

# State water board funds Sites Reservoir study

Thursday, Aug 18 2011, 5:05 pm

Susan Meeker and Todd R. Hansen / Tri-County Newspapers

Online link: <http://www.willows-journal.com/news/study-7027-decades-three.html>



For more than three decades, Colusa County's valley residents have called for a foothills reservoir west of Maxwell.

Those decades have included more than a half dozen flood years, and an even greater number of drought years for which proponents of the Sites Reservoir argued could have provided some relief.

But in an era when more dams have been torn down than built in the North State, the project has had little political or financial support.

Until now.

The California Water Resources Control Board this week voted 3-0 without discussion to allocate \$1.75 million in Proposition 204 funds for the environmental studies related to the reservoir project.

The potential benefits of the Sites Reservoir have been long debated, starting in the 1970s before the anti-dam revolution.

Proponents have consistently argued that the Antelope Valley, where John Sites homesteaded then helped develop the community that took his name, was a perfect place to store runoff from the winter snows.

Now the political climate might also be right, as pressures on the need for water in urban Southern California and for ecological remedies in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta converge.

The Sites Joint Powers Authority, which includes Colusa and Glenn counties, the Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District, Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority, Maxwell Irrigation District, Yolo County Flood Control District and Reclamation District 108, will complete the environmental analysis in cooperation with the Department of Water Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Among the requirements is compliance with the Safe, Clean and Reliable Drinking Water Supply Act of 2010, identifying beneficiaries for the project, developing financing mechanisms and alternatives and coordinating with local and regional interests.

The cost to build the reservoir is estimated at \$2.3 billion to \$3.2 billion depending on the conveyance options.

A state water bond that could help fund construction of the reservoir is slated for the November 2012 ballot.

**For more on Sites Reservoir:**

- [Sites Reservoir FAQ](#)
- [Map and Fact Sheet](#)

The legislation in the water bond identifies multiple benefits from the project, including ecosystem restoration actions on the Sacramento River, flood control, improved water quality, recreation, enhanced water supply and emergency response.

And even time has proven to be on everyone's side, with evolved improvements in modern technology and green energy.

The environmental study is viewed as a critical step in the evaluation process to determine what role the Sites Reservoir might play in implementing the 2006 Bay-Delta Plan.

Water officials will decide if the project titled "North-of-the Delta Offstream Storage Investigate," will help meet Delta water quality and flow-related needs, as well as assisting in the process to meet other statewide water demands.

John Brown, a civil engineer who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley, said it will.

"California can expect to reach a population of 40 (million) to 50 million people by 2040," said Brown, a member of the Central Valley Flood Protection Board. "If we don't do anything today, we are not going to have enough water."

Brown said Southern California is already facing the loss of 200,000 to 400,000 acre feet of water annually from the settlement of litigation between Arizona v. California and five Native American tribes along the Colorado River, and a loss of 662,000 acre feet of water annually from the completion of the Central Arizona Project.

That shortage will put more demand on Northern California and farmers to use less water.

"Conservation won't be enough," he said.