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California

Bill aims to speed completion of Sites Reservoir study

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

MAXWELL, Calif. — A Northern California congressman says he hopes his bill in Congress will motivate state and federal planners to complete a feasibility study of the proposed Sites Reservoir near here.

Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., has cosponsored a bill with Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., to set a deadline of late next year for the study and to authorize construction of the project if needed.

“The bill is a statement of support by the two representatives in the area,” Garamendi told the Capital Press. “It also has the purpose of stimulating discussion in Congress and within the administration — the Interior Department, the Commerce Department and (Environmental Protection Agency). This issue is alive and it is going to move.”



Photo courtesy of ACWA

California Reps. John Garamendi, left, a Democrat, and Doug LaMalfa, a Republican, give an overview of their bill expediting a feasibility study on the proposed Sites Reservoir near Maxwell, Calif. The bill would authorize construction for the project if it is found to be feasible.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the state Department of Water Resources and other agencies have been studying the workability of the planned 1.8 million acre-foot reservoir since

before the CALFED Bay-Delta Program’s record of decision in 2000 listed Sites as a potential project.

Talk of building the reservoir heated up again with the cam-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A ranch sits in the heart of a valley west of Maxwell, Calif., that would be under water if the proposed Sites Reservoir were built. California Reps. John Garamendi and Doug LaMalfa have introduced a bill to expedite a feasibility study of the project.

paign to pass a \$7.5 billion state water bond, which voters approved in November. The California Water Commission could begin awarding bond money to storage projects as early as December 2016.

Garamendi’s and LaMalfa’s House Resolution 1060 would require the feasibility study to be done in time for funding from the bond and would authorize the federal government to lead construc-

tion of the project if needed.

“We think California voters have spoken loud and clear that they support new storage,” LaMalfa spokesman Kevin Eastman said. “We’re trying to create an avenue to meet that need.”

The \$3.6 billion Sites Reservoir project is one of several around the state that has been identified for potential funding from the bond’s \$2.7 billion allocated for storage. Others in-

clude the proposed \$2.5 billion Temperance Flat Reservoir near Fresno and a plan to raise Shasta Dam by as much as 18 feet.

For the Sites project in western Colusa and Glenn counties, a joint powers authority formed in 2009 has been gathering commitments from those that would benefit from the additional water supply, as bond funds would only pay for such public benefits as recreation and environmental enhancement.

The bill comes as the state Department of Water Resources reported on Feb. 20 that Sites could generate as much as 900,000 acre-feet of additional water storage during drought years. An acre-foot is enough water to serve a family household for a year.

The feasibility study and environmental reviews will “become very important in quantifying” environmental benefits from the reservoir project, Garamendi said.

Calif. shuts down oil wells to protect ground water

By **SCOTT SMITH**
Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — A dozen wells used to pump oil-and-gas in California’s Central Valley have been ordered to stop production to protect underground drinking-water from contamination, officials said Tuesday.

The operators of 10 oil wells in Kern County voluntarily stopped production, while two were issued cease-and-desist orders, said Steven Bohlen, head of oil, gas and geothermal resources for the California Department of Conservation.

Groundwater surrounding the wells will be tested for traces of contamination.

The action came after a review found more than 2,500 instances when the state authorized the injection of oil-

field waste into protected water aquifers that could be used for drinking or irrigating crops.

In addition, California — the nation’s leading agricultural state — enters a fourth drought year with farmers relying heavily on scarce underground water supplies.

“It doesn’t necessarily mean that the aquifers have been spoiled,” Bohlen said in a telephone call with reporters.

He said another 11 wells were shut down last year, and so far testing has found no evidence of contamination.

Years of confusion, lax oversight and miscommunication among state and federal regulators are to blame for injecting protected groundwater with the waste, says a separate report made public Tuesday by California’s Environmental Protection Agency.

Study: Onion seed producers should limit pesticides

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

WOODLAND, Calif. — A farm advisor here is urging onion seed growers to take steps to protect their crop in light of new research showing that pesticide applications can repel the honeybees that are crucial to production.

A four-year study by University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources scientists found that if pesticides are applied repeatedly before onion bloom, honeybees are less likely to visit when the flowers opened up. Honeybee visitation has a direct impact on seed yield, they said.

The study suggests growers should limit their insecticide applications in fields, as researchers started seeing reduced honeybee activity with three or more applications,



Courtesy of Kathy Keatley Garve, UCANR. A honeybee collects nectar on an onion blossom.

said Rachael Long, a UC Cooperative Extension advisor here who led the study.

“Number one, they should definitely really be careful when using pesticide sprays not to apply it close to bloom,” Long said. “That’s when we saw the greatest impact ... on bee activity

and pollen germination.”

Growers should also watch their water use, as fields that are too saturated or too dry are more susceptible to the iris yellow spot virus spread by the onion thrips for which they have to spray, she said. Weed control is important, too, as weeds can harbor the virus, she said.

The southern Sacramento Valley is a big player in onion seed production, as many different varieties are grown in the region to produce the seed that’s used on onion farms throughout the world, the UC explains in a news release.

Growers and onion companies started seeing lower seed yields several years ago, and Long noticed a trend in the insecticides that growers were using, she said. The use of fungicides doesn’t appear to affect bees, she said.

The UC and the California

Garlic and Onion Research Advisory Board received a \$250,000 specialty-crop grant from the state Department of Food and Agriculture to look into the problem. The garlic and onion board also provided some funding for research.

The study didn’t find that applications harmed bees, as appeared to be the case when some orchard applications at the end of almond bloom last year led to a massive bee die-off. The incident prompted the Almond Board of California to issue best-practices guidelines and urge growers to consult with beekeepers when planning their sprays.

Onion-seed acreage is much smaller than that of almonds, and growers and seed companies tend to have close relationships with the bee producers they hire, said Bob Ehn, the onion and garlic board’s chief executive officer.

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