

## California announces tentative funding for new giant dams

By Kurtis Alexander

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California officials said Friday that eight major water projects qualify for a share of billions in state drought funds, an announcement that breathes new life into plans for two reservoir expansions in the Bay Area and two new massive dams in the Central Valley.

Bids to enlarge the East Bay's Los Vaqueros Reservoir and Santa Clara County's Pacheco Reservoir were deemed eligible for the highly sought Proposition 1 money. So were proposals for a new, 13-mile-long reservoir in Sites (Colusa County) and a new, 18-mile-long reservoir known as Temperance Flat near Fresno.



The dam at Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Brentwood, Calif., on Friday Feb. 2, 2018. More than a dozen local water agencies are trying to tap a windfall of state funds to expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir into a regional giant that serves San Francisco and Silicon Valley.

Photo: Michael Macor / The Chronicle

Friday's funding decision was good news for proponents of the storage projects, most of whom had been denied money in a tentative scoring of their applications announced in January. The California Water Commission initially determined that just three of 11 proposals submitted met Prop. 1's strict terms for providing public benefit.

Most of the applicants appealed the original decision, which could have doomed many of the projects, resulting in a new round of scoring.

"All along, the commission has been eager to get this money out the door," said Armando Quintero, chairman of the Water Commission, which has taken criticism for not being more generous with the water funds.

Still, before the new scores are final, they must be approved by the Water Commission's governing board in a vote scheduled for the first week of May. The board is expected to make a final decision on allocating the money in July.

At stake is \$2.7 billion of Prop. 1's \$7.5 billion reserved for water storage. The water measure, which also includes money for recycling, treatment and wetlands restoration, was passed by voters in 2014 with the goal of improving California's resiliency to drought.

Under the new scoring, the Contra Costa Water District is eligible for up to \$423 million to put toward the \$795 million expansion of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir in the East Bay hills north of Livermore.

The district is hoping to boost the reservoir's capacity by 70 percent to 275,000 acre-feet of water, enough to supply more than a half million households for a year. The district plans to share its excess with nearby water agencies, including the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and East Bay Municipal Utility District.

Also, the Santa Clara Valley Water District became eligible for up to \$485 million to put toward its \$969 million enlargement of the Pacheco Reservoir in the hills east of Gilroy. The intent is to provide more water for South Bay residents by increasing the reservoir's capacity from 5,500 to 140,000 acre-feet.

The new scoring is also a boon for efforts to construct California's first major dams in years.

The proposed \$5.2 billion Sites Reservoir off the Sacramento River, with a capacity of 1.8 million acre-feet of water, qualifies for up to \$933 million of Prop. 1 money. The proposed \$2.7 billion Temperance Flat Reservoir on the San Joaquin River, which would add more than 1 million acre-feet to an existing reservoir, qualifies for \$171 million.

Whether the sums are enough to get the big projects off the ground remains to be seen.

While more than a third of Prop. 1 money was allocated to water storage, the terms of the measure require projects to do more than hold water. They have to provide other benefits, such as adding water for fish passage or creating recreation opportunities for boaters.

The funding scores, which have been controversial, are based on how much benefit beyond water storage is provided. The revised figures come after the applicants submitted additional information on their projects.

The other projects qualifying for money include groundwater banks in Sacramento County, Kern County and the Inland Empire.

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