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Four water storage projects pass important Proposition 1 milestone, continue to advance toward construction

Four groundwater storage and reservoir projects passed a key hurdle set forth in Proposition 1, the 2014 water bond, and were deemed feasible Wednesday by the California Water Commission. This determination by Commissioners allows the four projects to remain eligible for funding under the \$2.7 billion Water Storage Investment Program (WSIP) created by Proposition 1. The local water districts backing the projects move next to permitting and other tasks that must be completed before they are eligible to receive their final funding awards from the Commission.

In other [Water Storage Investment Program](#) action on Wednesday, the Commission found that two proposed Central Valley water storage projects met certain requirements of Proposition 1 and would be eligible to apply to the WSIP to compete for available funding if the Commission decides to move forward with a second solicitation.

Proposition 1 – the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 – imposes a January 1, 2022, deadline for water storage project applicants to complete their feasibility studies, release a draft version of their environmental documents for public review, provide the Department of Water Resources director with documentation of commitments for at least 75 percent of the non-program funding, and have the California Water Commission find their projects feasible.

At the December 15 meeting, the Commissioners determined that the following projects were feasible: the Kern Fan Groundwater Storage Project, Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project, Sites Project, and Willow Springs Water Bank Conjunctive Use Project.

The [Kern Fan Project](#) would develop a regional water bank to recharge and store up to 100,000 acre-feet of unallocated Article 21 water available from the State Water Project (SWP) operation in the Kern County Groundwater Sub-basin of the San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin. Recovery and use of the stored water would provide public benefits in the form of an emergency water supply, intermittent temporary wetland habitat, and pulse flows to aid Chinook salmon. Construction is expected to begin next year.

The [Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project](#) would enlarge an existing reservoir located in southeast Santa Clara County from 6,000 to 140,000 acre-feet. Public benefits include year-round reservoir releases to Pacheco Creek to provide steelhead habitat, water deliveries to south-of-Delta refuges in below normal water years, and approximately 97,000 acre-feet to be available in response to a drought emergency, earthquake disruption, or Delta disruption. Construction is expected to begin in early 2025.

The [Sites Project](#) would construct a 1.5 million acre-foot off-stream surface storage reservoir in the Sacramento Valley west of the town of Maxwell. Public benefits include water deliveries to the

Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex and to the Yolo Bypass to benefit Delta smelt, incidental storage to capture flood flows, and increased opportunities for recreation at the proposed Stone Corral and Peninsula Hills recreation areas. Construction is expected to begin mid-2024.

The [Willow Springs Water Bank Conjunctive Use Project](#) is proposed as a conjunctive use and reservoir reoperation project that would leverage 500,000 acre-feet of existing groundwater storage facilities and operate conjunctively with the SWP. Public benefits include pulse flows to increase emigration of juvenile Chinook salmon, and up to 215,000 acre-feet of water for emergencies such as a Delta disruption. Construction is expected to begin late 2022.

At the previous two Commission meetings, three other WSIP projects – the [Chino Basin Conjunctive Use Environmental Water Storage/Exchange Program](#), [Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project](#) and the [Harvest Water Program](#) – all met the statutory deadline and remain eligible for WSIP funding.

“I believe there is nothing more important right now than building out properly vetted water storage projects that will serve our state and its citizens for generations to come,” said Commission Vice-Chair Matt Swanson.

Beyond January 1, 2022, Proposition 1 requires each of the seven projects to meet four additional requirements before they can appear before the Commission for a final funding decision. The applicants must complete final environmental documents, enter contracts for the non-public benefit cost share, contract with other state agencies for the administration of public benefits, and complete all permits required to begin construction. Combined, the projects, if completed, would add 2.77 million acre-feet to California’s water storage capacity.

In January 2021, after one project applicant withdrew from the WSIP, the Commission announced that it would accept screening information for new water storage projects that could meet the requirements tied to the January 1, 2022, deadline in Proposition 1. That screening process closed in October. Two projects – the Stanislaus Regional Water Authority Regional Surface Water Supply Project and the Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir – submitted information. On December 15 both projects were deemed feasible by Commissioners, who also concluded that the projects will advance the long-term objectives to restore ecological health and water management for beneficial uses of the Delta. Thus the two projects would be eligible to apply to the WSIP to compete for available funding if the Commission decides to move forward with a second solicitation. Commissioners will weigh that decision at a future meeting.

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The nine-member California Water Commission uses its public forum to explore water management issues from multiple perspectives and to formulate recommendations to advise the director of the California Department of Water Resources, and as appropriate, the California Natural Resources Agency, the Governor and Legislature on ways to improve water planning and management in response to California’s changing hydrology. For more information regarding the California Water Commission visit cwc.ca.gov.