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Sites Reservoir Decision Commits More Public Money to A Private Water Grab

Sites Reservoir Will Harm Water Quality, Raise Water Bills and Endanger Californians

Sacramento, CA – Today, the Department of the Interior advanced President Trump’s [Executive Order 14181](#) and approved the 14,000 acre Sites Reservoir, and associated diversions and funding, in Northern California. This action comes as no surprise, as the Trump administration also just re-wrote California’s Bay Delta water operations to allow most of California’s developed water to go to large agricultural interests, a move that threatens cities water supplies and salmon.

“Sites Reservoir does not create new water or improve reliability for most Californians, instead it negatively impacts drinking water quality, and salmon, in the Sacramento River and Bay Delta while providing little local benefits,” stated Save California Salmon’s Executive Director Regina Chichizola. “It is a costly boondoggle that uses public money to subsidize a private reservoir while raising Californian’s water bills, harming salmon and water quality, and failing to respect Tribal Nations and local economies in the North State,”

Chichizola went on to say California and the federal government have already committed billions of public funding to the private reservoir even though we will rarely be able to fill it.

Sites Reservoir is a massive new dam that would divert water from an already over-allocated Sacramento River, a tributary to the Klamath. The water would mostly benefit a small group of powerful water interests, while Californians are left to pay the price through higher water bills, degraded water quality and climate impacts. Critics say the reservoir does not create new water, it re-allocates already scarce water away from rivers, fish, and communities, and the money would be better invested in replenishing ground water supplies

“The Record of Decision was expected, and does not resolve the fundamental problems with Sites Reservoir,” said Keiko Mertz, Policy Director of Friends of the River. “Sites is still a nearly \$7 billion gamble that delivers little water at enormous cost, threatens rivers and fisheries, and distracts from real solutions.”

Despite claims that selecting Alternative 3 and shifting the Terminal Regulating Reservoir from west to east reduces impacts, the massive new diversion and associated water quality impacts remain unchanged. Diverting additional flows takes flows salmon depend on to survive and worsens the water quality while increasing the risk of harmful algal blooms and releasing warm, stagnant water into the Delta. The federal commitment also brings into question whether the reservoir may directly or indirectly impact the Trinity River, and whether the water will be used to fill the controversial Delta tunnel. The Trinity River is the largest, and coolest tributary to the Klamath River, yet most of it is diverted to the federal Central Valley Water Project for use by large agricultural exporters.

What is equally concerning is the continued lack of meaningful Tribal consultation. “Tribal Nations were not meaningfully consulted on a project that directly impacts our waters, sacred places, and our salmon,” said Josa Talley, a Karuk Tribal member and Communications and Outreach Coordinator at Save California Salmon. “That alone should have stopped this project. It is reckless to ignore Tribal knowledge and push projects that further destabilize rivers, devastate our already ailing salmon runs and the industries and cultures they sustain, and call it ‘progress.’”

Tribes have contended that the Sites project reflects a long and painful pattern where Tribal Nations whose cultural sites, burial grounds, and waters are affected continue to not be properly consulted, sidelining Indigenous voices, undermining legal obligations, and violating trust and treaty responsibilities in decisions that directly and irrevocably adversely impact Indigenous lands, waters, livelihoods, and lifeways. Commercial fishermen also have expressed concerns that having a massive new diversion in the Sacramento River would not only be the nail in the coffin of the salmon fishing industry, but also would be used to fill the controversial Delta Tunnel.

While federal officials tout job creation, a recent contract ensures that many of the construction jobs tied to Sites Reservoir will go to out-of-state contractors, while California communities are left with the long-term environmental damage, the serious risks to water quality and safety, and the financial burden. The fact that the Sites Authority, a private entity with public funding, has gone back on its promise to provide local jobs and benefits has further complicated this project and highlights that its promise of environmental benefits has also been proven false.

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