

Temperance Dam plan is flawed, critics say at Fresno forum

By Mark Grossi



Logan Page, stewardship director of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy looks over the edge of Big Table Mountain into the gorge containing the upper reaches of Millerton Lake near Temperance Flat. The proposed Temperance Flat dam (lower) would be beyond the first ridge in the center of the photo.

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Auberry resident Shannon Lodge told federal officials Thursday that a new Temperance Flat Reservoir would swamp a gem of an outdoor recreation area upstream of Millerton Lake — and the property where she lives.

"My grandmother is buried on that property," she told the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation as she commented in opposition to the proposed \$2.6 billion project.

About 100 people listened at a public meeting in Fresno to sometimes passionate statements from speakers who faulted everything from the feasibility analysis to the notification for the hearing on the draft Environmental Impact Statement for Temperance Flat Reservoir.

About a decade after beginning the investigation of a larger reservoir on the San Joaquin River, federal leaders have entered the final stages of their work to complete a plan that would have to be approved by Congress.

The bureau, owner and operator of Friant Dam at Millerton Lake, will consider comments given this week. The deadline for written comment is Tuesday. A final Environmental Impact Statement is expected in the next several months.

The draft environmental review says Temperance Flat Reservoir would be built 6.8 miles upstream of Friant Dam near Fine Gold Creek, partially inside the back end of 520,000 acre-foot Millerton Lake.

It would add a net 1.26 million acre-feet of storage. Each 326,000-gallon acre-foot would supply an average San Joaquin Valley family for a year to 18 months.

The new reservoir would flood two Pacific Gas & Electric Co. powerhouses. Among the fixes is installation of a hydro unit at Temperance Flat to replace some of the production as well as provide flexibility to produce electricity during the warm season.

The Bureau of Reclamation's most notable change from past discussions of Temperance Flat is the emphasis on many benefits, not just water supply or flood control. One of those other benefits would be the restoration of the river, including the restart of salmon runs.

But environmentalists, led by Sacramento-based Friends of the River, told the bureau that the project does not pencil out.

Ron Stork of Friends of the River said he doubted the project ever would work. The \$2.6 billion would produce, on average, only about 70,000 acre-feet a year. Stork said it would double the debt of the federal Central Valley Project, California's largest water system, which would include Temperance Flat.

"You'd double your debt and add only 1% to the yield of the Central Valley Project," he said. "It makes no sense."

Farm water officials said additional water is important, but Temperance Flat would be for multiple purposes — such as helping salmon restoration, replenishing underground water supplies and coping with a warming climate.

"Temperance Flat truly would be a multipurpose reservoir," said Ron Jacobsma, general manager of Friant Water Authority, representing 15,000 east San Joaquin Valley farmers who have lost 15% to 20% of their Millerton Lake water for river restoration.

Local environmental groups — the Tehipiti Chapter of the Sierra Club and Revive the San Joaquin — were critical of the Temperance Flat plan. Chris Acree, executive director of the nonprofit Revive the San Joaquin, said the bureau should allow more time for people to analyze the massive document.

"I want to complain about the data not being available," Acree said. "It's sad that we haven't had more chance to be involved."

Others, like Shannon Lodge, had more emotional opposition.

Kerman farmer Walt Shubin, who is known as a San Joaquin River activist, said he is absolutely against the construction of a new dam.

"It seems like decisions are being made by people who have never seen the river," he said.

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