



With state allocation set, Sites Reservoir officials begin securing more funding

California Water Commission awarded about half of the requested amount

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Local congressman urges federal agency to allocate more funds

A group of congressional Democrats from California, including John Garamendi (D-Fairfield), sent a letter to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation urging the federal agency to allocate an additional \$37.4 million for Sites Reservoir in fiscal year 2019-20.

The bureau recently committed \$4.34 million for the storage project as part of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act). Friday's letter requested the bureau build upon that investment.

"Federal support will be essential to moving this vital project toward completion. This letter shows that Sites has broad support from just about every part of the state and will hopefully convince Reclamation to award additional funding to supplement the state of California's investment," said Garamendi, in a press release.

The Sites Reservoir project will move forward, according to officials, despite being awarded in a recent California Water Commission announcement about half what project backers sought.

They will spend the next few months securing the necessary financing to begin the next phase.

The Commission announced Tuesday that Sites could expect \$816 million in state funding.

"We are pleased to reach this milestone," said Jim Watson, general manager of the Sites Project Authority. "We look forward to working with the commission on the next step, which is to advance the project. We will continue working with our members on starting that next phase of work."

The funding from the commission – the largest portion of Proposition 1 funding assigned to any of the projects vying for the \$2.7 billion available for water storage projects – will give the state a portion of the water stored in the reservoir to be used for refuge water supplies, Delta smelt, recreational opportunities and localized flood control.

In addition to the \$816 million in encumbered funds, the Commission noted the authority could get \$40.8 million in early funding to help

finance environmental analysis and acquire the necessary permits to construct and operate the project – Phase 2. Watson said that process should take two to three years to complete.

He said leadership has already begun working with the project's 35 member agencies to secure additional financing for the next phase of the project and hopes to complete that process by the end of the year.

"We are still going forward with the project as it is currently configured. As we get into permitting and gather more input from the public, elements (of the project) will be tweaked and shaped to better minimize impacts, but we don't foresee any wholesale changes. Once we get all the permits, that's about the last point in time we can make any real course corrections," he said.

The authority is also using federal funds that were awarded last year to help advance studies on the project. Watson said the authority is hoping to complete a feasibility report by the end of August. That report, he said, will give a better idea of what the federal government's role in the project might be.

"As we start advancing the rest of engineering and environmental analysis, once that is completed (the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation) will have more information to decide what funding, if any, to request from Congress," Watson said. "We see it as something similar to what we offered to the state, which was a concept of sharing the reservoir for them to use for environmental benefits. So, we are working with Reclamation on that process."

After the environmental analysis is completed and permits are acquired, the authority will return to the Commission to essentially finalize what the state will buy in for. That means the \$816 million figure could change.

"It's still somewhat of a fluid situation," Watson said.

Once project officials have a better idea on what the state, federal government and participating water agencies plan on buying in for, the authority will be able to begin Phase 3, which is final design and real estate acquisition.

"The water commission does have the ability to put additional funds into the project down the road, so we are somewhat flexible if the state wants to invest more," Watson said. "We'd be interested in seeing that happen."

Sites would be located in Colusa and Glenn counties and would be an offstream reservoir. During significant storm events, the project would pump water from the Sacramento River. As it is currently proposed, the reservoir would be able to store approximately 1.8 million acre-feet of water.

https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/with-state-allocation-set-sites-reservoir-officials-begin-securing-more/article_6dca3fc2-923f-11e8-9b7d-dbaad8973541.html