

Sites Reservoir Provides Significant Public Benefits and has Strong Statewide Support



When California voters resoundingly passed Proposition 1 in 2014, there was strong support for Chapter 8, “**Statewide Water System Operational Improvement and Drought Preparedness.**” This chapter provides an innovative investment program that will help California save water for our future.

Additionally, the **California Water Action Plan** stipulates that “the administration will work with the Legislature to make funding available to share in the cost of storage projects if funding partners step forward. The state will facilitate among willing local partners and stakeholders the development of financeable, multi-benefit storage projects, including working with local partners to complete feasibility studies. For example, the [Sites Project Authority](#), formed by a group of local government entities in the Sacramento Valley, is a potential emerging partnership that can help federal and state government determine the viability of a proposed off stream storage project – Sites Reservoir.” (Page 13.)



Sites Reservoir—an off-stream reservoir in Northern California—provides an excellent opportunity to carry out the voters’ will for statewide water system improvements and drought preparedness, as demonstrated by its public benefits and broad statewide investment and support:

- Significant [public benefits](#) include water quality improvements, reduced salinity levels in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta), improved Pacific Flyway habitat for migratory birds and other native species, and more reliable cold water for the benefit of salmon in the Sacramento Valley river systems. In sum, the project will contribute to the long-term ecologic health of the Delta by providing net improvements;
- Investment (\$\$\$) in Sites Reservoir by water suppliers throughout California, known as [Participating Entities](#);
- Strong support from a bi-partisan group of federal, state and local [elected](#) officials throughout the state;
- Broad statewide support from [organizations](#) and people in every region of California.

The advancement of Sites Reservoir should be part of an integrated water management solution for the administration. The public benefits and dedicated ecosystem water from Sites Reservoir could be used by California’s resources agencies as a flexible water management tool to address environmental needs in any given year, depending on hydrology and other conditions in the Sacramento River Basin and the Delta.

California Water Commission Evaluating Public Benefits of New Storage

Through the passage of Proposition 1 in 2014, California voters called for state investments in new storage facilities to provide public benefits to the ecosystem, water quality improvements, flood control, emergency response, and recreation. To receive Proposition 1 funding, projects must meet certain criteria established by the California Water Commission.

Initial public benefit scores were recently provided to funding applicants. The Sites Reservoir Project received initial public benefit credit for wildlife refuge improvements, flood control, and recreation. But, Water Commission staff requested more information before recommending a public benefit score for the project's significant environmental benefits for salmon and delta smelt. Without credit for the project's benefits to salmon and smelt, Water Commission staff has substantially undervalued the Sites Project in their initial scoring.

The Sites Project Authority remains confident in the project's environmental benefits and will work with the Water Commission to gain a better understanding of the methodologies and criteria used to score the project and adjust accordingly.

Although it's just one part of the Water Commission's overall scoring process, the public benefit score makes up one-third of an applicant's overall score. There are three other components that still need to be scored before a total score can be established as the basis for the Water Commission to make a conditional funding award.

The Sites Project Authority will submit its public benefit score appeal on February 23rd, with final public benefit scores expected this summer.



Sites is an offstream reservoir proposed north of the Delta, where it would not dam a major river or block fish migration in any watershed. The project provides unique environmental benefits during dry and critical water years, and especially during extended drought periods, by conserving coldwater releases for salmon and delivering water through the Yolo Bypass to support delta smelt. By capturing storm runoff not required to meet environmental regulations or other priorities, the project would provide the state with approximately 200,000 acre-feet of water to be used flexibly for environmental benefits.

