

Interior requests funding for Shasta Dam raise, Sites Reservoir and Friant-Kern Canal under WIIN Act

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The Trump administration on Monday, June 22, requested \$15 million for the Shasta Dam enlargement project, a project that Tribes, fishing groups and conservation organizations say will drive imperiled winter-run Chinook salmon closer to extinction and flood many of the remaining sacred cultural sites of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe.

This \$15 million was part of the \$108.7 million in funding for surface water storage projects in California under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act of 2016 that Interior Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Timothy Petty requested in a letter sent to Marcy Kaptur, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies.

You can read the letter here: <https://mavensnotebook.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Chairwoman-Kaptur-Letter-WIIN-Storage-06-22-20.pdf>

The request comes from a Department of Interior that is headed by Secretary David Bernhardt, a former lobbyist for the powerful Westlands Water District, the largest agricultural water district in the country, and the oil industry.

According to the letter, “This project will enlarge Shasta Dam and Reservoir, creating an additional 634,000 acre-feet of storage to benefit anadromous fish cold water supply (191,000 acre-feet) and water supply reliability, improve Upper Sacramento River habitat, increase power generation, and increase/improve recreation opportunities.”

The letter says the funds will be used for “preconstruction activities related to Shasta Dam raise, recreation facilities planning/coordination, and reservoir infrastructure modifications.” Pre-construction and design activities include: field explorations; contracts for cultural resource activities to support the required Historic Properties Treatment Plan development, survey data collection, seismic and hydrologic studies, and consultant contracts; and project management. Funds will also be used to begin construction once WIIN requirements are met.

The request also includes \$4 million for Sites Reservoir, another project opposed by Tribes, fishermen and conservationists because it would be used in tandem with the Shasta Dam enlargement to increase water deliveries to the Westlands Water District and other corporate agribusiness interests in the San Joaquin Valley.

“The proposed project includes up to an additional 1.8 million acre-feet of off-stream surface storage to restore flexibility and adaptability to Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP) operations,” the letter states. “Funding will be used for feasibility activities including operational agreements as well as ESA revisions, water rights, and water modeling.”

Besides the \$15 million for the Shasta Dam project and \$4 million for Sites Reservoir, the request includes \$71 million to fix the Friant-Kern Canal, \$3 million to study subsidence on the Delta Mendota Canal, \$1.5 million for studies related to Del Puerto Water District’s proposed reservoir near Patterson and \$7.8 million for Las Vaqueros, as well as other studies.

Representatives Kevin McCarthy, Ken Calvert (CA-42), Paul Cook (CA-08), Mike Garcia (CA-25), Doug LaMalfa (CA-01), Tom McClintock (CA-04), and Devin Nunes (CA-22) issued the following statement praising Petty’s letter requesting the funding.

“Water is the lifeblood that supports California’s families, small businesses, and agricultural producers. However, California’s last major reservoir was built over 40 years ago despite the state’s population doubling since then. This is simply not sustainable, and it’s clearer now more than ever that additional surface water storage in the state is necessary to maintaining our way of life.

“Prior to his election – and most recently during his visit to Bakersfield in February – President Trump recognized the importance of ensuring that our constituents get the water they contract and pay for, and the need for additional storage capacity to capture water during wet years for use in dry ones. That is why we want to commend him, Interior Secretary Bernhardt, and Reclamation Commissioner Burman for continuing to

prioritize building new and expanding existing surface water storage facilities in California to help our state become drought resilient.

“Now, Congress must work expeditiously to incorporate these funding requests, including money for the Shasta Reservoir project, in the Fiscal Year 2021 Energy and Water appropriations bill. We call on California House Democrats to put politics aside and ensure that the very people they were elected to represent have access to water.”

However, salmon advocates slammed the letter requesting funding for the Shasta Dam raise and Sites Reservoir. These say these projects are designed to provide at taxpayers' expense more exported water for corporate farmers at the expense of salmon, Tribes and the people of California.

“The fact is the water that the Sites Reservoir and Shasta Dam raise might provide would go to David Bernhardt's rich former clients like the Westlands Water District so they can farm almonds, for export, in the desert,” said Regina Chichizola, co-director of Save California Salmon. “The best case scenario from these destructive water projects is that much more water will be diverted from our rivers to feed corporate farms on toxic lands, while over a million of California's people continue to struggle for clean water and fishermen and tribes suffer. The worst case scenario is that taxpayers pay millions for new dams and reservoirs that will not ever fill up.”

“People have the right to clean water,” noted Chichizola. “Rural communities and Tribes have the right to the jobs, and the healthy food source, that salmon provide. Corporations do not have the right to our tax dollars, or our clean water. These projects give away our most precious resources to water barons All Californians should fight against this proposal.”

Providing irrigation water to the Westlands Water District and other corporate agribusiness interests so they can grow almonds and other crops for export “is the sole purpose of exporting more water that the north state cannot afford to ship from mountain streams and rivers,” said Caleen Sisk, Chief of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe. “Especially when there are no efforts to help maintain the high mountain streams, rivers, meadows, and trees. You have already taken all that can be taken without now DRYING UP the source. Get rich some other way!”

The dam raise, in conjunction with the construction of Sites Reservoir, would not only sacrifice water, salmon and the Delta to the greed of agribusiness barons, according to dam raise and Sites Reservoir opponents. The dam raise would also inundate or impact sacred sites integral to the Winnemem Wintu's culture and history. Sites that would be flooded include Children's Rock and Puberty Rock, vital sacred sites for the Winnemem Wintu's Puberty Ceremony for young women.

The Winnemem Wintu, who held war dances at Shasta Dam against the raising of dam in 2004 and then again in 2014, call the dam raise a “Weapon of Mass Desecration.”

“How would you feel if someone was coming to burn down your house, everyone knew it was going to happen, but no one — not even the people who are supposed to protect you — cared enough to stop it,” said Marine Sisk, Chief Caleen Sisk’s daughter, on Winnemem sacred sites that would be drowned by the proposed raise of Shasta Dam.

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