



# FRIENDS OF THE RIVER

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## **California's Rivers suffer Major Setback at important Water Commission Meeting**

SACRAMENTO, CA – On Wednesday, December 15, 2021, the California Water Commission (Commission) voted to move forward three water surface water storage projects that will harm our state's environment, cost taxpayers billions of dollars and have a devastating effect on the salmon population. The three projects include, Sites Reservoir, Pacheco Dam and Del Puerto Canyon Dam. The votes mean that these projects are considered environmentally and financially feasible and continue to remain eligible for Proposition 1 funding, which is around \$2.7 billion.

This was a disappointing result for Friends of the River (FOR), a Sacramento-based nonprofit that has been engaged in tracking and opposing Proposition 1 funding for surface water storage projects since 2014. “After having to deal with essentially the same destructive projects for decades, I found the Commission’s ‘rubber stamp’ approach during the meeting particularly concerning,” noted Ron Stork, FOR’s Senior Policy Advocate. “The Commission was given the authority under Proposition 1 to do a rigorous technical review of consequential water projects, and especially in the case of Del Puerto Canyon Dam, it was clear they were not willing to do so.”

FOR and over a dozen other organizations submitted a detailed [letter](#) to the Commission in advance of the meeting, urging them to not to move any of the three dam projects forward – especially in light of the climate crisis and state initiatives like 30 x 30 and Outdoor Access for All.

**Sites Reservoir** – The first surface water project the Commission considered was Sites Reservoir. Sites would divert water from the already over tapped Sacramento River. It will flood a 13,200-acre area containing invaluable cultural resources, wetlands, oak woodland habitat and 24 endangered species. Sites Reservoir will deplete the salmon population and taxpayer pocket books. Despite over an hour and a half of aggressive public comment, including from a number

of important tribes, the Commission unanimously voted that Sites would remain eligible for \$800 million of public funding.

**Pacheco Reservoir** – The Commission then moved on to find the Pacheco Dam project feasible in spite of it partially occupying Henry Coe State Park and doubling in cost to over \$2 billion since the last Commission meeting. When confronted with the accusation in public comment that such a use was illegal, the Santa Clara Valley Water District replied that it had done extensive legal research and concluded that such Park occupation was lawful. They have “begun to discuss” the matter with the State Department of Parks and Recreation. Despite a Commissioner observing that Valley Water “still had quite a bit of work left to do” on the project, the vote was unanimous.

**Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir** – Finally, the Commission considered a new entry to the Proposition 1 process, Del Puerto Canyon Dam. The Commission staff report said that they were unable to determine the facts necessary to support feasibility determinations. In spite of staff’s conclusions and public comment in opposition to the project from organizations and individuals, five Commissioners still voted to approve, with three voting against (Chair Alvarado and Commissioners Steiner and Arthur).

“While it was a setback, this is not the end,” said FOR’s Resilient Rivers Director Ashley Overhouse. “The Commission noted that ‘this is just the beginning’ and there is ‘plenty of time before funding allocations.’ We agree, and believe these projects will not hold up under more rigorous scrutiny. Friends of the River and our allies will continue to fight for healthy rivers and sustainable water solutions like water recycling and groundwater recharge in 2022. We must continue to engage with the Commission and other stakeholders to ensure our state achieves a resilient water future in the face of climate change.”

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*Friends of the River protects and restores California’s rivers, streams, and their watersheds;  
as well as advocating for sustainable water management.*