

Our View: Sites proponents have years of advocacy ahead of them to get the 500,000 acre-foot lake finally under construction

*Marysville Appeal-Democrat Editorial Board
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Sites Reservoir proponents are happy with what's happened this year ... they've collected commitments for some serious coinage – state and federal.

They can stay grounded, however, by the fact that they've got several billion dollars still to go. There's a lot of work ahead.

The off-stream reservoir adds a sizable storage capacity to Northern California, with none of the environmental and fewer political traps of an on-stream dam. The Sites project would dam up a valley and would pipe water in from some distance. Water would come out of the Sacramento River during low-demand winter months or during high-water events. The water would sit there in Sites Reservoir, then, to be drained via canals for whatever uses investors determine – irrigation, municipal supplies, or environmental needs.

The reservoir, as presently planned, would add about 500,000 acre-feet of water annually to the water system.

There are critics, of course, but North Cal can justify having the supply – it will come in handy, for sure, and could benefit the entire state one way or another.

There's been talk and planning for a Sites Reservoir (located on both sides of the Colusa/Glenn counties border) for literally decades. There was always some other priority for attention and funding, however.

Now we're considering dramatically changing climate patterns and snowpacks (which have historically provided about a third of our water supply) which don't measure up or melt too fast when they do.

There's impetus for a big reservoir in the north.

“I'm a lot more confident (it's going to get built) than I was three years ago,” said Jim Watson, Sites Project Authority general manager, in an article last week. “But we still have a lot of questions we need to answer, not only for ourselves but as part of completing the environmental review process to give the public an opportunity to review.”

He explains the Authority's strategy for dealing with a project of this size and scope: it's like an onion ... peeling one layer at a time.

This, of course, is like an onion the size of an SUV. The entire project is estimated to cost, at present, a cool \$5.1 billion to construct. The Authority has procured a tentative commitment from the state for \$816 million in Proposition 1 funding. And they got a U.S. Department of Agriculture commitment to provide a loan to cover the cost of a crucial piece of the project ... another \$449 million.

So they're about one-quarter of the way there, funding wise.

It's going to take long-term relations and constant advocacy from allies in government and various water agencies. And they need to keep attracting support. For years to come.

Metropolitan Water District, which provides water to 19 million people in Southern California is interested.

"Storage is key in managing water in dry years," said Steve Arakawa, manager of the Bay-Delta Initiatives Program for Metropolitan. "For all participants, that's what they are really looking for, to develop storage and add that capability into the system."

The Authority has to move ahead with studies related to the project – engineering, environmental and operational plans. They're on track, Watson said, to have critical permits in place by the end of 2021 and are hoping to have construction underway as early as 2022, heavy construction a few years later.

We're hoping that isn't strictly wishful thinking.

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https://www.appeal-democrat.com/opinion/our-view-sites-proponents-have-years-of-advocacy-ahead-of/article_7ca11f38-0144-11e9-a36a-f7fcdbd92047.html

Friends of the River addendum: We presume that the headline confuses storage capacity with yield or new deliveries. The Sites Project Authority, and previously the California Department of Water Resources, has proposed 1.2 and 1.8 million acre-feet dam complexes here. The Authority in what could prove to be overly optimistic assumptions has projected a 500 thousand acre-feet annual yield from the larger dam.