Katrina Chow - Project Manager

US Bureau of Reclamation

Planning Division,

2800 Cottage Way

Sacramento, CA 95825-1893

Dear Bureau of Reclamation,

I am writing to express my concern over the proposal to raise the height of Shasta Dam by 6.5-18.5 feet.

Although your draft feasibility study found such an undertaking would be “technically and environmentally feasible,” as well as “economically justified,” this project could require more than $1 billion in taxpayer funds and there is significant evidence that runs contrary to your findings.

Briefly put: raising Shasta Dam would provide a small benefit at a great cost.

If plans are approved to raise Shasta Dam by 18.5 feet, which BoR found to be the most economical option, statewide water storage capacity would expand by only 1.5%. The creation of 76,000 acre-feet of firm yield would add less than 0.2% of agricultural and urban water use per year in California.

Dams don’t create water – they merely capture rain and snowmelt – and the firm yield reliably produced on an annual basis depends on annual rainfall. The hypothetical firm yield of water produced from the 6.5-foot raise ranges from 20,000 to 72,000 acre-feet. The hypothetical firm yield of the 18.5-foot raise is 71,000-146,000 acre-feet. In comparison, if farmers producing low-value alfalfa were to conserve a mere five percent of the water they consume, it would save nearly one million-acre feet of water. Conservation is a much better alternative.

Another stated objective of raising the dam is to “increase survival of anadromous fish populations in the upper Sacramento River.” Ironically, Shasta Dam prevents Chinook salmon from reaching the cold-water streams where these fish naturally breed. Funds would be better spent building a fish ladder around Shasta Dam.

An analysis conducted by Golden Gate Salmon Association and the Natural Resources Defense Council found that the target salmon population put forth by state and federal government is only at 20% of historic populations. Why not invest instead in salmon restoration, an alternative that would provide a long-term solution that doesn’t exacerbate the problem it purports to solve?

Beyond the negative economic and ecological effects of raising Shasta Dam, please also consider the cultural damage a higher dam would inflict.

The Winnemem Wintu Tribe, the same people who lost much of their traditional homeland and many historic, cultural and sacred sites when Shasta Dam was built in the 1930s and 40s, would see an additional 39 sacred sites flooded, including Puberty Rock, a major ceremonial initiation site. A crucial aspect of the tribe’s ability to practice their culture and religion would be lost.

Raising Shasta Dam also violates the McCloud River’s designation as a federal Wild & Scenic River. So, not only would many Winnemem sacred sites be flooded and a Wild and Scenic River compromised, a variety of small businesses and families would be displaced.

Who would really benefit from raising the dam? A report by the Environmental Working Group shows that California taxpayers subsidize $416 million a year in water for agriculture that is conveyed to Central Valley farms and that “the largest 10 percent of the farms got 67 percent of the water.” These Central Valley water purveyors, including Westlands Water District, can sell the subsidized water to urban areas in southern California at a profit. The water might also facilitate hydrocarbon fracking in the Monterey Shale region. These are not valid justifications for raising Shasta Dam.

Furthermore, raising Shasta Dam is linked to the controversial proposal by California Governor Jerry Brown to build two large tunnels under the Delta in order to divert large amount of water to corporate agricultural farms to the south, not to the people who are paying for the proposed project.

I urge you to carefully consider these high costs and minimal benefits of raising Shasta Dam, and abandon the proposal to raise the height of the dam.

Respectfully,

(please sign your name here)