

Westlands' role in Shasta Dam-raising project takes a beating in Redding

Damon Arthur, Redding Record Searchlight

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A water district that provides irrigation to San Joaquin Valley farmers heard mostly negative comments in Redding on Wednesday about its role in the ongoing proposal to raise the height of Shasta Dam.

The Fresno County-based Westlands Water District, which has stepped forward to help pay the cost to raise the dam, held a meeting at the Holiday Inn to take comments that will be used to develop an environmental impact report on the project.

The purpose of the project is to ensure survival of salmon living downstream of the dam and to stabilize the supply of water in Lake Shasta and downstream of the dam, said Mary Paasch, vice president of Stantec, the consultant hired to write an environmental impact report on the project.

But most of those who spoke about the project Wednesday felt Westlands, long a controversial player in state water politics, has ulterior motives for wanting to build the project

“Does anybody really think that is accurate or descriptive for the purposes of the project?” said Dan Frost of Redding. “The purpose of the project is to send more water, at an enormous cost, down to that perpetual bottomless pit, the Westlands Water District, which has an insatiable appetite for water and public funds.”

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has for many years considered raising the height of the dam, and in 2015 completed a federal environmental analysis of raising the dam 18½ feet.

The \$1.4 billion project was shelved at the time because the bureau wanted local and state agencies to help pay the cost. This spring, however, Congress set aside \$20 million for design and pre-construction work on the project.



More than two hundred people attended a meeting Wednesday in Redding to take comment for an environmental analysis on the effects of raising Shasta Dam. (Photo: Damon Arthur Record Searchlight)

Plans for raising the dam have been drawn up and crews were out this past summer boring holes in the dam, testing the concrete to see if it was strong enough to hold the weight of a taller dam.



Nathan Morgan climbs back on top of Shasta Dam in September after doing work to prepare for drilling holes in the dam. The holes were being drilled to test the strength of the concrete in preparation for raising the height of the dam. (Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)

[Work begins on raising the height of Shasta Dam](#)

[Salamanders may block \\$1.4b dam raising project](#)

The bureau expects to award the first construction bid for the project in December 2019, which is also when the consultant expects to complete the environmental impact report.

The bureau has said it will pay half the cost of the project, but local and state partners will have to pay the other half of the cost.

So far, Westlands is the only other agency to offer help pay for the project, said Craig Moyle, a spokesman for Stantec.



Information posters were set up at the Holiday Inn in Redding on Wednesday for people to learn about the proposal to raise the height of Shasta Dam. (Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)

Ron Stork, a senior policy analyst with Friends of the River, said raising Shasta Dam would violate state law because a taller dam would result in the lake rising and further inundating the McCloud River, which is protected under state law.

California Secretary of Natural Resources John Laird sent a letter to leaders in Congress earlier this year asking them to consider other water projects because raising Shasta would violate state law.

“So my question is why are we here tonight? I guess one answer is, it’s speculative, but these people (Westlands) don’t respect the law. And that’s a sad thing,” Stork said.

Jose Gutierrez, an engineer for Westlands, attended the meeting Wednesday, but he said he could not comment on the project.

Moyle said even though a federal environmental analysis has already been completed, Westlands needs to do another study to satisfy state law because the water district is not a federal agency.

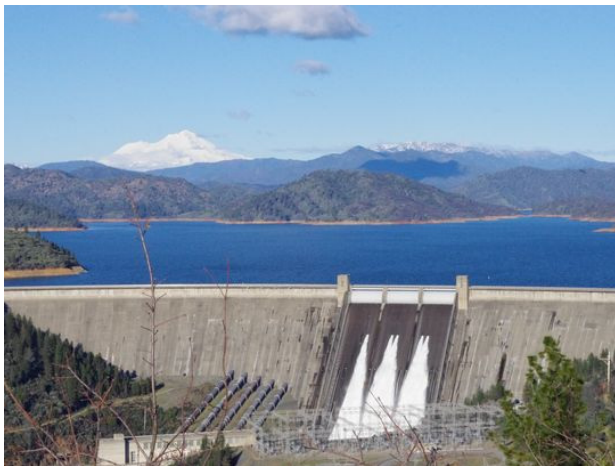
John McManus, executive director of the Golden Gate Salmon Association, said one federal government agency said the project wouldn’t benefit salmon in the Sacramento River downstream of the dam.

[Raising Shasta Dam: Nearby property owners want answers](#)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service submitted comments on the 2015 federal environmental analysis, stating the dam raise would not benefit salmon.

McManus said the wildlife service pointed out that raising the height of the dam would result in fewer large releases from the dam in heavy rain years because more water would be stored behind the dam. The salmon need periodic heavy releases to create side channels in the river that are used by young salmon as safe habitat, McManus said.

And the salmon need the higher flows in the spring, rather than summer, he said.



Federal officials are moving forward with plans to raise the height of Shasta Dam.
(Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)

Greg Watkins, mayor of Shasta Lake, said he disagreed that the dam has brought about the demise of winter-run chinook salmon. He said overfishing in the ocean is to blame for the lower numbers of salmon spawning in the river in the Redding area.

How the dam might affect salmon wasn’t the only topic discussed, though.

Matt Doyle, general manager of Lake Shasta Caverns, said he wanted the environmental impact report to take into account the positive benefits a higher dam would have on North State tourism.

“If this does happen we want to make sure recreation is protected, because this is a huge multi-million dollar industry for this area. I’m not saying that it should surpass the tribes. I believe that the tribes do need to be recognized, that they need their land before us,” Doyle said.

Caleen Sisk, chief of the Winnemen Wintu Tribe, said that she was against a higher dam because a higher lake level caused by the higher dam would inundate more of their sacred sites along the McCloud Arm of the lake.

The Winnemem once lived on the McCloud River, but were moved out of the area after Shasta Dam was built in the early 1940s.

Sisk said the Winnemem's identity is wrapped up in the river, and raising the lake level would harm their cultural sites.

"What is the difference between the Winnemem Tribe and the Hoopa? The rivers," she said, referring to the Hoopa Tribe, which lives along the Klamath River.

"What we have in connection to the river is at stake," she said before the meeting began.



Caleen Sisk, chief of the Winnemen Wintu Tribte, speaks during a meeting Tuesday on a proposal to raise the height of Shasta Dam. (Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)

<https://www.redding.com/story/news/2018/12/12/westlands-role-shasta-dam-raising-project-takes-beating-redding/2273105002/>