

Water Commission allocates just \$171 million for estimated \$3 billion dam at Temperance Flat

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TULARE COUNTY – A Tulare County supervisor is spearheading the effort to secure additional water storage for farmers, cities and water districts throughout the Valley and he got his first victory last week.

The Temperance Flat project to build a dam on the upper San Joaquin River east of Fresno was awarded \$171 million by the California Water Commission on July 25 as part of a \$2.5 billion allocated to water storage projects up and down the state.



Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley is president of the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority which presented its plan to build the dam to the Commission in December. The Authority is a coalition of county governments for Tulare, Fresno, Madera, Merced and Kern Counties proposing to build a 1.2 million-acre foot dam above Millerton Lake, which supplies farmers, rural communities and some cities along the Valley's eastside with surface water through the Friant-Kern Canal.

Temperance Flat would more than double the capacity of water storage at Millerton Lake behind Friant Dam, possibly reducing groundwater pumping for irrigation in the Valley by as much as 183,000 acre feet per year, the equivalent of the amount of water used by a quarter of a million homes each year.

Most of the Commission's allocations were awarded in the Sacramento and Bay Area including \$816 million for the Sites Reservoir project near Sacramento, and \$459 million for the Los Vaqueros reservoir expansion project near San Francisco. The San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority's \$171 million was far less than \$1.33 billion it had requested for the dam, which is estimated to total nearly \$3 billion.

"It is far less than what we originally asked for," said Mario Santoyo, SJVWIA Executive Director, "but these state funds remain an important part of Temperance Flat's financing that we have long looked toward along with federal and local investor funding. We have continued to move steadily forward working with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Interior Department and the investors group that has taken shape."

Project proponents were disappointed by a May 4 Water Commission action that turned down Temperance Flat public benefits scoring the project needed to achieve all the state project funding the SJVWIA had sought. They were also surprised by another Water Commission decision Thursday to not make available early funding to the SJVWIA for predevelopment environmental and permitting work.

"We're still moving forward and are not giving up," said Worthley. "We're pushing ahead because this project would be a major valley tool in complying with the state's new Sustainable Groundwater Management Act along with improving water supply availability and reliability and flood control. Temperance Flat would improve water supplies for disadvantaged communities and urban areas, and create tremendous water management flexibility, not to mention significant benefits for the environment."

Worthley said the remaining \$2.5 billion to build the dam will need to be invested by a variety of agencies including water agencies, such as Friant Water Authority and Westlands Water District; municipalities, such as the cities of Fresno and Lindsay where surface water deliveries can make up nearly 70% of their water supply; as well as additional state and federal funding sources.

"If investors don't see the value in the project then we are in trouble," Worthley said. "But I don't know how they couldn't."

A number of interested water agencies from many parts of the valley are exploring project financing options. The Bureau of Reclamation is pursuing completion of an updated Temperance Flat feasibility study.

Temperance Flat is viewed as a vitally-needed means of capturing and storing high flows of water generated in big water supply years. Much of that water is currently lost to flood releases from Friant Dam due to Millerton Lake's small storage capacity.

Temperance Flat is one of the state's two largest proposals seeking to be awarded some of the \$2.7 billion in Proposition 1 funding for new major storage projects. Proposition 1 overall authorizes 7.12 billion in water bonds to include numerous other types of projects statewide.

Without additional water storage, Worthley said Kern County has already estimated 40-50% of its irrigated farm land may be fallowed. "There are sections of southern Tulare County that may see similar numbers," Worthley added.

Worthley said the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority members will meet in Sacramento this week to discuss the next step in identifying funding for the dam.

<http://www.thesungazette.com/article/news/2018/08/01/water-commission-allocates-just-171-million-for-estimated-3-billion-dam-at-temperance-flat/>