

Sites Reservoir Record of Decision is Business as Usual *Project Remains Costly, Risky, and Far from Reality*

SACRAMENTO, CA – Friends of the River responded today to the Bureau of Reclamation’s announcement approving a Record of Decision (ROD) for the proposed Sites Reservoir Project, emphasizing that the decision was an expected procedural step, not a meaningful milestone, for a project that remains financially unsound, environmentally harmful, and deeply uncertain.

“The Record of Decision was expected, and does not resolve the fundamental problems with Sites Reservoir,” said Keiko Mertz, Policy Director of Friends of the River. “Sites is still a nearly \$7 billion gamble that delivers little water at enormous cost, threatens rivers and fisheries, and distracts from real solutions.”



Sites Reservoir is a proposed 1.5-million-acre-foot off-stream reservoir that would inundate more than 13,000 acres of oak woodland, destroy Tribal cultural resources and burial sites, and reduce flows critical to salmon and other protected species. Project costs have continued to climb, with the most recent estimate reaching \$6.8 billion, making Sites one of the most expensive recent water supply proposals in California.

Despite today’s announcement, key details about federal involvement remain unresolved. The Bureau of Reclamation still has not even determined how much of the project it intends to own or fund, with estimates ranging from 9 to 16 percent of total costs. This would be roughly \$700 million to \$1.2 billion taxpayer dollars used to subsidize the unproven “federal benefits” of the project.

Friends of the River emphasized that major hurdles remain, including unresolved water rights issues, continued Tribal opposition, labor issues, and ongoing concerns about harm to rivers, fisheries, and downstream communities. In a warming climate, Sites would deliver only a small fraction of California’s water supply while driving up costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Friends of the River will continue to scrutinize the project as it moves through remaining permitting, financing, and water rights processes.

Additional quotes from opponents:

“Tribal Nations were not meaningfully consulted on a project that directly impacts our waters, sacred places, and our salmon.” said **Josa Talley, a Karuk Tribal member and Communications and Outreach Coordinator at Save California Salmon**. “That alone should have stopped this project. It is reckless to ignore Tribal knowledge and push projects that further destabilize rivers, devastate our already ailing salmon runs and the industries and cultures they sustain, and call it ‘progress.’”

“Sites Reservoir does not create new water or improve reliability for most Californians, instead it negatively impacts drinking water quality, and salmon, in the Sacramento River and Bay Delta while providing little local benefits,” stated **Save California Salmon’s Executive Director Regina Chichizola**. “It is a costly boondoggle that uses public money to subsidize a private reservoir while raising Californian’s water bills, harming salmon and water quality, and failing to respect Tribal Nations and local economies in the North State.”