



Opinion

Valley farms, cities need Temperance Flat Dam to assure secure water future

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May 21, 2018 06:00 AM

Updated May 21, 2018 06:00 AM

“Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated” is a quote made famous by Mark Twain upon hearing rumors that he had died in 1897.

This is the same thought that we had in reaction to news that the most important project for securing a long-term water supply for the Central Valley, the construction of Temperance Flat Dam, was not fully funded by the California Water Commission. On May 2, the California Water Commission, which is in charge of selecting the projects that will get funding, proposed that Temperance Flat would only be eligible for \$171 million from the water bond – a small fraction of what it will cost to build the \$2.7 billion project.



This is a view to the north over the edge of Big Table Mountain into the gorge containing the upper reaches of Millerton Lake near Temperance Flat. MARK CROSSE Fresno Bee file

Why did such a critical project receive so little funding? The answer lies in the fine print of the water bond, which only allows for water-storage dollars to pay for so called “public benefits.” This is an ambiguous term open for interpretation, but includes things like improving water quality, environmental benefits, flood protection and recreational opportunities. According to the commission, the Temperance project only scored a 0.38 on the ratio of allocated funding to public benefit.

We know that the water commission overlooked some critical public benefits when scoring the Temperance Flat application, which was presented to the commission by the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority. The new reservoir would allow better management of river flows, which are needed to meet the demands of a legal settlement to restore the San Joaquin River and protect endangered salmon who rely on it. Interestingly enough, the only computer model that can be used on the San Joaquin River to measure environmental benefits as cited by the Commission is the Ecosystem

Diagnosis and Treatment Model (EDT). The EDT model is a fish life-cycle habitat model designed to help managers identify priorities for habitat restoration investments and to understand how habitat conditions control fish abundance and distribution. However, the commission gave that portion of the application to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for them to score. That portion of the application received a zero rating. We cannot help but wonder, what model did Fish and Wildlife use in their scoring?

When voters passed the \$7.5 billion water bond in 2014 during the depths of one of the worst droughts in California history, they were promised that at least \$2.7 billion dollars of it would be invested in new water storage projects. Central Valley residents hoped that this would lead to the badly needed construction of Temperance Flat Dam; those hopes met with disappointment by the decision of the California Water Commission.

Reliable water supplies are the lifeblood of the Central Valley. Both the agriculture industry that underwrites our entire local economy and the growing cities and towns in the region need to know where to turn during dry years. This is the backdrop for understanding why Temperance Flat's construction is so vital for family farms and all people living in the San Joaquin Valley. In our view, it is nearly impossible to restore the San Joaquin River without Temperance Flat Dam because the current reservoir at Millerton Lake is too small to meet these demands.

Sacramento often has misplaced priorities that lead to shortchanging critical infrastructure like Temperance Flat. There is still time for the California Water Commission to reverse their disappointing decision and recognize the public benefits that the Temperance Flat Dam and Reservoir will provide to five Central Valley counties and millions of residents. Additional hearings will be held in May and the final decision of which projects will be awarded funding will be made in July. The 2014 water bond was sold as making California more resilient to drought. State officials need to keep that promise to the Central Valley and give Temperance Flat the funding it deserves.

“Reports of the death of Temperance Flat Dam and Reservoir are greatly exaggerated” – we along with the San Joaquin Valley Water Authority will continue the fight. Families like ours are counting on the Water Commission to do the right thing – fund Temperance Flat!

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<http://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/article211466444.html>

