

California State Senate

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Statement of Senator Ted Gaines to the California Water Commission Regarding the Sites Reservoir Project

October 21, 2015

I find it highly regrettable that the State of California decided to have a severe water shortage.

Droughts are an act of nature. But our chronic water shortage was largely a *decision* rendered by lawmakers.

The decision was made when I was in middle school, right after the state completed the Oroville Dam in 1968. That is the last major water storage project built by the State of California, and I was 10 years old at the time. So we pretty much locked in the available water supply, but we didn't lock in our population.

To be sure, there have been efficiencies since then, and great leaps in conservation. But all of those efficiencies and conservation efforts combined cannot overcome the arresting fact that California's population has mushroomed since I was a kid. We cannot simply conserve our way out of the fact that, according to the federal census, in 1970 the Golden State was home to about 19 million people. In 2015, that figure was about 38 million. That is a 100% increase.

So we have doubled our population since we built our last reservoir, and then we wonder why we don't have enough water.

I appreciate the California Water Commission conducting this public meeting in Northern California. The sprawling 1st Senate District I am privileged to represent runs from the Oregon Border to the southernmost tip of Alpine County, which means that the bulk of the State's water originates in my district. This water is a very precious commodity, and it is high time that we stopped wasting it. It is long past time to build Sites Reservoir.

I strongly supported Proposition 1, the 2014 water bond, because it included \$2.7 billion for water storage. But that was only the first step in a long-term effort to actually get that storage put into place. There are countless ways to fritter away these funds on marginal projects, and that is precisely what many opponents of storage would be only too happy to see. But I strongly believe that these funds should be directed to the projects that show the most bang for the buck, and the Sites Reservoir Project is such a project.

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It has been studied at length, for decades, by the California Department of Water Resources, the United States Bureau of Reclamation and local water agencies. We do not need more years of study. We need a decision to move forward.

Here are some pertinent facts:

The Sites project would divert water from the Sacramento River during high flow periods (typically, December through February) into an off-stream reservoir. This captured water would be available for use when we need it, instead of simply wasting to the ocean.

About 75% of our annual precipitation falls north of Sacramento. Nature provides about 200 million acre-feet of precipitation to California in average years. But the rain falls when we need it the least. All we need to do is keep a bit more of it in storage and we won't have to argue so much about scarcity.

Sites would hold around 1.2 million acre-feet and 1.8 million acre-feet depending upon which project is selected. For context, Folsom Reservoir holds about 1 million acre-feet. It is a lot of water. The Sites Reservoir Project would also serve to add significant flexibility back into the operations of the federal and state water projects. Sites would result in increased water storage not only by the addition of Sites itself, but would also allow for a reoperation of the system to also increase the end of year storage levels in Shasta, Folsom, Trinity, and Oroville. Further, it would greatly increase the ability to meet the regulatory requirements related to cold water needs, environmental and fishery flows, and Delta water quality, thereby loosening the regulatory noose that has severely constrained the water supply system.

Lastly, Sites' strategic location would enable an operation that would allow water to be released for one purpose (cold water, for example) and be recaptured at Sites, and then stored again until a new need arose (water quality, for example), thereby allowing multiple uses of a specific quantity of water, allowing us to make great strides in the efficient management of water supplies for multiple benefits, water quality, ecosystem needs, and water supply.

Some may wonder why I am such a strong advocate for a project that is not in my district. It is a legitimate question. And the answer is simply this: self-defense. If supplies remain tight, the increasing danger for my constituents is that water will flow to the major population centers in Southern California. The more water there is in the system, the less pressure all of us are under. So additional storage is not only good policy, but it is a form of self-protection.

Again, I thank the California Water Commission for holding this meeting and I hope for your favorable review of the Sites Proposal.