

Nonprofit Suing to Keep Water in Lake Nacimiento

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Group says Monterey County didn't fully consider life at the lake

A San Luis Obispo County-based nonprofit organization is suing to block a plan to draw down Lake Nacimiento and replenish underground aquifers in the Salinas Valley. The Nacimiento Regional Water Management Advisory Committee claims Monterey County officials did not adequately consider how the plan will affect wildlife and recreation at the lake in San Luis Obispo County, just across the Monterey County line. Further, the group claims it violates the state's environmental quality act. In a statement released Tuesday, the Nacimiento committee's president, Jim Marshall, accused Monterey County of "decades of mismanagement" and "continued wasteful agricultural and municipal water use practices."

County counsel OK with plan

The Monterey County Board of Supervisors on June 4 endorsed the plan, called the Salinas Valley Water Project, which proposes increased releases of water from lakes Nacimiento and San Antonio, just outside Lockwood, into the Salinas Valley. The project also calls for construction of a seasonal dam on the Salinas River near Marina as well as changes to the Lake Nacimiento spillway. Property owners from Castroville to San Ardo will vote to approve the fees to pay for the project later this summer.

County officials said the moves would help prevent seawater intrusion into underground aquifers, an increasing threat to water quality and the agricultural industry throughout the Salinas Valley. The lawsuit, filed July 3 in San Luis Obispo County Superior Court, maintains the project will devastate "the Lake Nacimiento view shed" and cause "irreparable and immeasurable damage to the recreational use and direct adverse impact to those who depend for their livelihood and property values." The suit also says the county's EIR did not adequately address effects on the lake's bald eagle habitat.

Monterey County Counsel Adrienne Grover said Tuesday she hadn't seen the lawsuit, but wasn't surprised project opponents had filed it. She expressed confidence the county's actions on the water project will be upheld. "We do feel very good about the quality of the environmental review and the public interest of the project," she said. Grover said the primary purpose of the reservoirs always has been water conservation and flood control. "Recreation was the secondary benefit," she said. Said Marshall, "The Lake is for everyone, and its surrounding habitat, not just a few agricultural interests in Monterey County."

What's next ?

Once it is served with the lawsuit, the Monterey County Water Resources Agency has 30 days to respond.

Californian staff writer LARRY PARSONS contributed to this report.