



Fishing and Conservation Groups Hold Up Illegal Plan to Raise Shasta Dam

New agreement limits water district's support for the project

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Shasta Dam is a destructive project that would harm the protected McCloud River, take water from imperiled ecosystems and fish, and flood sacred sites of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe.

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Anna Stimmel
Staff Attorney, Earthjustice

Fresno, California — This week, a coalition of fishing and conservation groups represented by Earthjustice [signed a stipulation](#) with Westlands Water District that stymies the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's plan to raise Shasta Dam, [a destructive project that would harm the protected McCloud River, take water from imperiled ecosystems and fish, and flood sacred sites of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe](#). In the signed stipulation, Westlands, the largest agricultural water district in the country, and a major beneficiary of federal dams, agreed not to take unlawful actions in support Reclamation's ill-conceived project.

"This is an important step in our fight to stop the Trump administration from running roughshod over California's environment," said **Ron Stork of Friends of the River**, a California river protection organization that opposes the dam raise.

The agreement is the result of three complementary lawsuits filed earlier this year after Westlands initiated a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, signaling that it planned to enter into an agreement to help fund the destructive dam raise. Represented by Earthjustice, Friends of the River, Golden State Salmon Association, the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, the Institute for Fisheries Resources, the Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Natural Resources Defense Council [filed a lawsuit in May 2019](#) alleging that Westlands was violating the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. That law that protects the free-flowing McCloud River, which is home to a world-class trout fishery and sacred tribal sites still in use today. The State of California filed a similar case on the same day, and North Coast Rivers Alliance (NCRA) and San Francisco Crab Boat Owners Association filed an additional lawsuit in July.

After the California Supreme Court affirmed a [preliminary injunction](#) preventing Westlands from taking [any action that constitutes planning related to the Shasta Dam raise](#), Westlands halted its CEQA process.

The State of California and NCRA also signed stipulations with Westlands this week. In each of the stipulations, Westlands has agreed not to resume the CEQA process, enter into any agreement to fund the dam raise or to assist with the planning or construction of the dam raise, or acquire additional real property to facilitate the dam raise, to the extent doing so would violate the law.

"Westlands illegally tried to get around California law, and the courts said no," said **John McManus of the Golden State Salmon Association**. "This agreement is a win for all salmon fishermen because the Sacramento River is the biggest salmon producer in the state and would be badly damaged by the raising of the dam. It's also a win for all Californians who care about clean water and fish."

"We entered into this agreement because it throws a wrench in Reclamation's plan to raise Shasta Dam, which is a salmon killing project that threatens millions of fish and thousands of jobs by trapping the Sacramento River behind an even bigger concrete curtain," said **Noah Oppenheim of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations**.

Anna Stimmel, an attorney Earthjustice representing the coalition stated, "Going forward, Earthjustice will remain vigilant with our clients and partners to ensure that Westlands and the Trump administration don't violate the law and put the interests of corporate agriculture over the interests of the environment, fishermen, and tribes."

According to [a timeline posted on Reclamation's website](#), before the three lawsuits were filed, Reclamation had planned to secure a cost-share partner by August 2019 and make a decision about the project by September 2019 so that it could award construction contracts by the end of 2019. Reclamation has missed these deadlines, and it is unclear whether it will move forward with the project. [The U.S. Secretary of the Interior is a former Westlands lobbyist](#), and the Trump administration has been keen to revive the project after it was shelved under Obama. If Reclamation does proceed, the State of California and fishing and conservation groups will be watching, and they are ready for the fight.

“This unlawful project would have hurt the McCloud River, and the communities and species that depend on it,” said **Attorney General Becerra**. “Westlands’ attempt to engage in this process violated the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In spite of this, the District attempted to force its way forward. We applaud the court for blocking this project and are thankful that this matter has come to a close. You might have friends in Washington D.C., but that doesn’t place you above the law.”

“This stipulation helps ensure this harmful project—which does not meaningfully contribute to water security for all Californians—is never built.” said **Drevet Hunt of the Natural Resources Defense Council**. “But the fight is not over,” Hunt continued, “it’s time for California to invest in alternatives, like urban and agricultural efficiency, stormwater capture, and water recycling projects that reduce our unsustainable reliance on the Sacramento River and help to restore California’s valuable salmon fisheries.”

<https://earthjustice.org/news/press/2019/fishing-and-conservations-groups-hold-up-illegal-plan-to-raise-shasta-dam>