

## **Editorial: Boost for reservoir Contra Costa Times – 8/28/06**

THE POSSIBILITY of expanding the Los Vaqueros reservoir took a step forward with a favorable report by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The report said that tripling the size of the reservoir would cost about \$600 million but would be well worth the expense.

Furthermore, the bureau said that the federal government might be interested in contributing money to such a project. The project boosted by the bureau's report is smaller than the one approved in 2004 by voters in the Contra Costa Water District, which owns Los Vaqueros. Voters supported consideration of a reservoir of 500,000 acre-feet, five times the size of the current facility.

The bureau's economic study considered a reservoir of 275,000 acre-feet, which would be considerably less costly. The larger expansion's cost is estimated at \$1.5 billion, which likely would require considerable investment from Bay Area water agencies. The smaller expansion would be a lot cheaper because it could be achieved by enlarging the current dam, rather than building a new one.

The bureau says that a 275,000 acre-foot reservoir would be used to store water for environmental purposes. If enough water can be stored during dry periods, then there would be sufficient supplies available to maintain healthy fresh water flows into the Delta in dry periods without forcing farmers to cut back.

The bureau recognizes the growing demand for fresh water that flows into the Delta and the pressure that it could place on the already-troubled ecosystem of the state's largest estuary.

Los Vaqueros is not the only water project under consideration in California. There are four others: a private proposal to flood Delta islands, expanding Lake Shasta, a new reservoir in the Sacramento Valley and new storage on the San Joaquin River.

At least one or two of these projects will be necessary if California residents, businesses and farms are to have enough reliable supplies of fresh water without harming the environment.

The sooner studies of the other water storage proposals are completed the better. Then a decision needs to be made to go ahead with one or more projects, with Los Vaqueros and Lake Shasta expansion at the top of the list.

It is critical that new water storage facilities be used primarily to safeguard the environment and not just be an extra supply for agricultural use.

The ideas to prevent ecological damage to the Delta and rivers while maintaining agriculture and meeting the needs of a growing population. The only way to fulfill all those goals is increased water storage.

With support from the Bureau of Reclamation along with federal and state revenues, perhaps work on expanded reservoirs can be completed before there is a water crisis. #