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**Fishing and Conservation Groups Sue Country's Largest Agricultural Water District over
Illegal Plot to Raise Shasta Dam**

Dam Raise Would Flood a Protected River, Tribe's Remaining Sacred Sites and Harm Fisheries

Redding, CA – Yesterday, a coalition of fishing and conservation groups filed a lawsuit against Westlands Water District for unlawfully aiding efforts by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to raise Shasta Dam. The destructive project would flood critical parts of the protected McCloud River, located upstream of the dam, harming a prized trout fishery, tribal lands, rare plants and wildlife, as well as endangered Chinook salmon downstream of the dam. The State of California also filed a lawsuit against Westlands yesterday.

Represented by Earthjustice, Friends of the River, Golden Gate Salmon Association, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, the Institute for Fisheries Resources, Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) are urging the court to find Fresno-based Westlands in violation of the California Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. A 1989 amendment to that law protects the McCloud River by prohibiting any agency of the State of California from assisting or cooperating with the planning or construction of any dam that could adversely affect the McCloud River's free-flowing condition or its wild trout fishery.

Westlands, an agency of the state, is violating that law by cooperating with the Trump Administration's aggressive plans to raise Shasta Dam. As the largest agricultural water district in the country, Westlands stands to gain more water from the project to sell to corporate agriculture in the southern part of the California's Central Valley, hundreds of miles from the dam.

"The proposed dam raise and Westlands' current actions in support of it are illegal. It's time to end Westlands' disrespect of California's Wild and Scenic Rivers Act," said **Ron Stork of Friends of the River**.

While efforts to raise Shasta Dam have rumbled for years in the background, the issue was tabled indefinitely during the Obama Administration. Under the Trump Administration and with Westlands' former lobbyist as Secretary of the Interior, which oversees Reclamation, the federal government has revived the dam raise project. Despite the [protests of California leaders](#), the project timeline has been fast-tracked with construction to begin by the end of this year. Westlands is playing a key role in advancing the project by leading and funding an environmental impact review and negotiating to cover part of the more than \$1.4 billion project cost. Westlands is so eager to raise the dam that it even purchased 3,000 acres along the McCloud River to clear the way for the land to be flooded if the dam is raised. All these actions violate the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

"Neither Westlands nor Trump's Bureau of Reclamation is above the law. Californians spoke when they amended the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to make sure agencies of the state would not help a hostile federal government ram through a project that benefits big, corporate agriculture at the expense of

protected rivers, tribes, fisheries, and threatened species,” said **Nina Robertson, Staff Attorney at Earthjustice.**

REACTIONS TO PLOT TO RAISE SHASTA DAM

“Trump and Westlands’ plans would sacrifice our wild rivers and wildlife to secure water for a select few. Improving agricultural efficiency and appropriately sited water storage are more cost-effective and innovative ways to stabilize California’s water future,” said **Drev Hunt, Senior Attorney for NRDC.** “Raising Shasta Dam will irreversibly accelerate the collapse of an already vulnerable ecosystem,” Hunt added.

In addition to harming the McCloud River, the dam raise would also [destroy the sacred lands](#) of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe. The Tribe already lost 90% of its lands when Shasta Dam was first built in the 1940s. This included Winnemem Wintu villages, sacred ceremonial sites and burial sites. “We stand in solidarity with the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, which will see almost all of its remaining sacred sites destroyed by the dam raise. The injustice must stop,” said **Stacey Geis, Managing Attorney at Earthjustice.**

Endangered plants, fish and wildlife, including salmon that live downstream of the dam, are also at risk from the mega-dam expansion. **Kim Delfino of Defenders of Wildlife** stated, “Last week, the United Nations released an alarming report identifying more than one million plant and animal species at risk of extinction. The Shasta Dam raise, which would drive imperiled species like salmon and the Shasta salamander closer towards extinction, is exactly what we don’t need in California.”

“Unbelievably, those seeking to corral more water try to justify this terrible idea by saying it will help salmon populations downstream. The science, including findings of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, clearly says otherwise. The dam raise would harm—not help— salmon downstream,” says **John McManus, President of the Golden Gate Salmon Association.**

Noah Oppenheim, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations and the Institute for Fisheries Resources added, “Fishing communities from Santa Barbara to Bellingham, Washington depend on Chinook salmon that are born in the Sacramento River and return as adults each year. The Shasta dam raise is a salmon killing project, threatening millions of fish and thousands of jobs by trapping the Sacramento behind an even bigger concrete curtain. We are proud to join this coalition and the State of California in defending the economic, environmental, and cultural wealth of the rural West Coast by defeating this ill-conceived project.”

“Westlands’ actions are a blatant violation of law enacted by the Legislature and signed by Governor Deukmejian in 1989 to protect the remarkable natural resources of the Shasta region. The proposed dam raise and reservoir expansion are simply an attempted water grab for unsustainable corporate farming of the Central Valley at the expense of the residents of the Shasta area,” said **Jim Pahl of Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter.**

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