



# Sites Reservoir

## (North of Delta Offstream Storage)

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **1. What are the benefits of Sites Reservoir and who are the beneficiaries?**

The federal benefits of Sites Reservoir include operational flexibility for the Central Valley Project (CVP) and benefits for anadromous fish through increased cold-water storage. Additional state and local benefits include increased water supply for both North-of-Delta and South-of-Delta water users, improved reliability of water deliveries, water supply for refuges, and Delta ecosystem enhancement. Project beneficiaries include the Bureau of Reclamation, the state of California, and the member agencies of Sites Project Authority. Sites Project Authority has 23 member agencies, which include both agricultural and urban water districts throughout California.

#### **2. What is the source of water for Sites Reservoir?**

Sites Reservoir will divert water from the Sacramento River south of Shasta Dam during periods of excess conditions.

#### **3. What is the timing of the Sites Reservoir project?**

The Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the Sites Reservoir Project is expected to be released in October 2022, followed by a Record of Decision in December 2022. Construction would occur 2023 – 2030, with full operation of the reservoir anticipated in 2030.

#### **4. Why was a supplemental EIS necessary?**

A Supplemental Draft EIS (SDEIS) is used when new or updated information becomes available after the publication of the Draft EIS (DEIS). The SDEIS for the Sites Reservoir Project expands on information provided in the Sites Reservoir Project DEIS released in 2017.

#### **5. Will Reclamation respond to comments on the 2017 Draft EIS?**

Yes, Reclamation will respond to comments on both the 2017 DEIS and the 2021 SDEIS that were received during their respective comment periods.

#### **6. How is the project going to be funded?**

The project is pursuing implementation as a state-led project under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act. Under the WIIN Act, the federal government can contribute a maximum of 25% cost share with a non-federal entity providing the remaining funding. The

remainder of the costs would be paid for by the state of California and the member agencies of the Sites Project Authority.

### **7. Does this project impact the Trinity River?**

The project would not affect or result in changes in the operation of the CVP, Trinity River Division facilities (including Clear Creek). Reclamation would continue to operate the Trinity River Division consistent with all applicable statutory, legal and contractual obligations, including but not limited to the Trinity River Record of Decision (ROD), the 2017 ROD for the Long-Term Plan for the Lower Klamath River, and the provision of (not less than) 50,000 acre-feet identified in Trinity River Division Central Valley Project Act of 1955 to be made available to Humboldt County and downstream water users.

### **8. How does this project impact water quality in the Sacramento River and Delta?**

The project would have some impacts to water quality and would also enhance beneficial uses of water, even improving water quality in some areas. For example, increases in outflow in drier years could reduce seawater intrusion into the Delta. During those same periods, exchanges with Sites project water could benefit fish by preserving cold-water supplies from Shasta Lake, Lake Oroville and Folsom Lake later into the year. Sites Project Authority would implement best management practices to minimize any potential water quality impacts associated with facility operations and maintenance. These would include actions to prevent spills and reduce runoff that may cause sediment or contaminants to flow into waterbodies. Monthly water quality testing would be performed for discharges moving into and through the Yolo Bypass, and mitigation measures – such as mercury sediment management – would be implemented to counteract any impacts to water quality.

### **9. How will the project benefit anadromous fish?**

The additional water supply provided by Sites Reservoir may provide opportunities for improved management of salmonid habitat, particularly in the Sacramento River above Red Bluff Diversion Dam. By exchanging Sites project water for CVP water, Reclamation has an additional tool to maintain and improve habitat for salmonid spawning, incubation, rearing, and migration. By delivering water to CVP contractors from Sites Reservoir, Reclamation may maintain supply in Shasta Lake for important periods to support these habitat conditions. The possible additional water supply in Shasta Lake can then be allocated during real-time management scenarios for a number of uses (e.g., cold-water pool maintenance, spring pulse or fall pulse flow events, reduced fall flows) that may provide enhanced anadromous fish benefits.

