Sites Reservoir Project

RDEIR/SDEIS Frequently Asked Questions

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

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

   Yes, even during drier years there can be significant precipitation events that present conditions where water can be diverted safely 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.

2. **Would Sites Reservoir meaningfully address future droughts?**

   Sites Reservoir is an insurance policy for future droughts. Sites Reservoir does not rely on snowpack and if the scientific projections are correct about the impacts of climate change (i.e., California is expected to receive about the same annual precipitation that it currently does but more will come as rain than snow and be subject to year-to-year variability), then having Sites Reservoir would mean we can collect more water in the reservoir for use during future droughts.

3. **Would Sites Reservoir decrease Delta flows?**

   Yes, slightly, when the Project is diverting. However, since the Sites Reservoir diversions would occur only when there are high river flows, any reduction to Delta flows would be minor and would not impact any of the beneficial uses of the water in the Delta. Storing water in Sites Reservoir during times when there is a lot of flow in the Sacramento River for use during times when the flows are low, including during drought periods, is part of the statewide strategy for adapting to changing climate conditions and to return much needed flexibility to our statewide water management system.

4. **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 over the last two years to be more protective of the environment. These modifications have reduced the Project diversions from the Sacramento River substantially (almost in half) as compared to the criteria proposed in 2017. The current Project operations strikes the needed balance between environmental protections and Project affordability that has to exist for the Project to proceed.

5. **Does this Project impact the Trinity River?**

   The Project would not affect or result in changes in the operation of the Central Valley Project (CVP), Trinity River Division facilities (including Clear Creek). Reclamation would continue to operate the Trinity River Division consistent with all applicable statutory, legal, and contractual obligations, including but not limited to the Trinity River Record of Decision (ROD), the 2017 ROD for the Long-Term Plan for the Lower Klamath River, and the provision of (not less than) 50,000 acre-feet identified in Trinity River Division Central Valley Project Act of 1955 to be made available to Humboldt County and downstream water users.

6. 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, Lake Oroville, and Folsom Lake 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 counteract any impacts to water quality.

7. 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 Diversion Dam. By exchanging Sites water for CVP water, Reclamation has an additional tool to maintain and improve habitat for salmonid spawning, incubation, rearing, and migration. By delivering water to CVP contractors from Sites Reservoir, Reclamation may maintain supply in Shasta Lake for important periods to support these habitat conditions. The possible additional water supply in Shasta Lake can then be allocated during real-time management scenarios for a number of uses (e.g., cold-water pool maintenance, spring pulse or fall pulse flow events, reduced fall flows) that may provide enhanced anadromous fish benefits.

8. 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.