

## **A Bold and Necessary Move by “The Governor”**

By Dan Keppen

Executive Director

Family Farm Alliance

Klamath Falls, Oregon

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger last week triggered an outcry from West Coast environmental activists when he included provisions to build two new surface water storage facilities in his 2007-08 state budget. The two proposed projects – Sites Reservoir, in the Sacramento Valley, and Temperance Flat Reservoir on the San Joaquin River near Fresno – are part of a \$4 billion water supply bond that would go before voters in 2008, if the State Legislature can be swayed to support his proposal.

It's about time.

Gov. Schwarzenegger's move is a bold one in a state where environmental activists have many politicians and media reporters convinced that rapidly expanding water demand (caused, in part, by millions of new residents moving to the state) can be met simply by forcing farmers to either conserve more or simply sell out and give up their water. Due in part to this dynamic, the state of California on its own has not constructed a new surface storage facility in over three decades.

The two projects supported by Gov. Schwarzenegger are supported by farmers but opposed by many state Democrats and environmentalists. This opposition persists, despite the fact that a recent California Department of Water Resources (DWR) study shows that the state can expect to see a drastic drop in its drinking and farm water supplies, as well as more frequent winter flooding, due to climate change.

New reservoirs are one way to address this problem.

Some environmental groups apparently do not want to address the fact that new storage projects might actually help prevent negative impacts associated with the dreaded global warming threat. Instead, they claim that these projects will only benefit well-heeled agricultural interests, and that further study is required before these projects can proceed.

Barry Nelson, senior policy analyst at the Natural Resources Defense Council – a vocal critic of new and existing dams – told the *San Francisco Chronicle* "We think it's simply irresponsible to commit billions of dollars to construct these projects before they are proved credible."

Actually, the Sites Reservoir proposal has just about been studied to death. Contrary to what the dam-haters may say, the proposed Sites project has been identified by DWR and the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (CALFED) as one of the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial new facilities under consideration in California.

The California legislature first recognized the potential for a project at Sites in 1993. DWR received initial funding and authorization to study Sites and other offstream storage projects in Northern California when voters approved Proposition 204, the Safe, Clean, Reliable Water Supply Act, in 1996. A joint planning memorandum of understanding between federal and state agencies and local interests in the Sacramento Valley was signed in November 2000.

The Sites project, if ultimately constructed, could enhance water supply reliability for environmental, urban and agricultural uses throughout the state. Sites would provide water supplies in average and dry years for urban, agricultural and environmental purposes, increase San Francisco Bay-Sacramento / San Joaquin Delta outflows during critical times, improve flood control, enhance groundwater recharge, bolster fish flows, and improve flexibility for existing projects, such as Shasta Reservoir.

The proposed location of the Sites off-stream storage project is approximately 10 miles west of Maxwell. The reservoir would have a storage capacity of 1.9 million acre-feet (possibly larger) and would enhance water management flexibility throughout the state. Sites reservoir can greatly increase reliability of water supplies in the Sacramento Valley and other areas of the state by reducing water diversions on the Sacramento River during critical fish migration periods. In addition, by providing additional storage and operational benefits, Sites reservoir would be a critical component of an integrated water management and water development program for the Sacramento Valley.

California in the past decade has passed several bond measures intended to address environmental and water resources challenges of the state. Inevitably, these bonds end up funding hundreds of millions of dollars of environmental restoration projects, parks, and drinking water improvements, which are all good things. So far, however, California political leaders have failed to include anything more than “study” money when it comes to advancing new storage projects.

Many of us who have worked in the California water policy arena believe that the real reason why new storage projects have not been constructed is the lack of political leadership shown with respect to this controversial issue.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is bucking that trend, and rural California communities should support his charge into hostile political territory.