



FRIENDS OF THE RIVER

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NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Senate Considers Drought Relief for California *River Group Warns the Bill Will Only Get Worse in this Congress*

A U.S. Senate hearing today on Western Water legislation included testimony on S. 1894, the California Emergency Drought Relief Act of 2015. The bill, sponsored by Senators Feinstein and Boxer, would provide support for water conservation, efficiency, recycling, groundwater recharge, and disadvantaged communities suffering from the drought. The bill also authorizes at least \$875 million to fund new surface water storage projects before planning is complete and before any of the beneficiaries of such projects have agreed to pay their share.

“This bill has a number of good provisions to help with the drought, but it also authorizes hundreds of millions in funding for dams and storage projects that would take years to build and ultimately cost billions, said Eric Wesselman, Executive Director of Friends of the River. “The real concern is that the bill this Congress ultimately sends to the President will be much worse and loaded with pork for projects that will cost billions and do little to nothing for the drought.”

Funding for new storage is likely intended for raising Shasta Dam, building Temperance Flat Dam on the San Joaquin River Gorge, and constructing the Sites Offstream Storage Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley. Initial feasibility reports and environmental studies indicate that the total water yield for all of these CALFED surface storage projects would increase the state’s water supply by less than 1%.

“The fact is that we already have more than 1,400 dams in California and the most effective sites are taken,” said Wesselman. “Spending millions of public tax dollars to build large river-destroying dams is a 19th century solution to a 21st century problem.”

S. 1894 also provides funding before any local funding has been secured, violating fundamental federal reforms instituted by President Ronald Reagan requiring the beneficiaries of federal water projects to pay for their benefits. Specifically, the bill authorizes \$600 million through fiscal year 2025 to fund the federal share of constructing new “storage” in California, and authorizes \$200 million in loan guarantees along with \$75 million for local storage projects. Those numbers are likely to climb significantly before Congress sends a final bill to the President which may also include provisions to weaken protections for endangered species and Wild & Scenic Rivers, which have already been passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

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