

California's largest reservoir project in decades clears environmental court challenge

June 5 2024, by Ari Plachta, The Sacramento Bee



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

California is one step closer to building its largest water storage facility in nearly 50 years, after a court ruled in favor of the Sites Reservoir project following a challenge by environmental groups.

The Yolo County Superior Court issued the 65 page ruling late last week, marking a possible end to the project's environmental litigation. The relatively quick ruling stands in contrast to a typical, multi-year litigation period under the Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Gov. Gavin Newsom accelerated the project's CEQA litigation period in November under an infrastructure streamlining package passed the previous summer. He celebrated the court's ruling in a news release Tuesday.

"California needs more water storage, and we have no time to waste—projects like the Sites Reservoir will capture rain and snow runoff to supply millions of homes with [clean drinking water](#)," Newsom said.

The proposed \$4.5 billion [reservoir](#) would inundate nearly 14,000 acres of ranch lands in Glenn and Colusa counties to store water diverted from the Sacramento River through new a system of dams, pipelines and a bridge.

With a maximum capacity of 1.5 million acre-feet of water, proponents say Sites will boost storage amid unpredictable climate swings. Critics warn it will threaten river habitat for fish and other wildlife and lead to minimal water storage benefits.

The lawsuit against the project was filed by a coalition of [environmental groups](#) including Friends of the River, Center for Biological Diversity, Save California Salmon and the Sierra Club.

They argued that the project's claimed environmental impacts are underestimated and that the state failed to consider alternatives to achieving its [water storage](#) goals.

The court found that the environmental review of the project and consideration of alternatives was sufficient, and within the jurisdiction of the Sites Reservoir Authority. The groups have five days to appeal the ruling.

The [court ruling](#) marks the first time a CEQA process has been streamlined under Newsom's SB 149, which allows the governor to certify certain projects for judicial fast tracking. Under the law, courts must decide CEQA challenges within 270 days.

Sites Reservoir is currently acquiring a multitude of state and federal permits to start construction, which is expected to begin late 2026.

That includes a water rights process with the state Water Resources Control Board, which will kick off public hearings later this month. Water rights hearings are scheduled to take place over several days and extend through October.

2024 The Sacramento Bee. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: California's largest reservoir project in decades clears environmental court challenge (2024, June 5) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-06-california-largest-reservoir-decades-environmental.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--