

March 15, 2023

Via email: [board@valleywater.org](mailto:board@valleywater.org)

Chair and Members of the Board  
Santa Clara Valley Water District  
5700 Almaden Expressway  
San Jose, California 95123

**RE: March 16, 2023 Special Meeting, Agenda Item 2.4, Pacheco Reservoir Expansion, Project # 91954002**

Dear Chair and Board:

This is an excellent time to reassess Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) plans and eliminate consideration of Pacheco Reservoir Expansion (Pacheco). Pacheco is a high cost, high risk project—with a current cost of almost \$3 billion, potentially reaching \$6 billion or more, with water at \$18,800 per acre-foot (af)—that doesn't guarantee increased water supply. The only certainty for this project is that costs will continue to rise under the well-recognized precept for such projects: “over budget, over time, over and over again.”

Pacheco has not yet been subject to a rigorous cost-benefit analysis—important given rising rate projections for the project. Nor does it respect the ratepayers and taxpayers that would have to fund this project. Indeed, a disproportionate impact is likely to fall on those less able to pay, as has occurred under previous regressive SCVWD taxes (such as Measure S in 2020).

A recent CEO bulletin reports that over \$62,138,984 has been spent on Pacheco as of February 2023. Those millions would have been better spent on implementing appropriate water recycling, maintenance of supply infrastructure and the use of stormwater, which sources of supply are local, drought-proof, reliable, minimize our carbon footprint and can be sustained over the long-term.

With drought and climate change, water does not accumulate reliably behind dams—clear from the past few years and the status of the largest Colorado River reservoirs, Lakes Powell and Mead that are only 23% and 28% full as of 3/13/23.

It is time for SCVWD to increase its pursuit of local projects for water instead of seeking yet more water from the Delta—in violation of the Delta Reform Act that calls for reducing reliance on the Delta.

The Pacheco billions could be spent on such important timely projects as:

- Using cheaper groundwater:
  - Groundwater use is a cheaper alternative to surface storage (Stanford research shows groundwater costs 5-9 times less than surface water storage; groundwater banks could provide water at \$400 to \$600 per af, as compared to Pacheco's \$18,800 per af);
  - Groundwater storage saves water; reservoirs lose water to evaporation: About 2 million acre-feet/year (maf/y) are lost each year to evaporation from reservoirs and canals in California, equaling about one-third of the yearly urban 6.6 maf/y use;

- Raising existing Bay Area dams: Los Vaqueros Reservoir expansion, at a 90% design phase and projected to be completed by 2030, already has partners and is estimated to cost ~\$980 M (in 2022 dollars) to \$1.25 B; a Sisk Dam raise at San Luis Reservoir could likewise save millions of dollars in comparison with Pacheco. SCVWD has no partners for Pacheco, which may end up saddling our public with Pacheco's extraordinary project costs.
- Increasing reuse and recycling:
  - Orange County Water District's (OCWD) expansion of its wastewater reuse facility will produce about 112,000-145,600 acre-feet/year (afy). SCVWD has only minimal plans for reuse—up to 24,000 afy potable/purified reuse by 2040 with an additional 25,000 afy of NPR by 2045 (current 17,000 afy NPR).
  - Districts around California, (from San Fernando Valley, to LA/OCWD, to Healdsburg) are recycling wastewater at record levels. SCVWD, if it followed suit, could replace a significant amount of the 110,300 to 170,000 afy that it expects to import (using calendar year 2023 supply figures) with sustainable water. Dry year supplies that SCVWD hopes to obtain from Pacheco would instead come from forward-looking recycling projects.
  - Additionally Orange County Sani District has pioneered a high temperature, high pressure process that will remove bacteria and PFAS, rendering water safe from dangerous microbes, plastics and chemicals, a project that SCVWD could do here. <https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/story/2023-02-04/o-c-sanitation-demo-that-will-kill-forever-chemicals-turn-waste-into-water-electricity>
- Increasing natural flood protection: Land could be purchased to promote safe flood zones around streams—saving both lives and property and providing recharge zones. (San Jose residents experienced devastating floods a few years ago.)

Not only would the costly Pacheco expansion fail to drought-proof our county or bring new water sources, but it would be subject to the downsides of dams that the 21<sup>st</sup> century now recognizes:

- water loss through evaporation;
- capacity loss from siltation;
- significant greenhouse gas production contributing to climate change;
- toxic algae buildup;
- high cost to build, then repair (and possibly remove); and
- declining fish populations, as dams block access to spawning areas.

We ask the SCVWD to cease its pursuit of Pacheco Reservoir Expansion. It is not beneficial for our county.

Respectfully,

Alan and Meg Giberson