



Valley Voices

California should not build Temperance Flat Reservoir. The federal government should

By Kristi Diener

April 22, 2020 02:11 PM, Updated April 22, 2020 02:22 PM



The proposed Temperance Flat dam would be beyond the first ridge in the center of this photo.
MARK CROSSE Fresno Bee Staff Photo

Sixty-eight percent of California voters made their wishes clear in 2014 when they voted to approve the Proposition 1 water bond sold to them as the path to building new, major, above-ground storage.

But California never had any intentions of making the people's wishes a reality if the bond passed, which is why the words "dam" and "reservoir" were not mentioned in the carefully crafted language one single time. They used the phrase "water storage" instead, giving themselves plenty of wiggle room to exploit its interpretation.

By the time the \$7.5 billion bond had been whittled down by the California Water Commission, the board appointed by anti-dam governor, Jerry Brown, it was clear that California had allocated as little money as it could get away with for surface storage. One large project, Temperance Flat Reservoir, was awarded a minute fraction of the funding supporters requested after spending four years fulfilling onerous application hurdles.

Temperance Flat is a \$2.7 billion dollar project that would store 1.3 million acre-feet of new water, or enough to supply 13 million people for a year. After the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) for Temperance Flat spent thousands of dollars and several years jumping through all of California's hoops, they were awarded 1/20th of the project's

cost, or a measly \$171 million. But Temperance Flat gained something else from the state, too, and that was California's stamp of approval on the project.

With the realization that California has decades worth of opposition to building reservoirs on its record, it now makes sense to take the dam application, submitted and approved by them, to the federal government for help instead. We have a president who is very much in favor of budgeting money for increased water storage, rather than allowing freshwater to continue becoming seawater. The concept that it is in America's best interest to protect our nation's food independence is also understood by the federal government, while California remains detached.

But there are more reasons to partner with the federal government. Proposition 1 says that projects built with its bond money must provide 50% of its benefits to the ecosystem. This means, if Temperance Flat were built with the \$171 million in the pot, half of the water off the top is automatically owned by environmental causes and likely gets released into the Pacific Ocean.

Conversely, if the JPA that received the money from Prop. 1 were to return it, and the federal government builds the project instead, 100% of the water could be allocated to families and food producers.

Here's something else. Friant Dam is part of the federal Central Valley Project. Temperance Flat would be built behind Friant Dam and Millerton Lake. Why build a state project behind a federal project where the state captures and holds the water first? A better option to ensure future cohesive operations is to build a federal project behind a federal project.

If we want to see new, major, water storage become a reality, it's time to shift our focus from decades of pleading with California to standing up and joining forces with the federal government.

Kristi Diener of Clovis is the founder of the California Water for Food and People Movement, and is a third generation Central Valley family farmer.



Kristi Diener of the California Water for Food and People Movement Contributed Special to The Bee

<https://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article242211701.html>