



**AQUALLIANCE**  
DEFENDING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WATERS



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## **The fight against Sites Reservoir builds momentum**

### **Environmental and Tribal coalition submits extensive comments on why Sites is bad for California**

January 28, 2022, Sacramento, Calif. - Today, a coalition of environmental and tribal groups, including Friends of the River, California Native Plant Society, AquAlliance and Save California Salmon, submitted comments to the Sites Project Authority regarding the proposed Sites Reservoir. The comments come after the California Water Commission voted unanimously on December 15, 2021 to move the \$3 billion water storage project forward, despite more than 50,000 signatures of opposition gathered through a Save California Salmon petition.

According to the coalition's comments, the proposed Sites Reservoir Project would harm major California waterways, destroy critical habitat for sensitive species, and undermine California's climate change efforts. The environmental groups urge Sites Reservoir proponents to gather more data to more accurately reflect the project's impact.

"After review, we were disappointed to find that there was a significant amount of critical data missing from the Project's environmental reports," said Ron Stork, FOR's senior policy advocate, referencing the absence of data such as a Reservoir Operations Plan, rare plant surveys, and inadequate tribal consultation. "Without that information, we are not sure how Sites Reservoir Authority can substantiate many of its claims that it will provide any benefit to the natural environment or mitigate its considerable harms."

Located in the Sacramento Valley, Sites Reservoir would divert water from the already over-tapped Trinity and Sacramento Rivers and flood a 13,200-acre area containing cultural resources, wetlands, oak woodland habitat and dozens of endangered species. The stored water would then be released into the Bay Delta for additional water exports.

"The Delta is being further diminished along with its cultural and traditional resources that Tribes have utilized from the Delta for food, medicine, transportation, shelter, clothing, ceremony and traditional lifeways from the beginning of time," stated Malissa Tayaba, the Vice Chairman of the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. "Additional diversions from the Sacramento River watershed will exaggerate an already damaged and diminishing Delta ecosystem and estuary and our Tribe's ties to our homelands."

The coalition also raised concerns that the environmental report downplays the risk to water quality. AquAlliance's Water Policy Analyst Jim Brobeck notes, "The water diverted to, impounded in, and released from Sites Reservoir will include *several* concerning heavy metals, including mercury. The proponents even recognize methylmercury is of particular concern in the report by declaring they will not stock fish in the reservoir for at least 10 years."

Sites Reservoir also contradicts other recent state initiatives focused on climate resilience and land conservation, according to coalition members.

"Inundating open space and storing more water above ground is counterintuitive to the direction California water management must go in the face of climate change and California's goal to protect 30 percent of land and water by 2030," said Isabella Langone, CNPS conservation program manager. "The significant funds proposed for Sites should instead go toward multi-benefit solutions that promote native species, sustainable water management and land conservation."

If developed, Sites Reservoir would be owned by Sites Project Authority, an entity comprised primarily of local counties, Central Valley Project (CVP) water contractors and irrigation districts. Most potential buyers of the Sites Reservoir water sales are State Water Project (SWP) water contractors, predominantly located in Southern California.

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*For almost 50 years, Friends of the River (FOR) has been the voice of California's rivers as the only statewide river non-profit conservation organization. FOR's mission is to protect and restore California Rivers by influencing public policy and inspiring citizen action. Visit our website and follow us on social media to learn more: [www.friendsoftheriver.org](http://www.friendsoftheriver.org)*

*California Native Plant Society ("CNPS"), a non-profit environmental organization with over 10,000 members in 35 Chapters across California and Baja California, Mexico. CNPS's mission is to protect California's native plant heritage and preserve it for future generations through the application of science, research, education, and conservation. We work closely with decision-makers, scientists, and local planners to advocate for well-informed policies, regulations, and land management practices.*

*AquAlliance exists to defend northern California waters and to challenge threats to the hydrologic health of the northern Sacramento River watershed.*

*Save California Salmon (SCS) is dedicated to policy change and community advocacy for Northern California's salmon and fish dependent people.*