

California Water Commission hears from supporters of Temperance Flat dam

By Robert Rodriguez



This is a view to the north 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 (upper) would be constructed roughly where the lake is obscured by the ridge coming in from the right.

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- The California Water Commission comes to Fresno to collect comments for how to spend \$2.7 billion for water storage projects.
- Supporters of water storage in the San Joaquin Valley are pushing for the construction of a dam at Temperance Flat in Fresno County and Sites Reservoir in Sacramento Valley.
- The water bond will pay for storage, water conservation and water treatment.

The California Water Commission came to Fresno on Wednesday to collect comments on how to spend \$2.7 billion in bond money for water storage projects. The message the commissioners heard was loud and clear: build Sites Reservoir and Temperance Flat dam.

The nine-member commission listened to community members, elected officials and farmers for more than two hours. Many of them reminded the commissioners about the vital role water plays in the region.

The San Joaquin Valley is the heart of the state's \$46 billion agriculture industry. But four years of drought have taken a toll on the Valley, with farmers fallowing thousands of acres and employing fewer workers.

Many of the speakers said the ability to store water during dry years is critical to the region's survival. Supporters of more water storage are pushing to have a new dam built at Temperance Flat, upstream of Millerton Lake, and Sites Reservoir in Sacramento Valley.

"Building Sites Reservoir and Temperance Flat dam should be given the highest priority," said Barry Bedwell, president of the California Fresh Fruit Association. "Because if we don't develop storage now, we can't be sustainable."

Bedwell and others told the commissioners that the effects of the drought hurt more than just those who farm. It extends to workers, businesses that depend on farming and rural communities.

Farmworker Ysirlo Reyes labors in the Five Points area of west Fresno County and has seen many acres of farmland go dormant because of a lack of water.

"If there is no water, we will be the ones suffering the most," Reyes said.

Commission member Maria Herrera of Visalia said she understands the difficult time people in the Valley are having because of dry wells. She is a community development specialist at Self-Help Enterprises.

"Your comments are invaluable to us," she said.

Ben Bergquam, director of marketing for Synthetic Grass Warehouse, said that while his company may benefit from the drought and the need to replace water-thirsty lawns, he supports building new water storage facilities. He said that the dollars generated by agriculture don't just stay on the farm — that money is spread throughout the community in car sales, retail shopping and equipment purchases.

"Building Temperance Flat is a no-brainer in my opinion," Bergquam said. "It should have been done 30 years ago."

The California Water Commission is responsible for coming up with a plan for how to spend \$2.7 billion for water storage. The funding comes from the \$7.5 billion water bond, known as Proposition 1. The bond was passed in November 2014 with 66.8% voter approval.

Along with water storage, the bond will also provide for other water-related projects, including conservation and treatment.

How the water storage portion of the funds is to be spent will be debated among the nine members of the commission Three are from the Valley: farmer Joe Del Bosque of Firebaugh, Dave Orth, general manager of the Kings River Conservation District, and Herrera of Visalia. Del Bosque is currently vice-chairman of the commission.

Contact Robert Rodriguez: brodriguez@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6327 or @FresnoBeeBob on Twitter.