

The Bee recommends: Pass Proposition 1 water bond and invest in California's future

By The Bee Editorial Board



The Bee recommends a "yes" vote on Proposition 1.

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Severe drought has exacerbated weaknesses in California's water system, highlighting problems that a \$7.5 billion water bond would begin to address and giving voters ample reason to approve Proposition 1 on Nov. 4.

In providing safe and reliable water to 38 million residents and a \$44 billion agriculture industry, the state needs a comprehensive and strategic approach to clean contaminated groundwater, restore rivers and streams, encourage recycling, shore up levees and and plan to store more water.

Gov. Jerry Brown, the leading proponent of Proposition 1, told The Sacramento Bee's editorial board that the bond would provide a "long-term commitment that's very important for the state." The vast majority of policymakers who have studied it agree, as do we. The bond received only two "no" votes in the Legislature.

A solid commitment and long-term planning are essential for the lifeblood of California. The punishing drought, combined with a changing climate that may reduce snowpack in the Sierra, has demonstrated how much a smart strategy is necessary now.

As the drought stretched into its third year this summer, reservoir levels plummeted, water allocations to farmers were cut and groundwater was pumped to the extent that wells went dry and the issue of land subsidence became widely known.

Lawmakers took two major steps this legislative session to fix gaps in California's water policy and set the course to improve the state's water system. They approved statewide regulations to sustainably manage groundwater for the first time, and they placed the water bond on the ballot.

Opponents of the \$7.5 billion bond say the state could not afford the debt and the bond would allocate money for misplaced projects.

Residents in Valley communities who can't drink water that flows from their faucets would dispute that claim. If voters approve the bond, the state would spend \$520 million to clean up water sources in disadvantaged communities and improve public water systems.

Another \$900 million would go toward cleaning contaminated aquifers, particularly in the Los Angeles basin. Part of that money would help implement plans for the approved groundwater regulation.

The bond would allow for \$2.7 billion to be used for storing water underground and perhaps behind dams. Money for dams is essential and part of the multi-pronged water strategy that we have long endorsed. Storage is certainly a high priority, but we also want officials to show that the new dams pencil out in terms of costs and benefits.

The \$395 million for flood protection projects is sorely needed, especially in the Sacramento area, with the bulk of that money – \$295 million – aimed at improving the aging levees in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The bond includes \$810 million to prepare for the next drought, climate change and sea level rise; \$725 million for recycling and conservation; and \$1.49 billion for restoring and protecting rivers, lakes and watersheds.

Legislators were careful to make the bond language "tunnel neutral," so no money would go toward implementing the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and 35-mile-long twin tunnels through the delta to transfer water south.

Proposition 1 is a slimmed-down version of a \$11.1 billion water bond put on hold since 2009. California should not wait to begin updating its aging water system and preparing for the future.

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