

# Earth Log: SF groups oppose lawsuit aimed at emptying Hetch Hetchy

By Mark Grossi



Hetch Hetchy Reservoir behind O'Shaughnessy Dam in Yosemite National Park is on the Tuolumne River.

TIM CONNOR — AP

The health, safety and economic well-being of 1.7 million residents and 30,000 businesses would be threatened if Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in Yosemite National Park is drained, says a San Francisco water agency in reaction to a new lawsuit over the reservoir.

Welcome to the next chapter in the fight over San Francisco's reservoir in California's premier national park. Environmentalists continue the long-term battle to get water out of a glacially sculpted valley. San Francisco keeps saying it makes no sense.

And so the debate has gone for decade after decade since famed conservationist John Muir lost the fight against the reservoir a century ago.

The health, safety and economic concerns come from one of the defendants named in a lawsuit filed last week over restoring Hetch Hetchy Valley. The group is the [Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency](#) (BAWSCA), representing 26 member agencies that buy Hetch Hetchy water.

[Our lawsuit story](#) last week explained that the advocacy group [Restore Hetch Hetchy](#) was challenging the reservoir based on a state law that refers to diverting water in a beneficial way.

The plaintiff says the water could be captured downstream, away from Yosemite, without losing a drop of supply. It is not beneficial to capture the water in the national park, Restore Hetch Hetchy says.

Bay Area officials say draining the reservoir would be expensive and unwise. The cost would be at least \$10 billion,

says Jim Wunderman, president of the [Bay Area Council](#), business-sponsored, public-policy advocacy organization for the nine-county Bay Area.

“The court should quickly dismiss this lawsuit and let us focus on the real threat of combating California’s drought,” he said.

BAWSCA Chief Executive Officer Nicole Sandkulla added that thorough plans would be needed, as well as legally enforceable agreements on water rights, ownership and operating responsibilities.

“Any such efforts must not delay the current \$4.8 billion program to rebuild the Bay Area’s existing earthquake-vulnerable water system,” she says.

The [lawsuit](#) is filed in Tuloumne County Superior Court.