

From: Chris Quock <cqotherprojcts@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 12, 2021 7:55 PM
To: California Water Commission
Subject: Concerning Agenda Item 12B - Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir

Dear CA Water Commission,

For decades, the combination of diverse natural resources and the flexible land management landscape in Del Puerto Canyon and along Del Puerto Canyon Road have provided many groups with a versatile outlet for both recreational and academic pursuits in the canyon. Through run-ins with other groups over the nearly 10 years I attended and eventually helped oversee class field trips to the canyon as a student-teacher assistant and correspondences with current and retired professors, I am aware of instructors from almost half-a-dozen educational institutions who used or still use the canyon for regular field trips and student projects. It's unique, fossil-rich geology has attracted the attention of researchers from Stanford University, Yale University, and a number of other public and private educational institutions (1, 2). Researchers from UC Davis, Berkeley, and other institutions have used field sites in the canyon and specimens obtained from the canyon for many insect studies (3, 4, 5). As recently as 2018, entomologists from Colorado State University collected and described a new species of stonefly from the area (6). Additionally, amateur botany and birding groups from across CA have developed lists of sites of interest in DPC for their self-guided and group excursions (7). These are just a few examples of research and educational uses provided by this canyon over the past several decades. This accumulated knowledge about the timing and occurrences of various flora, fauna, and other natural history features that can be found at certain roadside stops is an invaluable resource for teachers.

I believe that the findings of the project's existing EIR do not adequately address the interests of all of these groups that have historically used the canyon. The creation of the reservoir and relocation of Del Puerto Canyon road would impair the ability of place-based field trips and studies to draw on past lines of information from specific locations to enhance their activities. This change in the roadway may also impact commute times and fuel costs for groups that depend on access from I-5 to reach deeper parts of the canyon and make day trips to-and-from some locations impractical. As well as impacting distance commuters, this project may impact the ability of some Patterson residents to easily access Del Puerto Canyon. I also believe the project's focus on benefits through water for wildlife refuges does not adequately offset the impacts to equitable nature space access for Patterson residents that would result from this loss of nearby location. As well as being geographically harder for some Patterson residents to reach, the management structures of these wildlife refuges may not be able to sufficiently accommodate the scope and diversity of both institutional and amateur naturalist groups who have used Del Puerto Canyon for a variety of activities. I am concerned that this project, through its limiting of publicly accessible space, may further concentrate various recreational groups, causing conflicts between those with incompatible interests and potentially increasing the intensity of environmental disturbance in spaces adjacent to the reservoir. Or it may cause some to seek out other areas as outlets for spontaneous recreation and contribute to use conflicts there.

To the extent that some activities like illegal dumping and marijuana cultivation have been identified as ongoing problems for private property owners (8), I'm concerned that major changes to the roadway and accessible surface water sources could make patterns of such actions more difficult to predict. Increasing the amount of available water that could be illegally accessed for such growing operations could create issues for landowners adjacent to the reservoir. This may create a need for expensive security measures with their own implications for public access, impacts on wildlife, and local community responses.

For these reasons, I believe competing plans for a multi-use recreation area promoted by some groups opposed to this reservoir are more in alignment with the goals of promoting the health of CA's watersheds. Providing a recreational outlet with tangible benefits for the local community and more defined codes of conduct between public and private zones may help gain broader support for efforts to curb illegal dumping and marijuana cultivation. Such an area may also serve to expand the interests of more members of the community to include activities not directly tied to development or heavy water users like intensive agricultural operations.

Sincerely,
Christopher Quock

References:

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