

Judge delays ruling to stop Shasta Dam study

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A judge on Monday backed off a decision to stop a Fresno-based water district from going forward with a study on whether to raise the height of Shasta Dam.

The judge had issued a tentative ruling that would have forced the Westlands Water District to stop work on an environmental impact report assessing the impacts of raising the height of the dam.

However, after listening to arguments in Shasta County Superior Court on Monday from the district and the state Attorney General's Office, the judge said he would issue a final statement within 48 hours.

The judge, Dennis Buckley, at times appeared flummoxed about how to proceed on the issue, at one point closing his eyes and putting his head in his hands.

Westlands has told the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates Shasta Dam, that it is interested in helping pay for the cost of raising the height of the dam 18½ feet.



Workers did testing on Shasta Dam in 2018 to determine whether it could withstand having an additional 18 1/2 feet of concrete placed on the crest of the dam. (Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)



File - In March 2019, the Bureau of Reclamation has increased the amount of water coming out of the dam to 30,000 cubic-feet per second. (Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)

But the state attorney general and several environmental groups sued Westlands, claiming that doing so would violate state law. Raising the height of the dam would inundate a portion of the McCloud River, which is protected under state law.

State officials argued that a state law prohibits state agencies from participating in studies or planning for any project that would harm the McCloud River. Writing an environmental impact report would require participation from several state agencies, said Russell Hildreth, an attorney for the state.

But Daniel O'Hanlon, an attorney for Westlands, said the irrigation district has not decided whether to go forward with the project. The district wants to complete the study to determine whether it wants to help pay the \$1.4 billion cost to raise the height of the dam.

The bureau's 2015 environmental study of the proposed dam raise concluded raising the height of the dam would raise the lake level about 20 feet when full, and inundate about a third of a mile of the McCloud River.

The bureau has said it needs local and state partners to pay for half the cost of the dam. It has also said it plans to issue the first construction contracts later this year.



File - In March 2019, four of the five turbines below Shasta Dam were turning, creating electricity.
(Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)

Damon Arthur is the Record Searchlight's resources and environment reporter. He is among the first on the scene at breaking news incidents, reporting real time on Twitter at [@damonarthur_RS](https://twitter.com/damonarthur_RS). Damon is part of a dedicated team of journalists who investigate wrongdoing and find the unheard voices to tell the stories of the North State. He welcomes story tips at 530-225-8226 and damon.arthur@redding.com. Help local journalism thrive by [subscribing today!](#)

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