

Temperance Flat Dam dominates California Water Commission meeting in Clovis

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As members of the California Water Commission convened Wednesday night in Clovis to update the public on the Water Storage Investment Program, conversation centered on one topic: Temperance Flat Dam.

“We have disadvantaged communities where wells are going dry rapidly,” said Madera County Supervisor David Rogers. “For them, hope is out there at Temperance Flat.”

Rogers said some solutions, such as groundwater recharge facilities, haven’t gotten much focus. And if the state doesn’t move quickly enough, counties should take the lead.

The commission was [last in Fresno in April](#), when members listened to community members, elected officials and farmers speak for more than two hours in support of Temperance Flat. Wednesday’s meeting at the Clovis Veterans Memorial District was much the same.

Voters passed [Proposition 1](#) last fall, which, in part, allocates \$2.7 billion to build water storage, dams and reservoirs. The state hasn’t significantly invested in water storage since the 1970s.

The new funding is meant for public benefits defined as ecosystem and water quality improvement, flood control, flood emergency response and recreation. The California Water Commission will decide which projects get funded.

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Water bond money is seen as competitive. The \$2.6 billion Temperance Flat project would add more than 1 million acre-feet of storage above Millerton Lake on the San Joaquin River. Sites Reservoir near Maxwell in Northern California is also in the running for funding, with a projected price tag of \$3.9 billion.

The state can fund up to 50 percent of any project, and half of that has to improve the ecosystem. Funding is based on how strongly a project will benefit the public.

Program managers sought to discuss draft regulations for the Water Storage Investment Program. They have until December 2016 to come up with funding rules. Project applications are due in November 2017 and will be selected by late 2018.

But the meeting ended up mostly devoted to public comments and questions. And those were mostly about Temperance Flat.

Greg Musson, president of [Gar Tootelian](#), a Reedley distributor for agricultural chemical producers, told commissioners the timeline is unacceptable.

“Let me assure you that if rain doesn’t arrive this year, we’re going to be out of business,” said Musson, who also runs the [#moreDamstorage](#) campaign. “You may not care because you have a job. The Bay Area may not care.”

His comments were met with big applause.

Bill Stretch, assistant manager of the Fresno Irrigation District, said the district supports Temperance Flat. But he said funding should go toward a combination of large and small projects “to deal with the current drought and future droughts – because we know they are coming.”

One of the few commenters to not bring up the dam was Clovis City Council Member Jose Flores. He urged the commission to consider projects that would directly benefit residents of disadvantaged communities.

“When farmworkers aren’t working, you’ll find their families at Millerton Lake,” he said. “They find the nearest source of water, of greenery, and they go there. We need more recreational areas for the people that can’t leave this Valley. We need more places to exercise and be healthy.”

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