



Informational Update on Dam Safety Permitting

Agenda Item at a Glance

- The Department of Water Resources, called "DWR", oversees the design, construction and maintenance of many dams in California. The Water Storage Investment Program, called "WSIP", administered by the California Water Commission, called "Commission", provides funding for water storage projects, including dams.
- This agenda item will explain how DWR makes sure that dams are safe through their permitting process. Some projects in WSIP will require dam safety permits.
- This is an informational agenda item, important to anyone interested in DWR's work related to dam safety and WSIP.
- At this meeting, DWR staff will present information on how they make sure that dams are safe. Commissioners will have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the information presented. Tribes and the public will have an opportunity to make a comment to the Commission before the Commission discusses this agenda item.

Introduction

The Department of Water Resources' Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD) regulates approximately 1,230 non-federal jurisdictional-sized dams for the purpose of safeguarding life and property from dam failures.

The California Water Commission (Commission) administers the Water Storage Investment Program (WSIP) to fund the public benefits associated with water storage projects using funds from Proposition 1, the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1), codified at Water Code section 79750 et seq, and supplemented by funds from Proposition 4, the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clear Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4). Two of the WSIP projects will be regulated by DSOD: the [Sites Project](#) and the [Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project](#).

DSOD staff will present information on the process of permitting dams to ensure their safety. The presentation will explain the review of submitted application packages from initial alternatives and concept acceptance to approving application-related work to move into construction. DSOD staff will describe the review and approval of a project in phases, how this integrates into the overall application approval process, and how this may be applied to the two WSIP projects under DSOD's jurisdiction for dam safety.

Background

The California Water Code, Division 3 and the California Code of Regulations, Title 23, Division 2, Chapter 1 broadly define dam safety requirements that include the application process DSOD uses to administer the permitting for the construction of new dams or reservoirs and the enlargement, alteration, repair, or removal of existing dams or reservoirs.

The application process described is focused on the application package at project initiation and the requirements for approval of an application. The advancement of an application from submittal to approval is an iterative review and comment process DSOD uses to ensure concurrence on design concepts early, accommodates DSOD's thorough independent evaluation of a project in parallel with the project's design by the dam owner and their engineers, and efficiently resolve comments.

Large scale dam projects, such as those in the WSIP, may require a significant amount of time and money to develop the design and accommodate DSOD's associated review. While reviewing large scale dam projects in the past, DSOD has approved phases of a project to move into construction when the phase reaches 100 percent design so that the owner may realize some cost and time savings. This phased process requires assurance of the acceptability of the project concept to minimize the risk that the individual phases negatively impact later phases as they are reviewed and move into construction.

This agenda item relates to Goal One of the [Commission's Strategic Plan](#), which calls on the Commission to implement the WSIP to achieve public benefits.

Meeting Overview

DSOD's Design Engineering Branch Manager Erik Malvick, Ph.D., P.E., G.E., will present DSOD's process for reviewing and approving project applications for dam safety permits. This presentation will help the Commission understand how WSIP projects secure dam safety permits.

This is an informational item.

Contact

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