

Mid Pacific Region, 916-978-5100, <http://www.usbr.gov/mp>, February 2017

## Folsom Dam & Reservoir: Frequently Asked Questions

### 1 – What is the function of Folsom Dam – Why was it built?

Completed in 1956 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, flood damage reduction is the authorized purpose for Folsom Dam and Reservoir. Sacramento and surrounding areas reside in a flood plain that relies on a state-federal flood control system designed to keep floodwaters away from people and property. The project is operated by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation as part of the [Central Valley Project](#), serving water supply demands in the state of California.

Additionally, Folsom Dam and Reservoir produces hydroelectricity, helps to maintain water quality in the Bay Delta, provides recreation and water for local municipal agencies.

### 2 – Who is responsible for releases?

Reclamation is responsible for daily operations and releases at Folsom Reservoir. It's operated as part of one, integrated CVP system, which includes Trinity, Shasta, New Melones and Millerton reservoirs.

Reclamation releases water from Folsom for many reasons including water supply, water quality in the Delta (primarily to prevent salinity intrusion from the Pacific Ocean), and for endangered and threatened species. Reclamation has contracts with the following agencies for water supply from Folsom Reservoir: El Dorado Irrigation District, City of Roseville, Sacramento County Water Agency, Sacramento County (assignment from SMUD), San Juan Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Placer County Water Agency, and City of Folsom.

### 3 – What determines when/how much water is released?

Determining how much water to release from Folsom and the other CVP reservoirs is constantly being assessed in coordination with numerous agencies including the California Department of Water Resources, State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Corps. Reclamation also coordinates CVP operations with 271 CVP contractors, 80 Preference Power customers, numerous environmental groups, and federally recognized tribes and Native American groups in an effort to jointly maximize the operational flexibility of both the CVP and California's State Water Project.

Reclamation bases overall CVP reservoir operations and releases—including Folsom Reservoir—on a number of legal, contractual, and regulatory requirements and takes into

consideration projected runoff forecasts throughout the Central Valley that cover a range of future wet and dry conditions. The latest weather forecasting information, current and forecast reservoir storage and inflow data, and snowpack accumulation are all used to help determine appropriate reservoir releases at any given point in time.

## **4 – Who controls Folsom Dam during flood operations?**

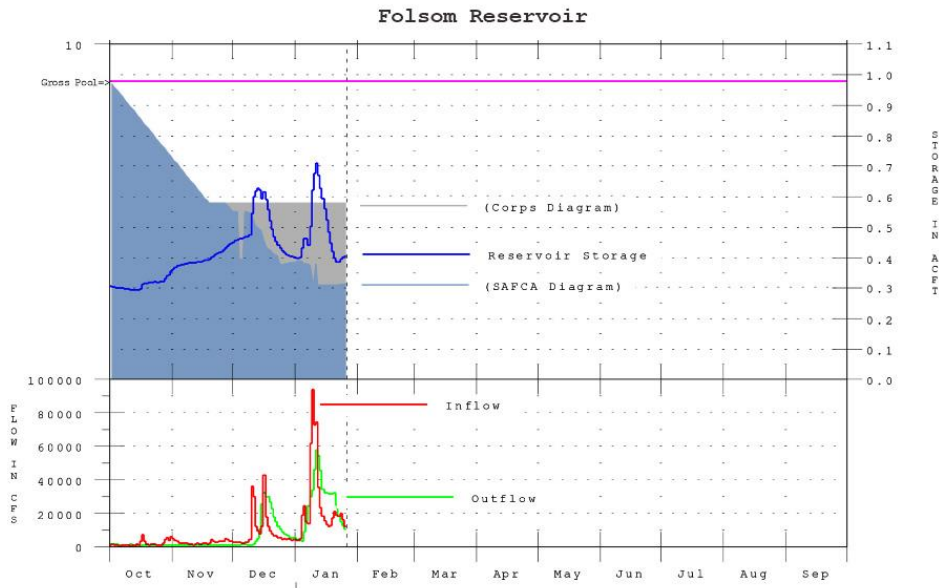
Reclamation is responsible for managing releases when reservoir levels go above seasonal thresholds, also called flood operations; however, several considerations which Reclamation takes into account include close coordination and agreements with other agencies.

The Corps, with input from local, state and federal agencies, developed a comprehensive “owner’s manual,” the [Water Control Manual](#). Within the manual is a diagram that defines seasonal reservoir storage volumes to leave empty in the fall, winter and spring, and reservoir release requirements in order to reduce flood risk.

A separate agreement and diagram exists between Reclamation and the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency defining how much room to leave empty in the reservoir. The SAFCA diagram establishes an additional storage requirement for the city of Sacramento’s flood risk reduction and differs from the Corps’ manual by considering available storage in three upstream reservoirs: French Meadows, Hell Hole and Union Valley.

Between the two agreements/diagrams is a built-in flexibility upon which Reclamation and the Corps collaborate when reservoir operations must consider dam safety guidelines. Dam safety data for Folsom and other reservoirs may be found on this website: <http://www.spk-wc.usace.army.mil/fcgi-bin/midnight.py?days=0&report=FCR>

The goal is to strike a balance between multiple purposes without compromising public safety and the protection of property downstream. Reclamation considers these agreements, along with other operational demands, as well as the latest forecast/current conditions to help inform its release decisions.



The top half of the image shows Folsom Reservoir storage being maintained in between the federal and locally recommended amounts during the rainy season. The lower half, illustrates large variations to inflows and outflows that impact reservoir operations. Please contact Reclamation public affairs with questions, [mppublicaffairs@usbr.gov](mailto:mppublicaffairs@usbr.gov) or 916-978-5100 (TTY 800-877-8339)

For a similar, real-time visual representation of Folsom Reservoir in relation to the Corps and SAFCA diagrams as above, please visit <http://www.spk-wc.usace.army.mil/cgi-bin/getplot.py?plot=folr&wy=2017&interval=d&length=wy>

## 5 – Why is water still released during drought conditions?

During drought, releases are scaled back to conserve storage when inflows are poor; however, water still needs to flow downstream to maintain the fishery habitat per federal and state regulatory requirements and for other downstream demands, which include seasonal water supply needs, water right requirements, regulatory requirements and biological considerations.

Folsom is one of the smallest CVP reservoirs with one of the highest refill potentials; this means it can fill quickly and frequently. Enough water passes through the reservoir to fill and empty it 2-3 times in a wet year. Inflow from the Sierras needs to be appropriately managed as snow melts in the spring and runs downstream into Folsom Reservoir. Basically, storage conditions at the reservoir need to be at an appropriate level in the fall to prepare for the upcoming rain or snow season.

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