the Project will receive the benefits created by the Project. Participating agencies are investing in a dedicated storage space in Sites Reservoir and a share of the project's diversions from the Sacramento River, which is determined by the proportional share of their investment in the project. They can choose how and when they use their water stored in Sites Reservoir.

How does the cost of water from Sites Reservoir compare to other sources during dry years?

The cost of water from Sites Reservoir compares favorably to other water supply alternatives, which improves water affordability for participants and the 24 million users they serve, including disadvantaged communities. It is extremely competitive for the increased water supplies and added reliability delivered in a changing climate. Water is one of California's most scarce and valuable resources, so it is essential to develop a diverse portfolio of sustainable water supply solutions. The Project has been designed to put the State's limited water resources to the best use in an affordable, flexible, and sustainable way.

How can participating agencies be assured that there will be water in Sites Reservoir if they are paying for storage?

Each participant will have access to a share of Sites Reservoir's diversions from the Sacramento River in any given water year to be stored in their dedicated storage space. The proportional amount of water a participant receives is based on their level of investment in the Project. Participants choose when and how to use the water they have in their dedicated storage space in Sites Reservoir.

Additionally, the Authority has completed a suite of water availability analyses under a variety of climate scenarios, ranging from historical conditions to climate change projections as far out as 2070; the scenarios analyzed show that an annual average of at least 658,000 acre-feet of water would be available to divert and store in Sites Reservoir and that there are years where the full capacity of Sites Reservoir, 1.5 million acre-feet, would be available for diversion.

Why is Sites Reservoir gaining momentum now?

Sites Reservoir was first conceived in the 1950s with efforts originally led by the California Department of Water

Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation to ensure the state had a more reliable water supply. Since then, aspects of water management in California have changed including years of serious droughts, the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the declining reliability of the state and federal water projects, and the accelerated uncertainty of our changing climate.

The Sites Project Authority was formed in 2010 to move the Project more expeditiously. Big projects take time and careful consideration, and the Authority has done that over the last decade and will continue into the future. Additionally, the overwhelming passage of Proposition 1 in 2014 made $2.7 billion available to water projects with public benefits; Sites Reservoir received a total of $875 million to move the project forward. Today, the project is needed more than ever as hotter and drier weather is predicted to diminish California's existing water supply by up to 10% by 2040. Sites Reservoir is anticipated to be operational around 2032.

What is the current predicted cost of Sites Reservoir?

As of 2023, the project is estimated to cost $3.9 billion (in May 2021 dollars). An updated cost estimate is being prepared and will be available in summer 2024.