

Sites Reservoir – Speak your Piece

Sen. Ted Gaines needs to be more verbal on Sites Reservoir project

By Mark Engel, Director, Clear Creek Community Services District.

Published in the Redding Record Searchlight - 9:58 a.m. PT Feb. 23, 2018

In the perpetual badminton game of Sacramento politics, one issue that stands out to me is the Sites reservoir project.

Longtime residents here in the North State recognize the fact that this “birdie” has been batted back and forth for 25 years now with no substantial progress. My understanding is that it has been funded now twice by state voters, the most recent time just about four years ago. Yet, what I'm hearing today is that it once again is being shuffled into obscurity.

Two years ago, I sat with Sen. Ted Gaines and his chief of staff, Dave Titus, in the senator's Sacramento office where we discussed this project and its future. The senator at that time acknowledged the passing of the recent voter referendum that funded water projects, including Sites Reservoir throughout the state. He went on to identify Sites Reservoir as “an ongoing appropriation.”

I submit that if, as the senator stated, the Sites project is an “ongoing appropriation of funds,” then another shuffle of this critically important project constitutes a misappropriation of public funds.

Most in our area are aware of the verbal public support for this project coming from other North State politicians including James Gallagher and Jim Nielsen, who represent areas to the south of Shasta County. That said, I for one find conspicuously lacking any vigorous open and ongoing verbal support from Gaines.

As a citizen of California, a member of the Gaines constituency, a taxpayer, and a seated member of The Clear Creek Community Service District board of directors, I call on Gaines to show significantly more support for this extremely important water storage project. Also, I call on the senator to rail against the replacement of this critically important project in favor of legacy projects like the governor's water tunnels.

As proof of the need for more water storage in California, I submit that though my tenancy on the Clear Creek Board is only in its third year, I've seen first-hand the financial ravages that have occurred by lack of water and the recent drought. Our financial reserves at CCCSD have been quite thoroughly decimated in battling to maintain the business while sustaining affordable rates for our customers.

Adding to this, a “zero allotment” for agricultural water in our area during the drought has also decimated agriculture business in Happy Valley contributing to personal and community hardship via lost business revenue and tremendous hardship for farmers. All this in an area where we have an abundance of natural water resources but are forced to accept state and federal imposed restrictions on the use of those resources. I find this ludicrous.

Simply stated, added water storage here in the North State where there is more rainfall will allow for added insulation from nature's whimsical weather patterns. I call on our senator to get on board here. Rally your political resources with your fellow North State colleagues. Your constituents need your service and your verbal prominence with regard to this most important project.

Mark Engel lives in Happy Valley and is on the board of directors for the Clear Creek Community Services District.