

## Efforts to raise the height of Shasta Dam continue despite Westlands backing out

*Damon Arthur, Redding Record Searchlight Published 6:00 a.m. PT Feb. 5, 2020 | Updated 7:34 a.m. PT Feb. 5, 2020*

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation last year lost a major partner willing to help pay for raising the height of Shasta Dam, but that hasn't stopped the agency from going forward with the project.

The federal agency continues to look for new partners after the Fresno-based Westlands Water District backed out, and the bureau continues to do "pre-construction" and design work on the dam.

"Reclamation is engaging various stakeholders to look at all options for cost-sharing partners to help support this project to improve California's future," bureau spokesman Todd Plain said in an email.



Water is released last year from Shasta Dam into the Sacramento River. A proposal to raise the height of Shasta Dam would mean inundating part of the McCloud River. (Photo: Greg Barnette/Record Searchlight file photo)

However, the bureau won't say who it has been talking with as possible partners to help pay 50% of the cost of the \$1.4 billion project. The bureau needs a non-federal partner to pay half the cost of raising the height of the dam.

The bureau has long been interested in raising the height of the dam, and the current proposal would entail making the structure 18½ feet taller, adding about 14% more capacity to the lake.

[More: Future uncertain for Shasta Dam raising after irrigation district stops work on study](#)

The bureau believes the larger lake would provide more water statewide for residential, commercial and agricultural uses and benefit the environment.

"The Shasta Dam and Reservoir Enlargement Project is a cost-effective and much needed effort that increases water storage for fishery and environmental enhancements while improving water supply reliability for agricultural, municipal, and industrial uses," Plain said.

"The project also reduces risk of flood damage and improves Sacramento River cool-water temperatures for improved water quality below the dam for fishery spawning and existence," he said.

But a California law that protects the McCloud River prohibits state or local agencies from working on any project that would negatively affect the river, which flows into Lake Shasta. The McCloud River, which flows into Lake Shasta, is at the center of a dispute over raising the height of Shasta Dam.



The McCloud River, which flows into Lake Shasta, is at the center of a dispute over raising the height of Shasta Dam. (Photo: Contributed photo by Thomas O'Keefe)

A federal environmental review of the dam said raising the height of the structure would raise the lake level to the point of further inundating about two-thirds of a mile of the McCloud River.

Based on that state law, the state Supreme Court ruled in September 2019 that Westlands Water District was violating state law by working on an environmental impact report on raising the height of the dam.

A week after the court's ruling, Westlands backed out of the project. Work on the project didn't stop, though.

The bureau says it is still using the \$20 million allocated by Congress in May 2018 to do pre-construction and design work on the dam. The agency also continues to look for partners to help pay for the project.

Federal officials, however, would not say who they have been talking to or which other agencies might be interested in helping to pay for the project.

[More: State Supreme Court weighs in on Shasta Dam case](#)

Ron Stork, a senior policy advocate for Friends of the River, said his agency filed a lawsuit against the bureau to find out which agencies it has been courting as possible partners.

"It's not some little sideshow in the Department of the Interior, but important enough to spend a significant amount of time and energy on," Stork said.

He didn't know which agency the bureau could recruit to help pay for the project because all other cities, counties and local districts in California would also be barred from working on the project, just as Westlands was, Stork said.

He said the bureau's continued work on the Shasta Dam project may be related to Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt's previous work on behalf of Westlands.

Another interior secretary might have moved on after Westlands dropped out of the project, Stork said.

[More: Interior Department proposes coveted water deal to ex-client of agency head](#)

"It's apparent this is not a normal secretary of the interior because they haven't moved on to other things," Stork said.

Businesses and residents around Lake Shasta would like to see the bureau either get working on the project or give it up, said Matt Doyle, general manager at Lake Shasta Caverns.

If the dam is raised, the lake level also will rise, forcing many businesses around the lake to either move to higher ground or close down.

Businesses and property owners located closer to the lake have been living under the threat of a higher lake level for many years, and it has hurt property values, he said.



The McCloud River, which flows into Lake Shasta, is at the center of a dispute over raising the height of Shasta Dam. (Photo: Contributed photo by Thomas O'Keefe)

Doyle said he predicts the project will eventually be completed, but not until after this year's presidential election.

Before Westlands backed out of the project, bureau officials said they planned to award the first construction contracts in December 2019. That did not happen.

Bureau officials did not provide a new timeline for completing the project, but the agency's website still says the project will be complete in February 2024.

*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. 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!*

<https://www.redding.com/story/news/2020/02/05/california-shasta-dam-height-raise-effort/4651770002/>

*F.O.R addendum: On February 4, 2020, U.S. House of Representatives Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy announced that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation planned a Distribution of Additional Funding for federal fiscal year 2020 of \$8 million dollars for preconstruction engineering and design for the Shasta Dam and Reservoir Enlargement Project. Congress had provided \$20 million for this project in federal fiscal year 2018 but had failed to fund this effort with appropriations outlays for the federal fiscal years 2019 and 2020. The announced distribution could be from the Water Storage Account created by the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016, an account controlled by the Secretary of the Interior. Previous outlays from this account had been made pursuant to Congressional appropriations.*