



## McCloud River takes central role in dam-raising proposal

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Tucked up along the border of Shasta and Siskiyou counties, the McCloud River doesn't wind through any cities or get the attention of motorists by sidling up to major roads. Instead, the river sticks to the canyons of forested mountains.

The nearest town is the southern Siskiyou community of McCloud, population 1,100, about six miles away. Highway 89 veers near only the upper portions of the river before it flows south into Shasta County.



The McCloud River, seen from Gilman Road [in the upper part of Shasta Reservoir], has central role in the debate over raising the height of Shasta Dam.

What parts of the river are accessible to the public are reached by remote and winding mountain roads. Most of the stretch south of Lake McCloud flows through private property before it empties into the upper reaches of Lake Shasta.

While the McCloud geographically is off the beaten path, its status as a wild and scenic river<sup>1</sup> moves it closer to the center of the web of California's water politics.

The Westlands Water District and Metropolitan Water District, two rich and powerful south state water agencies interested in raising the height of Shasta Dam have the McCloud River in its sights.

The law governing the river's status forbids any state agency from planning for or building anything that would affect the river. The law also specifically says the state can't spend money on proposals to raise Shasta Dam.

A U.S. Bureau of Reclamation draft report released last year said it would be economically feasible to raise the dam, but two issues were unresolved: the McCloud's wild and scenic status and the numerous Winnemem Wintu sacred sites along the river.

State legislation to place an \$11.1 billion statewide water bond before voters next year includes a clause that specifically forbids using any of the money to increase the height of the dam because of how it might affect the McCloud River.<sup>2</sup>

For decades, the bureau, which operates the dam, has looked at raising the structure to ensure a more reliable source of water for salmon and steelhead trout, as well as farms and cities downstream.

But river advocates say raising the dam would harm the river and further degrade a priceless trout fishery.

Curtis Knight, Mt. Shasta Region manager of California Trout, said his agency has placed a high priority on preserving and protecting the river.

"It's one of the more picturesque, beautiful rivers in the world," Knight said. "I spend more time on that river than I can say."

Raising the height of the dam would potentially inundate an additional 25 acres of the river over an area extending about two miles upstream of the McCloud River Bridge, part of the [protected] portion of the river.

While the bureau says salmon and steelhead in the Sacramento River system would benefit from the project, officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have a different point of view.

"The service doesn't necessarily agree with raising Shasta Dam being an improvement for the fish," said Robert Moler, a spokesman for the service. The salmon and steelhead would benefit from the project during critically dry years, but in years with normal precipitation, the dam would not be good for the fish, based on the bureau's own predictions, he said.

"In about 90 percent of the years, there would be no benefit to anadromous fish survival," according to a draft fish and wildlife report written to accompany the bureau's assessment of the dam.

Other than consulting with the bureau on the proposal several years ago, the National Marine Fisheries Service has had little involvement with the dam project, said Jim Milbury, a spokesman for the service.

"More water is always good for fish, that's for sure, but we haven't had the resources to review those documents," Milbury said, referring to environmental reports on raising the dam.

## **Dry years**

A higher dam would allow greater water reliability during drought years, especially as the water demand grows along with the state population, said Louis Moore, a bureau spokesman.

"We've just seen it recently, where in 2010-11 we had a wet year and then nothing" the following year, he said, referring to the drought conditions in 2011-12. More water stored in

Lake Shasta would enable the bureau to hold more water in the lake in reserve for drought years, he said.

The project would also allow greater cold water storage, which would benefit the Chinook salmon that rely on the water for spawning in the Sacramento River, the report says.

Raising the dam's height would increase the reservoir's capacity by about 14 percent. Bureau studies say raising the dam would make up to 133,400 acre-feet more water available to Central Valley Project contractors and the State Water Project, which serves the Metropolitan Water District and other districts in Southern California.<sup>3</sup> An acre-foot is the amount of water needed to cover an acre one foot deep.

