

Frequently Asked Questions: **General**

Will Sites Reservoir help increase water supplies in future droughts?

Yes. Sites Reservoir is an insurance policy for future droughts. Sites Reservoir does not rely on snowpack and if the scientific projections are correct about the impacts of climate change (i.e. California is expected to receive about the same annual precipitation that it currently does but more will come as rain instead of snow), then having Sites Reservoir will mean we can safely collect more water in the reservoir for use during future droughts.

Will Sites Reservoir divert water from the Sacramento River even during critically dry years?

It depends. Even during drier years there can be significant precipitation events that present conditions where water can be diverted safely from the river and placed in Sites Reservoir. All diversions will be subject to the highly protective operating conditions that are currently being proposed and will ultimately be permitted by State and Federal regulatory agencies for the Sites Reservoir Project.

Will Sites Reservoir decrease Delta flows?

Yes, slightly, when the Project is diverting. However, since the Sites Reservoir diversions occur only when there are high river flows, any reduction to Delta flows would be minor and would not impact any of the beneficial uses of the water in the Delta. Storing water in Sites Reservoir during times when there is a lot of flow in the Sacramento River for use during times with the flows are low, including during drought periods, is part of the statewide strategy for adapting to changing climate conditions and to return much needed flexibility to the statewide water management system.

Have concerns about the impact of Sites Reservoir operations on the environment been addressed in the current proposal?

The Project operations have been modified substantially over the last two years to be more protective of the environment. These modifications have reduced the Project diversions from the Sacramento River substantially, in fact diversions have been reduced almost in half, as compared to the criteria proposed in 2017. The current Project operations strikes the needed balance between environmental protections and Project affordability that must exist for the Project to proceed.

How much would have been diverted in 2021?

Zero diversions into the reservoir in 2021 would have occurred if Sites Reservoir would have been in place. This is in accordance with the highly protective operating conditions that are currently being proposed for the Project. However, the one million acre-feet estimate that would have already been stored as result of the wetter years in 2017 and 2019 is the water that would be available today. And if 2022 is another dry year it is estimated there could be approximately 400,000 acre-feet of that left in Sites. This water is badly needed addition to a severely depleted water supply system that was not built to address future climate.

Is Sites Reservoir compliant with Proposition 1?

Even with the Project changes that have occurred since the original award in 2018, the Sites Reservoir Project continues to provide the public benefits the California Water Commission conditionally approved for the Project in State Proposition 1 funding in 2018. The Project meets the Proposition 1 conditions and continues to meet all the feasibility requirements for investment by the State. In December 2021, the California Water Commission deemed the Project feasible.

Who profits from Sites Reservoir?

The Sites Reservoir Project is led by a Joint Powers Authority made up of irrigation agencies, water districts, cities, and counties in the Sacramento Valley area. The Project is being developed on a beneficiary pays principle which means that the benefits received are paid for by those receiving the benefits. The beneficiaries of the Project include the federal government, state government, and local public agencies. The water generated by the Project will be used for agriculture, meeting water demands of businesses and residents, and serving the needs of the environment throughout California.



Is Sites Reservoir a private reservoir?

No. Sites Reservoir is funded 100 percent by local, state, and federal public dollars. There are environmental, recreational and flood control benefits – as well new dry year water supplies secured for public agency ratepayers throughout California. Participation in Sites is broad and diverse, including the Bureau of Reclamation, State of California, urban areas of Southern California and the Bay Area, as well as public irrigation districts in the Sacramento Valley and San Joaquin Valley.

How does the cost of water from Sites compare to other sources during dry years?

The Sites Reservoir compares favorably to other dry year water supply alternatives which improves water affordability for Project participants and the 24 million users they serve, including disadvantaged communities. With water being one of California's most scarce and valuable resources, it is essential to develop a diverse portfolio of sustainable water supply solutions. But it is equally important for decision-makers and stakeholders to evaluate the most cost-effective options available to maximize the value of these investments. The Project has been designed to put the state's limited water resources to the best use in an affordable, flexible, and sustainable way.

How can member agencies be assured that there will be water in Sites Reservoir if they are paying for storage?

Sites Reservoir is a beneficiary pays project, which means that the benefits of the project go to those paying. Each participant (including environmental uses) has control over their portion of the storage space and a proportionate share of the water diverted into Sites Reservoir. There is flexibility in the timing and uses of the water, including for the environment. The assurance of water being in the reservoir is largely the result of the individual participant decisions in their operations of their portion of the facility. This way, each member is assured to receive what they pay for in a way that works within and complements that member's water supply portfolio.

Why has it taken so much time to get Sites to the finish line?

Sites has been around for decades with efforts originally being led by the California Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation. The Project had starts and stops, as is typically seen in large projects led by the state or federal government. The Sites Project Authority was formed in 2010 to move the Project more expeditiously. Big projects take time and careful consideration, and the Authority has done that over the last decade and will continue into the future. Sites Reservoir is anticipated to be operational around 2030. The Authority has made great strides over the last two years to “right-size” the Project for affordability and permitability, two critical success factors. This represents a huge milestone for Project advancement and sets a turning point that makes the Project more feasible and more likely to be built than ever before.

Why does this project make sense now, after 60 years?

Many aspects of water management in California have changed in the recent decade that put the Sites Reservoir on the fast track to completion. These changes include the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the continued declining reliability of the state and federal water projects, increasing regulatory changes requiring diversification of water purveyors' water portfolios, and the need for water resiliency to address the inevitable uncertainty of the changing climate. Additionally, never before has California had a means to invest in storing water for the environment which was made possible with the overwhelming voter passage in 2014 of Proposition 1 making \$2.7 billion available for public benefits of water storage. Approximately 18% of Sites Reservoir is dedicated to delivering water for the environmental purposes as a result of Proposition 1 funds which, for the first time, creates an asset California's regulators can use to adaptively manage for the benefit of fish and wildlife.

In hindsight, should this project have been built when originally contemplated, and if so what would be different today?

Hindsight is always 20/20 and if Sites had been built decades ago the added flexibility it would have created would have been very beneficial for California water management over the years. From a more recent perspective, if California had Sites Reservoir in a dry year like 2021 it is estimated there would be close to 1 million acre-feet of additional water supplies available for farms, cities and the environment. Sites Reservoir diverts water in wet periods and stores that water for use in the drier times.

