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California

Sites proposal gains momentum as it prepares to seek bond funds

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

MAXWELL, Calif. — Backers of the proposed Sites Reservoir west of here believe they have plenty of momentum going into next year's application period for Proposition 1 water bond funds.

The number of agencies signed on to participate in the project has grown from 14 to 34, including from the San Francisco Bay area and San Joaquin Valley, said Jim Watson, general manager of the Sites Authority.

The Legislature also recently passed Assembly Bill 2553, a bipartisan measure that will give flexibility in construction methods to help speed the project.

"With what we've put together now, we are on track to making the Sites Reservoir a reality," said Assemblyman James Gallagher, R-Yuba City, who authored the bill.

The \$3.6 billion Sites Reservoir project is one of several around the state that have been identified for potential funding under Proposition 1, the \$7.5 billion water bond approved by voters in 2014. The bond sets aside \$2.7 billion for large stor-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Assemblyman James Gallagher, left, and Colusa County Supervisor Kim Vann discuss the Sites Reservoir proposal during an Oct. 21 presentation in Maxwell, Calif. The Sites project will apply next year for Proposition 1 water bond funds.

age projects.

The California Water Commission is set to take applications from projects in the first half of 2017, determine the eligibility of projects late next year and determine funding in the spring of 2018, according to the agency's website.

Language in the initiative had called for the commission to hand out money as early as this December. But an initial timeline set out by the commission called for projects to be funded

as late as 2019, Watson said.

"In May, we supported the commission's decision to accelerate the schedule, and they pulled a year off the schedule," he said. "We believe it's critical that these projects move forward."

Another project expected to seek funding is the \$2.5 billion Temperance Flat Reservoir near Fresno, for which the newly formed San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority has begun planning its application.

The bond tasks the water commission with funding the public-benefit portion of storage projects, which could include flood protection, ecosystem restoration, recreation or water quality benefits. Local agencies that would benefit from additional water would need to partially fund projects.

Both the Sites and Temperance Flat projects would be aided by the passage of AB 2553, which will allow several steps in construction, such as design-

ing and building, to happen concurrently.

The bill passed 78-2 in the Assembly and 36-1 in the Senate and was signed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

"We don't agree on everything," said state Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber, referring to the governor. "We're fighting over the tunnels. But we agree on this."

Brown also proposes building twin water tunnels to transport water south from the Sacramento River.

Planning for Sites has had a significant head start over other projects. 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 CAL-FED Bay-Delta Program's record of decision in 2000 listed Sites as a potential project.

A joint powers authority was formed in 2009 and has been gathering commitments from those that would benefit from the additional water supply. The Sites Authority recently opened a new office in Maxwell and launched a new information website.

The moves follow a DWR

report last year that Sites could provide as much as 900,000 acre-feet of additional water storage during drought years. An acre-foot is enough water to serve a household for a year.

Rancher Mary Wells, whose 500-acre property is in the center of the proposed reservoir in western Colusa and Glenn counties, supports the project because she understands the need for additional water storage, she said. She also farms rice and almonds near Maxwell and could benefit from the project.

"This project is different because it will have a whole different impact on the locals," Wells said, noting that plans call for Sites to be built by local companies. She credits the authority for dealing directly with affected landowners.

Wells touts what proponents see as the project's environmental benefits, as up to half of its stored water will be dedicated to increasing Sacramento River flows to improve water quality in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta at certain times of the year.

"The world has changed," she said. "California has changed. As much as farming, we deal with the environment."

Walnut harvest resumes after rain drenches N. California

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

LOS MOLINOS, Calif. — Growers who rushed to harvest as many walnuts as they could before the mid-October rains drenched Northern California are now slowly returning to work.

Farms got an early start on harvesting an anticipated 670,000-ton walnut crop by using ethephon to hasten hull split, which produces lighter kernels, said Rick Buchner, a University of California Cooperative Extension farm advisor in Red Bluff.

Buchner said he hadn't yet heard of any damage from the storms, which dumped nearly an inch of rain on the area Oct. 14-17. Some growers were waiting a day or two to let their orchard floors dry before resuming harvest, he said.

"It was just a matter of being under the right cloud," he said, noting that some orchards got wetter than others.

"The part that's unknown is the quality — how much they can actually take from the orchard and put in the bank," Buchner said of the harvest. "Anything that's light and doesn't have a hull in it will be separated out."

Bruce Lindauer, owner of Lindauer Farm Management near Los Molinos, said the quality of his walnuts has been good. He said he's heard of some growers kicking out 10 percent of their crop because of sunburn damage.

"I'm not kicking out that much," he said. "My yield is actually up. I'm just doing Howards now, but my Hartleys were up at least 15 percent."

Growers were accelerating their harvests to get the lighter kernels that walnuts naturally have just before hull split. Lighter kernels earn a higher premium, which is important as the average price per pound to the grower has dropped from about \$2.05 in 2013 to about 85 cents.

Buchner and other advisers have been offering growers tips on producing higher-quality kernels, such as not watering too much or too little, preventing defoliation by guarding against leaf-feeding insects and managing sunburn with kaolin particle films.

Sunburn was a problem for some growers this summer, as temperatures that soared to near 110 degrees in the Central Valley for several days in late July affected numerous crops.

The harvest's first work stoppage came on Oct. 2, when the first storm of the new water year spritzed Red Bluff with one-third of an inch of rain.



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