



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Eric Wesselman: 510-775-3797
Ron Stork: 916-764-0340

Congress Pushes Controversial Drought Legislation *25 Organizations Call on Interior Secretary to Protect California's Rivers*

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell received [a letter](#) yesterday from 25 conservation, recreation, and environmental justice organizations in California raising concerns about dam projects that could be advanced by current negotiations to pass federal “drought relief” legislation. These projects would harm the state’s rivers, fish and wildlife, and public lands visited by thousands of people annually. [The letter](#) is particularly timely given that Congress is considering amending a “must pass” spending bill to pre-authorize dam projects recommended by the Interior Secretary, even though essential feasibility and environmental studies have not yet been fully completed and for which the specific beneficiaries have yet to be identified.

“There are simply too many unanswered questions and controversies surrounding these dam projects,” said Eric Wesselman, Executive Director of Friends of the River. “It’s crazy that Congress appears prepared to commit taxpayers to paying billions of dollars for dam projects that actually produce very little new water and could cause significant harm to fish and wildlife and our state’s legacy of free flowing rivers.”

The letter specifically expressed concern about three projects, including the proposed Shasta Dam raise and Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento River watershed, and Temperance Flat Dam on the upper San Joaquin River. These projects collectively could harm threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead and flood public lands visited by hundreds of thousands of people annually, including the Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area, Sacramento River Bend Area, Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge, and the San Joaquin River Gorge.

“The Bureau’s own feasibility and environmental reports identify significant unresolved issues with these projects, including violation of state law, uncertain water rights, lack of local cost-sharing partners, the actual amount of water produced by the dams and who will receive it, and significant and unavoidable impacts on threatened and endangered species and their habitats,” said Ron Stork, Senior Policy Advocate for Friends of the River. “How can Congress authorize and the Secretary recommend these projects before these serious issues are resolved?” he asked.

The letter points out that the reliable amount of water produced annually by the proposed dam projects is equal to about one percent of the state’s water budget, but will cost billions of dollars to build. Questionable “environmental benefits” from the dams will foist at least 50% of the cost on to state and federal taxpayers. The dams will modify downstream flows and harm ecosystems that support threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead and wildlife dependent on healthy riparian habitat.

More than 28,000 acres of public and private lands will be condemned and drown beneath the new and enlarged reservoirs and affiliated facilities, including lands that provide nationally significant outdoor recreation opportunities, critical fish and wildlife habitat, sensitive cultural resources and local jobs. Environmental and feasibility studies have yet to be completed for the Sites project and Temperance Flat Dam, and state and federal agencies have seriously questioned the adequacy of the completed studies for the Shasta Dam raise. The Winnemem Wintu Tribe has joined in signing onto this letter given the impacts that raising Shasta Dam would have on their land. The federal government has not consulted the Winnemem about the proposed flooding of their sacred sites as required by law.

"Priceless places of initiation, ceremony and prayer on what's left of the McCloud River are endangered—places like Puberty Rock and Sucker Pool," said Caleen Sisk, Winnemem Wintu Chief. "These are places I have known since I was a child, where I was initiated, as was my daughter."

The letter was signed by Friends of the River, Sierra Club California, Winnemem Wintu Tribe, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Restore the Delta, Sacramento River Preservation Trust, Northern California Council Federation of Fly Fishers, Foothill Conservancy, American Whitewater, Planning and Conservation League, Clean Water Action, Tuolumne River Trust, California Water Impact Network, Institute for Fisheries Resources, Northcoast Environmental Center, Friends of the Eel River, California Wilderness Coalition, Butte Environmental Council, Endangered Species Coalition, Southern California Watershed Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Environmental Protection Information Center, Coast Action Group, and Environmental Justice Coalition for Water.

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