

Earth Log: It's nitty-gritty time for Temperance Flat funding

By Mark Grossi



At the edge of Big Table Mountain, this is the view of the San Joaquin River gorge near Temperance Flat, where a new reservoir is proposed above Millerton Lake.

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This isn't over. The San Joaquin Valley campaign for Temperance Flat Reservoir may have moved forward on federal drawing boards, and it may have gotten a shot of adrenaline when the \$7.5 billion water bond passed this month.

But the public money is not committed here yet. Instead, a spotlight has suddenly appeared on the California Water Commission, a seemingly obscure, nine-member board.

These are the folks who will have a lot of say about spending \$2.7 billion of bond – the water storage investment in this measure. They will decide which projects have enough public benefit to be funded.

In the Valley, the top of that pyramid of projects would be Temperance Flat Reservoir, upstream of Millerton Lake. So the campaign continues, probably for many months to come as the commission deliberates. There likely will be studies, announcements, media events – from many sides of the issue.

Who is on this commission? They are governor-appointed members from all over the state. Seven have expertise in the control, storage and beneficial use of water, and two are chosen for their knowledge of the environment.

Two are from the San Joaquin Valley – farmer Joe Del Bosque and Dave Orth, general manager of the Kings River Conservation District.

In the federal bureaucratic study process, Temperance Flat probably will have a final Environmental Impact Statement in the coming months.

That EIS outlines benefits, including San Joaquin River restoration, water storage, flood protection, groundwater replenishment and strategic location in the event of an emergency. It has long been pitched as a savior in the farming community.

But will it pass muster?

The University of California at Davis is advising the state to look at storage projects as part of the larger picture of water use and needs in California, not in isolation. The study is called “[Integrating Storage in California’s Changing Water System](#).” Consider it one of the starting places for the funding discussion, at least as far as UC Davis is concerned.

The UC Davis researchers worked with three water consultants and the Nature Conservancy on the study. Among the many things in this study, researchers say water deliveries will not increase in direct proportion to additional storage capacity.

“Reservoirs cannot supply water without a water supply to fill them first,” said Jay Lund, lead author of the report and director of the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences, in a prepared statement.

Keep watching. I’m pretty sure this won’t be the last study to help the water commission prioritize its thinking.

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