Last year, because of limited reservoir supply and lower snowpack, CVP agricultural contractors only got 40 percent of their allotment, and cities received 75 percent.

The bureau Shasta Enlargement report says the lake is in a "dry/critical" stage about 36 percent of the time. Raising the dam would provide an additional 120,000 acre-feet of water during "dry/critical" years.

More water also would mean more power could be generated at the dam: up to 138 gigawatt-hours, according to the bureau.

### **Water grab?**

The McCloud River also is on the radar of the Westlands Water District and the Metropolitan Water District, two rich and powerful players in state politics that support raising Shasta Dam. The two agencies have the means and the clout to change the state law protecting the McCloud, said Ron Stork, a senior policy director for the Sacramento-based Friends of the River, a nonprofit agency that works to protect rivers from development.

In December, directors of the Metropolitan district — a wholesale water supplier to about 19 million Southern California residents — voted to lobby to change state law so the state could help pay for raising the dam.

A spokesman for the Metropolitan district said the board approved the measure because in general it supports creating more water storage statewide.

Westlands officials also want the dam raised. In 2007 the district paid about \$33 million to buy about 3,000 acres bordering the river, including the Bollibokka Fly Fishing Club. Its property extends south to just downstream of the McCloud River bridge.

Westlands General Manager Tom Birmingham said in 2007 the district, which supplies water to some 600 farms in the San Joaquin Valley, bought the land to protect its interests along the river and around Lake Shasta.

"We did not want to see the use of this land to be changed to impede the potential of raising the dam," he told the Record Searchlight in 2007.

Experts on water rights and state water politics said they were unsure how owning property along the McCloud River would benefit an agricultural water district in the San Joaquin Valley.

Birmingham and other officials with the district did not return calls seeking comment for this story.

River advocates claim both districts are interested in changing state law so they can get more water from Northern California.

Dave Steindorf, California stewardship director for American Whitewater, said it doesn't make sense to raise the dam, because only about once every four years does the lake fill with the dam at its current height.

"Are we going to remove protections for one of the last great rivers to store water that isn't there?" Steindorf said.

And river advocates worry the wild and scenic protections also will be removed by the state Legislature. They point to the Merced River as an example of what could happen to the McCloud.

Last year the House passed a bill that would have stripped the wild and scenic status from a portion of the Merced to expand Lake McClure. The bill died, though, when the Senate failed to take up the measure.

"Even if the rules don't allow it, there's a way for them to get the water," Stork said of efforts to change the law.

### **Who pays?**

Last year's draft report said the proposal to raise the dam 18 ½ feet would be the most feasible.

The federal government would pay \$655 million of the \$1.07 billion cost. Agricultural and municipal contractors would pay \$331 million through their annual fees. An additional \$84 million would be raised through selling hydroelectricity.

The agency says the annual cost of the dam project would be \$54 million, but the benefit of generating more power, selling more water and ensuring more salmon in the Sacramento River would generate an estimated \$92.2 million a year.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation officials are still working on environmental reports about the dam. If Congress approved funds for the project, the bureau says it could begin construction on an addition to the dam within five years.

## **History of preservation**

While bureau officials look to the future, McCloud River advocates say wild and scenic status is rooted in decades-old politics.

In the 1980s, when legislators were working on a wild and scenic bill for the McCloud, proponents ran into resistance from landowners along the river, said Jeff Shellito, who at the time was a consultant to the state Assembly Natural Resources Committee.

Two well-known and politically connected families — the Schillings, who founded the Schilling spice company, and the Hearsts, heirs to a media empire — objected to giving the McCloud full wild and scenic status, he said.

The families feared the label would attract more rafters and anglers to the river, Shellito said.

"They didn't want it to be in quotes 'a wild and scenic river,'" Shellito said.

So in 1989 the Legislature worked out a compromise to give the McCloud the same protections as the state's other wild and scenic rivers, but its status was supposed to be less known to the public, he said.

"I think it's more the way it's advertised," Knight said.

