

May 21, 2026

Nicole Kuenzi
Administrative Hearings Office
State Water Resources Control Board

Dear Ms. Kuenzi:

I write today in support of the Sites Reservoir Project and its water right application to the California State Water Resources Control Board. Sites Reservoir is an important water infrastructure investment that can help meet California's current and future water reliability and supply needs.

I recognize that in evaluating whether to approve diversions for water storage projects, you face a difficult task in balancing the water supply benefits they provide against environmental impacts. Many other proposed new surface storage projects would be on balance harmful and do not meet this test.

However, Sites Reservoir is a 21st Century water storage solution and the only surface storage project remaining that is eligible for funds from the \$2.7 billion in water storage funding that California voters approved in 2014. A federal record of decision was issued by the Bureau of Reclamation in January 2026, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife) has already issued permits for the project operations plan, including its set-aside of water for the environment and its impacts on endangered species.

California is facing serious threats to its water supply from climate change, which is concentrating much of the precipitation we get into a few large atmospheric rivers, with increasingly severe and prolonged droughts in-between. We must expand our capacity to capture more of the outflow from atmospheric rivers in order to better manage supply during the intervening droughts.

I am a big proponent of groundwater recharge as part of our portfolio, but I also recognize that recharge alone will not enable us to capture substantially more of the flow from atmospheric rivers. Limits on soil permeability prevent us from getting the water into the ground fast enough. We need surface storage to capture an initial portion of the surge in flow from atmospheric rivers – while avoiding excessive diversions that are harmful to threatened and endangered fish – and then move that water to groundwater recharge areas at a rate that they can absorb it.

While large infrastructure projects like Sites have some environmental impacts, Sites also sets aside a significant amount of water dedicated solely to helping fish and wildlife during dry periods when it is most needed. This is a trade-off before the Board for evaluation and consideration.

There is a strong Federal interest in reducing threats to California's water supply, and the Federal government has provided \$798 million in funding for Sites. I believe there is a path forward to protect fish and wildlife in a manner that allows the construction of a viable Sites Reservoir to help California meet its water supply challenges.

I encourage you to make the permit adjustments necessary to have the project move forward responsibly and issue the approved permit in a timely fashion. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator