

What is the environmental impact of the Sites Project?

The environmental effects of the Sites Reservoir Project (Project) have been analyzed in detail in the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS)—available at sitesproject.org/environmental-review. Working closely with our federal partners, the Sites Project Authority (Authority) has completed three iterations of an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), each progressively more protective of the environment and communities surrounding the Project. The Authority has made changes to the Project to address public concerns and reduce impacts and Project operations strike the needed balance between environmental protections and affordability that is necessary for the Project to move forward. The Project is designed to avoid and lessen any environmental concerns and, when necessary, provide appropriate mitigation.

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 nor otherwise reduce allocations of water for other senior water right holders.

How does the Project impact the Trinity River?

Sites Reservoir 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). The Bureau of Reclamation (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.

Will the Project threaten fish species in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta?

No. Sites Reservoir does not threaten the existence of salmon and other fish. In fact, there are highly protective operating conditions that must be in place before diversions into Sites Reservoir can proceed. The Authority has established a highly protective minimum flow threshold for the Sacramento River before any Project diversions can occur, minimizing or eliminating its impacts on fishery and ecosystem resources in the Sacramento River and Delta ecosystems. The Authority’s minimum flow threshold is based on a peer reviewed, scientific study for protecting outmigrating salmon. The amount of water that must be in the Sacramento River before Sites Reservoir can divert water has more than doubled as compared to the Project’s 2017 and 2021 diversion criteria. This substantially decreases the proportion of outmigrating fish that could be affected by the Project’s diversions. In addition, the intakes being used for diverting water into Sites Reservoir include state-of-the-art fish screens that are proven to be highly effective at protecting fish.

Has the Authority analyzed and considered a comprehensive range of environmental mitigation measures to protect fisheries in the Sacramento River and the Bay-Delta ecosystem?

Yes. The Project has a number of diversion criteria, but the following two stand out as key for the protection of fish:

- Flows in the Sacramento River at Wilkins Slough must be and remain above 10,700 cubic feet per second (cfs) from October through June 14 and 5,000 cfs in September (the Project is not diverting from June 15 to end of August); and
- The Project will implement a pulse protection criteria and stop diversions for seven days during qualified pulse events to protect outmigrating juvenile salmonids.

How does the environmental water stored in Sites support fisheries?

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. Working with Reclamation's management of Shasta Lake, the Project can benefit salmonids by:

- Maintaining the cold-water pool in Shasta Lake for longer into the summer, helping to maintain sufficient cold water for winter-run salmon spawning in the upper Sacramento River into the later summer and fall;
- Stabilizing flows in the upper Sacramento River in the fall to help prevent dewatering of fall-run salmon nests, called redds; and
- Assisting Reclamation in making spring pulse releases from Shasta Lake for the benefit of juvenile salmon out-migration.

How does Sites address temperature management for fish protection?

All species have varying needs throughout their lives. They need food to sustain and grow along with places to take cover and rest while migrating to the ocean among other things. While temperature management alone does not meet all of the needs of cold-water fish, it is an important component.

Modeling of Sites' discharges into the Sacramento River has indicated that the temperature of the water released would, on average, be slightly cooler than that of the Sacramento River. In addition, Sites has been shown to assist in Reclamation's temperature management efforts for salmon protection in the upper Sacramento River. Reclamation would establish the criteria for these exchanges through its temperature management planning, which weighs risks and rewards of various potential protective actions. Sites is a potential tool for use in managing temperature, but is not limited to serving this purpose only. Sites provides additional benefits to the environment, including assisting in providing stability for flows in the fall to reduce salmon redd dewatering, providing additional food resources for Delta smelt in the north Delta, among other existing and potential benefits.

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 later into the year. The 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 management – would be implemented to reduce impacts to water quality.

Is Sites being built on native lands? Have Native American tribes been consulted?

Both the Authority and Reclamation have consulted with Native American Tribes regarding impacts to Tribal people and resources. This is described in detail in Chapter 23 and Chapter 29 of the Final EIR/EIS. The Authority has consulted with Tribes under Assembly Bill 52 (AB 52) and has completed all applicable requirements under AB 52. There are no lands owned by Tribes within the Project Area, however, lands affected are believed to hold resources important to Tribes. The Authority is committed to working with the Tribes with traditional or cultural affiliation with the Project area throughout the life of the Project to better understand and respectfully incorporate their perspectives.