Is Temperance Flat Dam Proposal Down to Its Last Strike?

Bill McEwen  April 20, 2018

A proposed dam at Temperance Flat on the San Joaquin River above Friant is eligible for $171.3 million in funding, California officials announced today.

But while that’s a lot of money, it’s well short of what’s needed — along with federal and local financing — to make the $2.6 billion, 1.26 million acre-foot project a reality.

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“We’re not done, but we’re damn close. We’ve got one more shot” to increase the state funding, said Mario Santoya, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority.

That one more shot is a meeting in early May when Temperance Flat promoters will make their case to the nine commissioners of the California Water Commission.

$40 Million And Not One Drop of Water

Thus far, $40 million has been spent trying to break ground on the dam. The breakdown is $38 million in federal funds and $2 million by the infrastructure authority.

Temperance Flat received a zero in the initial scoring of proposed water-storage projects seeking funding from Proposition 1, the $7.5 billion “water bond” passed by voters in 2014.

“The commissioners will now have the weight on their shoulders,” Santoyo said. “Voters passed Prop. 1 with the expectation of big water projects. If that doesn’t happen, they won’t vote for future water bonds.”

The proposed Sites Reservoir, north of Sacramento, saw its tentative state award increase from $662.6 million to $933.3 million. But the estimated cost for the 13-mile long reservoir is $5.2 billion.
Commission staff did the first round of scoring, as well as the most recent scoring which resulted in the tentative award of $171.3 million for 18-mile long Temperance Flat. Project backers had sought $1 billion of the $2.7 billion set aside in Proposition 1 for water-storage projects.

**Temperance Flat’s Fate Rests with Water Commissioners**

Santoyo said the staff’s analysis of the project is befuddling.

“The bottom line is this, we submitted an appeals document that reflected a 2.8-to-1 benefit ratio. They, in turn, came back with a ratio of 0.38. There clearly is a bias from the perspective of the reviewers.”

Santoyo added that the project uses the same computer modeling for benefits as the “San Joaquin River restoration is using.”

Only two of the 11 projects under consideration had scores higher than 1.0. Both are small surface-storage proposals. They are Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project in Contra Costa County and Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project in Santa Clara County.

In a nutshell, Temperance Flat’s fate rests with the commissioners.

“We’ll see what kind of answer they give us,” Santoyo said.

To read about funding for other water-storage projects, click on this story from the San Francisco Chronicle’s Kurtis Alexander.


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