

## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

May 22, 2026

State Water Resources Control Board and  
Administrative Hearings Office  
P.O. Box 100  
Sacramento, CA 95814-0100

RE: Sites Reservoir Project

Dear Chair Esquivel; Board members D'Adamo, Firestone, Maguire, and Morgan,

As you consider revisions to the draft permit for the Sites Reservoir Project, I must elaborate on the importance of Sites Reservoir to California's water future.

Now more than ever, California needs durable solutions to respond to our new reality of climate whiplash. In my tenure as Governor, we have experienced the driest three-year period in our state's history, followed immediately by one of the wettest three-week periods on record. We can expect more of these extremes: our precipitation coming in more intense bursts, separated by long dry periods. Scientists indicate we will lose upwards of 10% of our water supply on average each year by 2040. New infrastructure is needed to mitigate this decline in supplies by capturing and storing water from major storms to make water available to California communities, farms, and the environment during dry periods.

The proposed Sites Reservoir Project is the 21st century infrastructure California needs for our new hydrology. Sites will be an "off-stream" reservoir that does not block fish migration or spawning. Instead, water will be diverted from the

Sacramento River at times of high flows and stored in the reservoir, then released back into the Sacramento River for use in drier times.

State and federal agencies, along with approximately two dozen urban and agricultural water agencies across the state, are positioned to fund this \$6.2 billion to \$6.8 billion project. The state, through the California Water Commission, is poised to invest \$1.1 billion from the 2014 Proposition 1 water bond. This state investment will fund the broad public benefits of the project, including ecosystem improvements and water to wildlife refuges, emergency water supplies that are dispatchable in times of need, recreation benefits for residents, and flood protection for downriver communities. The federal government, through the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, has also invested a total of \$780 million to date.

Recognizing the critical need for new, modernized water infrastructure in California, our Administration has worked to support the planning and efficient permitting of Sites Reservoir. In 2023, I partnered with our Legislature to enact legislation to streamline judicial review of legal challenges to environmental review of certain water projects. Sites reservoir was the first project to qualify under the new law, and CEQA challenges to the project were resolved within 256 days, ahead of the required 270 days. In October 2024, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife issued an incidental take permit for the construction and operation of Sites Reservoir. The California Water Commission has invested \$54 million in early funding for planning and permitting. This March, the State Water Resources Control Board issued a draft water right permit for the project.

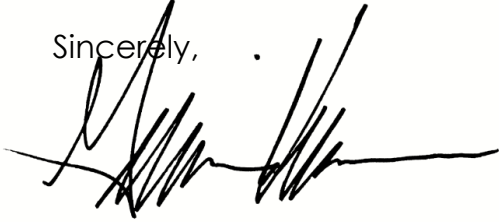
The Sites Reservoir Project is a bipartisan, multi-benefit project that is essential for the future of California. It will provide a lifeline during dry periods — supporting irrigation, domestic consumption, and fish and wildlife.

As the Board considers revisions to the draft permit, I urge you to balance the many public interests to ensure Sites Reservoir can be built. As I understand it, modifications to the draft permit are necessary and appropriate to continue to protect flows on the Sacramento River while allowing for adequate storage in the reservoir.

Together, we share a responsibility to balance public trust resources, and the many beneficial uses of water. I urge you to weigh the submissions of your fellow state agencies that provide valuable technical expertise to help appropriately balance the beneficial uses of the environment, fisheries, ecosystems, water quality and water supply. California voters, who supported Proposition 1 by a 67% vote, are eager to see the state fulfill its commitment.

Thank you for your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Gavin Newsom", written over a horizontal line.

Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California