



## **Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project?**

The project is a collaboration between Valley Water, the San Benito County Water District and the Pacheco Pass Water District to expand Pacheco Reservoir in southeastern Santa Clara County. The proposed project would increase the reservoir's capacity from 5,500 acre-feet to up to 140,000 acre-feet, enough water to supply 1.4 million residents for one year during an emergency.

### **2. How does this project improve our future water supply needs?**

An expanded Pacheco Reservoir would allow us to hold water during wet years to use during droughts. The enlarged reservoir will capture more runoff from the North Fork Pacheco Creek watershed than the existing reservoir does today. It will also provide storage for some of the Central Valley Project water that is supplied by the Bureau of Reclamation to the San Benito County Water District and Valley Water. That water is fed from San Luis Reservoir, which holds water from the state and federal government, that lies at a higher elevation to the east.

The Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project also enables a lower cost storage for dry years through purchase of water from the state and federal government during wet years.

### **3. How will Valley Water fill the reservoir during a drought? Will climate change impact our ability to fill the reservoir if we are expected to see more rapid snowmelt?**

Weather is expected to be more extreme because of climate change, including more frequent and severe droughts with warmer spring rainstorms resulting in less snowpack (for early to mid-summer supplies) and more winter snowmelt in the Sierra Nevada.

Climate change models suggest more water will be available but at much shorter windows to pump from the Delta. This is exactly the scenario a reservoir such as Pacheco is needed. We can fill the reservoir at times when excess flow at the Delta is available for delivery to us. That gives us the ability to store it locally and use during the dry months. When we applied for funding through California's Water Storage Investment Program, we researched the impacts of climate change forecasted out to 2030 and 2070 to make sure the reservoir is not only viable now, but also in the future.



#### **4. How much will this dam cost?**

Our initial cost estimate was based on 2015 dollars and indicated an estimated cost of about \$969 million dollars. That estimate was updated to about \$1.3 billion dollars in 2019.

In 2020, Valley Water performed a more detailed [design study](#) which included an updated cost estimate. This design study indicated construction costs for the proposed project had increased to about \$2.5 billion, prompted largely by [major changes](#) to the dam and spillway design. These design changes were necessary to ensure Valley Water can build a safe dam and spillway.

Valley Water is currently exploring five different options for building a dam at the Pacheco site. The different options could potentially reduce the project cost by 10-20%. However, decisions about moving forward on this project will be made later by the Board of Directors.

#### **5. How will Valley Water and its partners pay for this new dam?**

Based on the extensive public benefits the project provides, the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project received the highest rating under the Water Storage Investment Program (WSIP) and was awarded \$484.5 million in conditional WSIP funding in 2018. The award included \$24.2 million in early funding to help cost share for the planning and environmental documentation efforts. Valley Water is exploring additional funding sources and potential cost sharing with partners. Any gap will be made up through water rates.

#### **6. Will there be public access? What about recreational opportunities such as boating and fishing?**

The current project does not include nor exclude recreational opportunities for the public at the proposed project site. Valley Water has discussed potential opportunities with regional recreation agencies, and any recreation features would require additional analysis of environmental impacts. Plans for public access and recreation will be assessed and evaluated as the project develops. These opportunities will be evaluated and discussed during planning meetings held with the public, landowners, non-profit organizations and other agencies.

#### **7. Where is Valley Water in this process?**

We are currently preparing a draft Environmental Impact Report which is expected to be completed by the end of 2021. The project is currently in early design stages with five different alternatives. The completion of design, permit approvals, and environmental documents are scheduled to be completed in 2024 with an anticipated construction start date in 2025.

#### **8. Will other counties benefit from an expanded reservoir and water supply?**

Yes, joining Valley Water in this endeavor as key project partners are two local water districts — the Pacheco Pass Water District and the San Benito County Water District. Benefits to these districts are anticipated to include added storage, improved groundwater recharge and reduced flooding.



**9. Are there environmental benefits associated with the project?**

Yes. The Pacheco Creek watershed is an ephemeral system, meaning that it swings from boom-and-bust weather cycles that frequently result in a lifeless, dry channel by late summer. The Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project would [enhance conditions for the federally threatened South-Central California Coast Steelhead Trout](#) and other native fish by expanding the existing reservoir with a facility capable of providing year-round flows with improved temperatures, even in multiple dry years.

It would also provide flow to improve habitat conditions for in-river rearing and downstream migration of juvenile fish. The Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project would stabilize the chronic drying of wetlands along the lower reaches of Pacheco Creek and improve water quality conditions.

Storage supply opportunities made possible through the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project would enable Valley Water to provide water in below normal water years to South-of-Delta wildlife refuges to support habitat management in the Delta watershed.

**10. What is Valley Water’s strategy for evaluating and addressing potential environmental impacts?**

Valley Water is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to evaluate potential impacts associated with the project.

Valley Water released a Notice of Preparation in August 2017 and has received comments that will be addressed in the draft EIR. Valley Water is holding a pair of virtual public scoping meetings in February 2021 to gather additional written comments for the draft EIR.

Valley Water will utilize all available information, apply the best available science to evaluate potential environmental impacts and identify a range of measures to address those impacts.