### **10. Will this project curtail or otherwise reduce allocations for other water right holders?**

Sites Reservoir would only divert water when flows in the Sacramento River meet minimum diversion criteria, when the Delta is in "excess" conditions, when all senior downstream water rights have been met, when all environmental permit conditions have been met, and when there is excess capacity within the conveyance facilities, such as the Tehama Colusa and Glenn-Colusa Canals. The project would not curtail or otherwise reduce allocations of water for other water right holders.

**11. Would Sites Reservoir divert water from the Sacramento River during dry and critically dry years?**

Yes, 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 would be subject to the highly protective operating conditions that are currently being proposed for the Sites Reservoir project.

**12. Would 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 our statewide water management system.

**13. 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 project diversions from the Sacramento River substantially (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 has to exist for the project to proceed.

**14. Does Sites Reservoir threaten salmon and other fish in the Sacramento River and Bay-Delta?**

There are highly protective operating conditions being proposed that must be in place before diversions into Sites Reservoir can proceed, including managing adaptively to evolving conditions. Also, the intakes being used for diverting water into Sites Reservoir include state-of-the-art fish screens that are proven to be highly effective at protecting fish.

**15. Has the Sites Project Authority analyzed and considered a comprehensive range of environmental mitigation and protections to support salmon and the Bay-Delta ecosystem?**

Absolutely, and there are a couple of specific elements of the project that are critical to supporting environmental needs. First, the state has made a large investment in the project through Proposition 1 to enhance their ability to support the Bay-Delta ecosystem. Second, there are opportunities to partner with the state and federal water projects in coordinated operations that may provide fishery benefits associated with their operations.

**16. Would Sites Reservoir meaningfully address future droughts?**

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 than snow and be subject to year-to-year variability), then having Sites Reservoir would mean we can collect more water in the reservoir for use during future droughts.

**17. It has been stated that if operational today, Sites Reservoir would have 1 million acre-feet (MAF) of water in 2021. How much would be 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 1 MAF 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 Reservoir. This water is a badly needed addition to a severely depleted water supply system that was not built to address future climate.

**18. 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 conditions Proposition 1 says must met by January 1, 2022, and Sites Reservoir continues to meet all the feasibility requirements for investment by the state.

**19. 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.

**20. 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 we typically see of a large project 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 Sites Project Authority has done that over the last decade and will continue into the future. Sites Reservoir is anticipated to be operational by the end of this decade, around 2030. Sites Project 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.

**21. 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 our changing climate. Additionally, never before has California had a means to invest in storing water for the environment, made possible with the overwhelming voter passage in 2014 of Proposition 1 making \$2.7B 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.

**22. 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 Reservoir 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.

**23. Is this reservoir a stand-alone, or does it work with other regional reservoirs?**

Sites Reservoir is uniquely located in relation to other major components of the state and federal water projects like Shasta Lake, Lake Oroville, and Folsom Lake. Sites Reservoir is complementary to these existing crucial elements of statewide water management and could act to extend the functions they serve by creating flexibility to adapt to changing river and Delta management conditions. For example, Sites Reservoir can be operated in coordination with Shasta Lake to preserve and enhance cold water for endangered salmon in the Sacramento River. Or Sites Reservoir could contribute to the increased fresh-water flow into the Delta during drier periods to assist with salinity management of this critical estuary. Sites Reservoir would not compete for the water resources stored in these state and federal facilities, but would increase the total amount of managed water in storage. With all of the uncertainty California water managers face in the next century, having the Sites Reservoir is a necessity for statewide water management.

**24. How will this project utilize and capitalize on existing infrastructure and what does that mean for the project footprint?**

Extending the performance of existing infrastructure is good public policy, good business practice and makes for a more sustainable footprint by reducing the environmental impact of the constructed work. The project will utilize existing facilities and infrastructure to a great extent and the existing topography of the reservoir site itself is a natural bowl perfectly situated to accommodate a water reservoir. A significant portion of the 100-plus miles of conveyance (canals and pipelines) involved in the project will be existing facilities. The only new conveyance envisioned are the inlet/outlet works for the reservoir and the four miles of 10-foot diameter pipeline to convey water back to the Sacramento River between the Tehama-Colusa Canal and the Colusa Basin Drain.