

Republican Perspective
13 March /2019
by Ed Manning

WASTING WATER

Water is the driving force of all nature. Leonardo da Vinci

As I write, it is another rainy day in the East Bay. Rossmoor golf courses are closed, Ptarmagin floods, and Guernville is an island. The good news is that a series of winter storms has brought record snowpack to the Sierras.

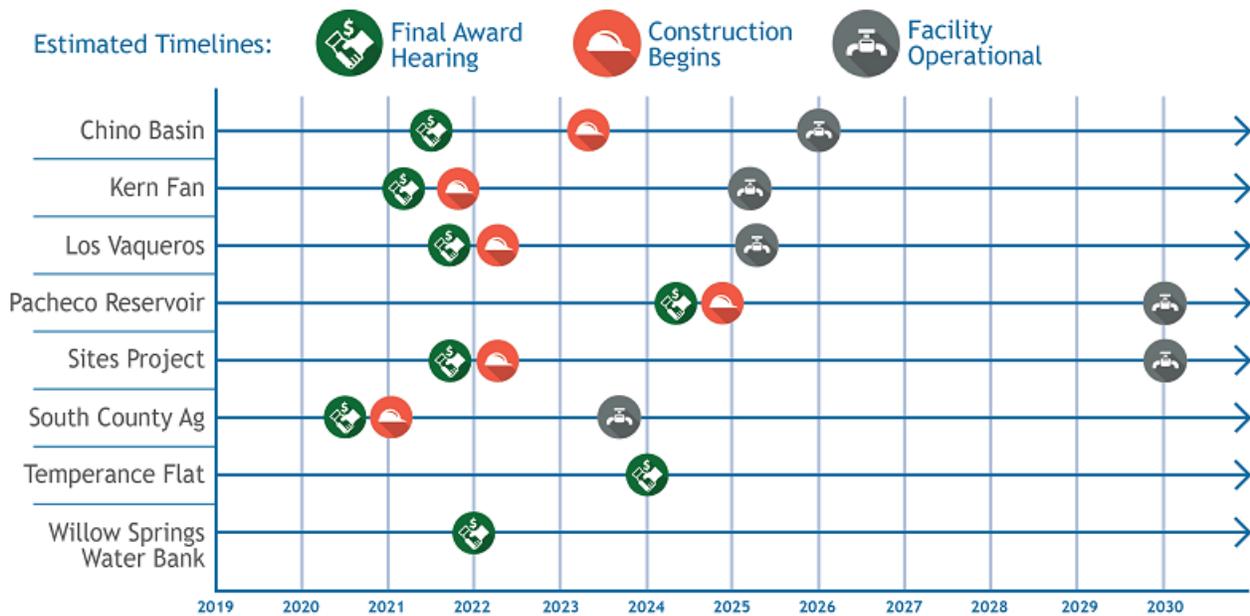
The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) reports that Sierra snowpack is now 153% of average to date. Since 1980, this high reading only occurred five times. A manual measurement at Phillips Station off U.S. 50 found a snow depth of 113 inches and a snow water equal to 43.5 inches. Ski resorts are ecstatic.

2019 is shaping up to be a great water year for California. Unfortunately, due to poor public policy, much of the snow runoff will find its way to the Pacific ocean and not be stored. Back in the day, California built reservoirs to transfer water from wet years to dry years and built canals to transfer water from wet regions to dry ones. Public policy was driven to insure residents and businesses a water supply through the dry years. Hard charging environmentalists changed this landscape.

In 2014, Californians passed Proposition 1, authorizing \$7.545 billion in general obligation bonds to fund ecosystems and watershed protection and restoration, water supply infrastructure projects, including surface and groundwater storage, and drinking water protection. \$2.7 billion of this measure is for investments in water storage projects.

You may be surprised to learn that in the past five years, not one shovel of dirt has been turned for water storage. The California Water Commission (CWC) handles implementation of Proposition 1. Per its website: "In July 2018, the Commission approved maximum conditional funding amounts for eight projects that collectively would boost California's water storage capacity by 4.3 million acre-feet. The projects range from expanding existing reservoirs to boosting groundwater storage to building 21st century surface storage facilities."

While the CWC has approved conditional funding," applicants must now complete the remaining Proposition 1 requirements, including final permits, environmental documents, contracts for the administration of public benefits, and commitments for non-Proposition 1 funding." Here is CWC's forecast of water storage project completions:



The earliest that any of these projects become operational is 2023, some nine years after voter approval of Proposition 1. Remember this is just CWC's estimated timelines. Once applicants actually are awarded a project, expect certain environmental groups to begin their delaying legal challenges. My take is that 2023 is optimistic. Elite environmentalists know better than pedestrian California voters.

The Sites offstream reservoir project received \$816 M of Proposition 1's \$2.7 M. Offstream means that Sites will not dam, or in any way impede, any river or streambed. It is situated on the west side of the Sacramento Valley, approximately 10 miles west of the rural town of Maxwell. It has received bi-partisan support. CA Congressman John Garamendi (D) said: "As a proud supporter of Sites Reservoir, I am pleased by today's decision by the California Water Commission to award \$816 million - a substantial amount of funding - to advance Sites Reservoir."

The Sites Project will add up to 500,000 acre-feet to California's water system annually. This is enough to serve 1.2 million homes and businesses for one year. Proponents argue Sites will "relieve stress on the state's water system, allowing other reservoirs to hold more water later into the summer months and helping increase the reliability of existing supplies." No matter, the Sierra Club opposes building Sites, instead encouraging such alternatives as better groundwater management. The group sees environmental problems even for a proposed reservoir that doesn't involve damming a river.

As spring arrives, expect millions of gallons of fresh water to be released by California's reservoirs to prevent overflow. The New Melones Dam and reservoir is the last mammoth dam and water storage project built in California by either the state or federal government. It was completed in 1979 when California's population was around 24 million. Today we are close to 40 million. It's just common sense to build additional water storage facilities to service the population growth.

Environmental groups tell us that reservoirs are old-fashioned, and that we must look to solutions like conservation, recycling and desalination. Conservation makes us feel good but does not add to our water supply. According to the California Energy Commission, surface water storage costs between \$400 and \$800 per acre foot; water recycling \$1,200 to \$1,800 per foot; and water desalination costs \$1,800 to \$2,800 per foot.

Even though Proposition 1 passed, elite environmentalists will thwart the will of Californians. What else is new?