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Coalition of Conservation Groups Unite in Opposition To Sites Reservoir, Formally Protest Water Right

SACRAMENTO, CA – Friends of the River (FOR) and the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA), two of California’s oldest and most respected water conservation organizations, along with a coalition of tribes and environmental organizations including the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, AquAlliance, California Water Impact Network, Cal Wild, Fly Fishers of Davis, Friends of the Swainson’s Hawk, Northern California Council of Fly Fishers International, Restore the Delta, Save California Salmon, Sierra Club California, and Water Climate Trust, have submitted a protest against the water rights application and petitions of the Sites Project Authority for the proposed Sites Reservoir. This protest is part of a legally required process to ensure public concerns are addressed when granting water rights in California.

Jann Dorman, Executive Director of Friends of the River, released the following statement:

“Friends of the River stands firmly in opposition to granting the water rights to build the \$4.8 billion Sites Reservoir. The water needed to achieve the purported project benefits is simply not available without causing even greater harm to the environment, vulnerable communities, and the public. The Sacramento River and Bay Delta are already over-allocated and in environmental collapse. The required heavy rain events will likely be increasingly unpredictable, of short duration when they do occur, and take place within the overall context of hotter, drier, longer periods of drought. We use more water than we have, and the oft-proposed solutions, like Sites, sacrifice more of the river flows to quench a thirst that far outpaces capacity. At some point, we must accept that conservation is now cheaper and more equitable than more dams. While some wealthy water users will benefit from Sites Reservoir, the people of California will not.

The truth is that Sites will add very little to California’s water portfolio overall, or to the vulnerable communities who can’t afford expensive Sites water, and its harm to the Sacramento River, Delta ecosystems, and communities that rely on them will be irreversible and ongoing.”

The protest lays out a plethora of evidence for the environmental harm that Sites Reservoir will cause, as well as the ways in which Sites Reservoir will not produce nearly as much water as advocates for the project hope it will. [Read the full protest HERE.](#)

Chris Shutes, Executive Director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance stated:

“Building new reservoirs will never solve the problem of giving away too much water. Sites would join a system of reservoirs whose drains are too big for their spigots. The supposed environmental benefits rely on promises of responsible management by the people who give away too much water in the first place. The pay-to-play model is inequitable and unjust. Sites Reservoir is a bad deal California: for its fish and wildlife, for its rivers, for its people.”

According to the protest, Sites Reservoir’s negative environmental impact is the result of impaired timing, temperature and volume of flows in the Sacramento River and Delta, increased concentration of toxic metals, the formation of harmful algae blooms, and the [immense greenhouse gas emissions](#) Sites will create. Meanwhile, Sites Reservoir is expected to only be responsible for 0.657% of the state’s water if constructed. That expensive water will go to those few who can afford it. These wealthy investors to the Sites Project will be able to resell their water at inflated prices in times of drought and shortage, using the profits to mitigate the high cost of investment. FOR believes the construction of Sites Reservoir, a proposal that will cost billions in taxpayer dollars, is purely a boondoggle for the wealthy water users who will benefit.

This protest comes on the heels of the release of a [major scientific study](#) done in conjunction with Patagonia, the apparel company, and Tell The Dam Truth that identifies how the construction of Sites Reservoir will contribute as much methane into the environment as 80,000 gas-powered vehicles per day, covered by [the LA Times last week](#).

Friends of the River believes the state can deliver more water to water-stricken communities at a lower cost through more investments in water conservation and recycling, better agricultural water management and efficiency, and improved agricultural land use diversification. You can read more about Friends of the River’s position on Sites Reservoir and alternatives to it [HERE](#).

For more than a half-century, Friends of the River (FOR) has been at the forefront of California’s environmentalist movement for a sustainable water future. FOR is dedicated to protecting and restoring California’s rivers, streams, and watersheds, while advocating for sustainable water management and water solutions that protect the environment. Healthy rivers are a critical component of a sustainable water future in California and FOR rejects the notion that the state must choose between healthy river ecosystems and having enough water. With the state’s water crisis approaching a breaking point, FOR is in its toughest fight yet as it works to stop the Sites Reservoir boondoggle while offering more practical and sustainable alternatives to protect and restore California’s rivers.

The California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA) has been an advocate for fish, habitat, and water quality for 40 years. A leader in efforts to improve fisheries and fishing opportunities, CSPA is also one of California's major water policy organizations, with decades of consistent and effective advocacy before the State Water Board and regional water quality control boards.

[Read the full protest **HERE**.](#)

For more information on Friends of the River, visit <https://www.friendsoftheriver.org>.

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