Legislators also added a clause to the law forbidding any state agency from participating in planning and construction to raise Shasta Dam, with an exception allowing the state Department of Water Resources to work on technical and feasibility studies to raise the dam.

A bill currently in the state Legislature to put a statewide water bond on the November 2014 ballot refers to the Shasta Dam clause and prohibits using any of the bond money on efforts to raise the dam.

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, helped draft the original water bond bill in 2009 when he was a state assemblyman. He said the prohibition against using money for work on Shasta Dam has been included in previous water bonds approved by voters.

That clause was included to protect the McCloud River from being further inundated, he said.

"It's about protecting that wild and scenic status," Huffman said.

Raising the elevation of the lake also would mean relocating numerous roads, bridges and businesses.

While some structures can be relocated, members of the Winnemem Wintu tribe say many of their sacred sites along the river would be inaccessible and ruined by flooding.

The wild and scenic protections extend to a quarter-mile downstream of the McCloud River bridge, just about the same area where the Winnemem have fought for several years to close off to boaters during a coming-of-age ceremony for teenage girls in the tribe.

The puberty rock, central to the ceremony, as well as a nearby campground used by the Winnemem during the event, would be below the new high water mark set by a higher dam.

Knight said the current Shasta Dam and the dam creating Lake McCloud have done enough damage to the river.

"I think our approach is, look at what the McCloud has already given up," Knight said.

<http://www.redding.com/news/beloved-by-some-coveted-by-others-mccloud-river>

**Endnotes (F.O.R. addendum, December 30, 2014)**

1. As discussed later in the article, the McCloud River is not in the State Wild & Scenic River System. Rather, it is protected in the Wild & Scenic River section of the California Public Resources Code. The applicable code section is the following: No dam, reservoir, diversion, or other water impoundment facility shall be constructed on the McCloud River from Algoma to the confluence with Huckleberry Creek, and 0.25 mile downstream from the McCloud Dam to the McCloud River Bridge; nor shall any such facility be constructed on Squaw Valley Creek from the confluence with Cabin Creek to the confluence with the McCloud River.

2. The California Water Bond of 2014, passed instead of the bond mentioned here, retained language preventing expenditures for bond-funded projects on rivers protected in the Wild & Scenic River section of the California Resources Code—as well as for Federal Wild & Scenic Rivers.

3. Water yield estimates differ. In addition to the 133 thousand acre-feet per year estimate, Reclamation’s Shasta Dam draft EIS has the following estimates for *firm* total, north of delta, and south of delta yields from the 18.5 ft. dam-raise alternatives (columns three and four). (Table S-2) Typical CVP deliveries are 7 million acre-feet per year.

Increase Water Supply Reliability					
Total Increased Firm Water Supplies (TAF/year) <sup>3</sup>	47.3	77.8	63.1	47.3	113.5
Increased Firm Water Supplies NOD (TAF/year) <sup>3</sup>	4.5	10.7	35.2	4.5	25.2
Increased Firm Water Supplies SOD (TAF/year) <sup>3</sup>	42.7	67.1	28.0	42.7	88.3

The Sacramento Bee published the following chart on potential *average* yields of large dam projects being discussed for funding in the water bond during the summer of 2014:

**COMPARING RESERVOIR PROJECTS**

Five major reservoir projects under study in California would cost nearly \$9 billion combined. Here’s the construction cost per acre-foot of “new” water they would deliver to customers.

Reservoir project	Sites	Temperance Flat	Shasta raise	Los Vaqueros raise	San Luis raise
Cost estimate	\$3.8 billion	\$2.5 billion	\$1.2 billion	\$1 billion	\$360 million
Projected increased water supply in average years (in acre-feet)	164,000	76,000	75,900	20,000	71,000
Project construction cost per acre-foot of increased water supply	\$23,171	\$32,895	\$15,810	\$50,000	\$5,070

Note: Customers will generally pay less than \$1,000 per acre-foot, because construction costs are financed over decades.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation The Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/2014/06/01/6448005/should-california-use-taxpayer.html>