



FRIENDS OF THE RIVER

1418 20TH STREET, SUITE 100, SACRAMENTO, CA 95811
916/442-3155 • FAX: 916/442-3396 • WWW.FRIENDSOFTHERIVER.ORG

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senate
Washington DC

Re: S. 1894 – California Emergency Drought Relief Act of 2015: OPPOSE
Date: October 8, 2015

Dear Senator Feinstein and Senator Boxer:

Friends of the River has carefully reviewed S. 1894. We appreciate your intent to draft consensus legislation that attempts to alleviate the effects of the drought on California. We support provisions in the bill that authorize federal funding for water recycling, agricultural water conservation, groundwater recharge, urban stormwater capture, and other innovative projects. We also appreciate positive provisions in the bill to provide emergency drinking water to small disadvantaged communities, encourage restoration projects that will help reduce impacts to fish and wildlife, and improve water supplies for national wildlife refuges. In particular, we thank you for not including in S. 1894 any direct attacks on the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System found in other bills introduced and passed by the House of Representatives.

Although S. 1894 has many aspects with which we agree, there are certain egregious provisions in the bill that we cannot support as currently written.

The most egregious provisions of S. 1894 are those that fund new water storage projects, including section 312, which authorizes \$600 million through fiscal year 2025 to fund the federal share of constructing new “storage” in California, and Title IV, which authorizes \$200 million in loan guarantees and \$75 million for local storage projects.

Section 312 could fund controversial new and expanded dams and reservoirs such as raising Shasta Dam and enlarging its reservoir, building the Temperance Flat Dam on the San Joaquin River Gorge, and constructing the Sites Offstream Storage Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley. But the federal funding could be spent on any storage project proposed in the state as long as certain conditions are met. There are a number of serious problems with this provision, not the least of which include:

- Feasibility reports and environmental studies on these projects are not yet complete. Authorizing funding for any of these projects optimistically assumes that they are financially and environmentally feasible.
- None of these projects will provide any drought relief now or in the next 20 years. In fact, initial feasibility reports and environmental studies indicate that the total water yield of all CALFED surface storage projects would increase the state’s water supply by less than 1%.

- The proposed Shasta Dam raise and Temperance Flat Dam will provide few if any real environmental benefits. Both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife question whether raising Shasta Dam will provide any net environmental benefits and an independent economic analysis of the Temperance Flat Dam found that the value of supposed environmental benefits provided by the project are wildly over-estimated.
- Initial feasibility reports indicate that ultimately all of the annual water yield from the Shasta Dam raise and the Temperance Flat Dam will primarily benefit water contractors. If real quantifiable environmental benefits are not provided by these projects, then S. 1894 clearly violates fundamental federal reforms instituted by President Ronald Reagan requiring the beneficiaries of federal water projects to pay for their benefits.
- PayGo rules will almost certainly ensure that Congress will offset the new dam-spending largess provided by S. 1894 with further cuts in federal programs protecting clean water and air, public lands, and endangered species.
- The loan guarantees and local storage project funding provided in Title IV could fuel speculative and controversial local water projects that would otherwise never get off the drawing board due to their financial and environmental infeasibility.


Spending millions of public tax dollars to build large river-destroying dams is a 19th century solution to a 21st century problem. The fact is that all the most effective dam sites in the state are already occupied by dams. Expanding surface storage in California long ago reached the point of diminishing returns. The millions of public tax dollars to fund storage in S. 1894 will not provide any true drought relief now or in the future.

In addition to its focus on surface storage, other provisions of S. 1894 that cause concern can be interpreted to maximize fulfillment of water contracts while discouraging compliance with the biological opinion protecting endangered salmon and steelhead, NEPA, and state law.

We urge you to delete the egregious dam funding provisions from S. 1894 and amend the provisions maximizing water contracts at the expense of the environment. Please move forward with a bill that protects our environment, while providing real and immediate drought relief for California communities and farmers by reducing demand and conserving existing water supplies.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Executive Director
Friends of the River