



## Governor Schwarzenegger Revives Proposals For Dam Construction

By Eric W. Davis

The Schwarzenegger administration has proposed to expand California's water storage infrastructure, and that proposal will call for the construction of two new dams.

Background During the 2006 legislative session, Democrats and Republicans offered up competing proposals to increase the storage capacity of the state's water system. Democrats proposed improving and expanding the Lake Perris dam in Riverside County, while Republicans pushed for construction of a new dam, either in Colusa County or near the Madera-Fresno County line. The Governor's office, in an attempt to break the deadlock between the parties' competing visions, proposed a plan that would have committed \$500 million to water system improvements while essentially deferring any decision on which projects would move forward. The proposal could not overcome partisan differences on water storage policy, however, and was eventually abandoned.

### The Proposed Dam Projects

On January 9, 2007, the Governor's staff unveiled a \$29.4 billion bond proposal that would appear on the 2008 ballot. As part of that proposal, the state would commit nearly \$6 billion to construct dams in both Colusa County and in Fresno/Madera Counties. Department of Water Resources Director Lester Snow cited climate change and related changes in precipitation patterns as reasons that make expansion of California's water storage capacity a political priority.

The proposal would fund a new dam on the San Joaquin River, located at Temperance Flat above Millerton Lake. The Temperance Flat dam would create a reservoir with a 1.3 million acre-feet capacity and would create a new water supply of 165,000 acre-feet annually (AFA).

In Northern California, the proposal envisions construction of an off-stream reservoir near the Feather River. The Sites Dam, as it is called, would reportedly form a 1.8 million acre-foot reservoir capable of delivering between 250,000 and 350,000 AFA.

In addition to increasing available water supply, proponents also point out that the dams would increase the overall flexibility of the state's water projects, permitting, for example, more aggressive use of Oroville Dam for flood control.

As in 2006, however, the Temperance Flat and Sites Dam have no shortage of opponents. Assembly Member Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, has called the proposals "half-baked" and questioned whether the proposed benefits are worth the costs. A representative of the Natural Resources Defense Council suggested that the dam proposals were motivated less by general concern for California's water supply and more by agricultural interests in cheap and plentiful irrigation water. Other environmentalists have questioned why the Governor would advocate these two massive infrastructure investments before federal cost-effectiveness studies have been completed.

Further complicating the political landscape around the proposed dams is the fact that water supply issues are intimately related to water conveyance issues. Governor Schwarzenegger has, in the past, insisted that California needs both increased surface storage and new conveyance facilities. New dams may be controversial, but the dispute over dams would pale in comparison to the political firestorm that would be triggered by a related proposal for new conveyance facilities such as a peripheral canal around the San Francisco Bay Delta. Proposals for dam construction in Northern California, particularly construction of a dam on the Feather or Sacramento Rivers, inevitably raise concerns about how the new water supply will be linked to the thirstiest regions of the state in Southern California.

### Conclusion/Implications

Governor Schwarzenegger's bond package, including the funds for proposed dam construction, will face rigorous scrutiny in the Democrat-controlled Legislature. Concerns of environmentalists and competing project preferences of legislators are likely to challenge the Governor's resolve to govern in a bipartisan fashion. But the fact that the Governor's office appears to be willing to push new dam construction will undoubtedly mean that water supply, along with flood control, will continue to be a hotly debated topic around Sacramento. For more information, visit <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/press-release/5083/>.