

The environmental review process

The Santa Clara Valley Water District and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have determined that the San Luis Reservoir Low-Point Improvement Project may have a significant impact on the environment and have decided to prepare an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) to provide ample opportunity for disclosure and public participation in the planning and decision-making process.

The water district is the lead agency for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is the lead agency for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The purpose of the Draft EIR/EIS will be to evaluate potential environmental effects of implementing the various project alternatives, including "no action." CEQA and NEPA require that a wide range of potential solutions be studied – even those that might have significant environmental impacts.

The process of developing an EIR/EIS ensures public comment and input for projects that may have environmental effects. The Draft EIR/EIS will address the physical, biological and human environment and will also describe adverse effects, anticipated benefits, and cumulative impacts.

When the Draft EIR/EIS is released, a public comment period of 45 days will commence, during which a public hearing will be held. All comments received during that period will be included and addressed in the Final EIR/EIS. Ultimately, the Santa Clara Valley Water District Board of Directors and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation will hold public hearings to certify the Final EIR/EIS. The preferred alternative will not be identified until the environmental impacts of each alternative have been studied.

Timeline

Notice of Intent/Notice of Preparation	August 2002
Public scoping meetings	August 2002
Public meetings on alternatives	Summer 2003
Public review and comment on Draft EIR/EIS	2004
Final EIR/EIS public hearings	Early 2005

Public input

The Santa Clara Valley Water District welcomes public input during the environmental planning process and will consider comments received when preparing the project EIR/EIS. The water district's public input process includes public meetings, written updates and a project Web site. In addition, a committee of stakeholders has been formed to advise the water district during this process, and the project team continues to meet with other interested parties to update them on the project and seek additional input.

As the potential solutions were identified, many people expressed their preferences or opposition to various alternatives. Most notably, a number of groups and individuals have expressed their objection to any alternative that would affect Henry W. Coe State Park. As it had been described previously, the Pacheco Reservoir expansion could have potentially encroached upon the park. In May 2003, the water district ruled out any possibility of adversely affecting Henry W. Coe State Park. There will be no inundation of any Coe Park lands. As this alternative is fully developed, all potential impacts will be identified.

For additional information, visit the water district Web site at www.valleywater.org, contact Senior Project Manager **Kurt Arends** at **(408) 265-2600** or send an e-mail inquiry to SLReservoirLowPoint@valleywater.org.

overview

San Luis Reservoir Low-Point Improvement Project



A significant proportion of the water supply to Santa Clara County, San Benito County and the Pajaro Valley is at risk due to the low-point problem at San Luis Reservoir. Water quality degrades when the reservoir reaches a certain low point during the summer, the peak demand season.

The San Luis Reservoir Low-Point Improvement Project was established to study ways to allow the San Luis Reservoir to be fully utilized without interrupting water deliveries or impacting water quality to users to the west.

San Luis Reservoir – A key component of the state and federal water supply systems

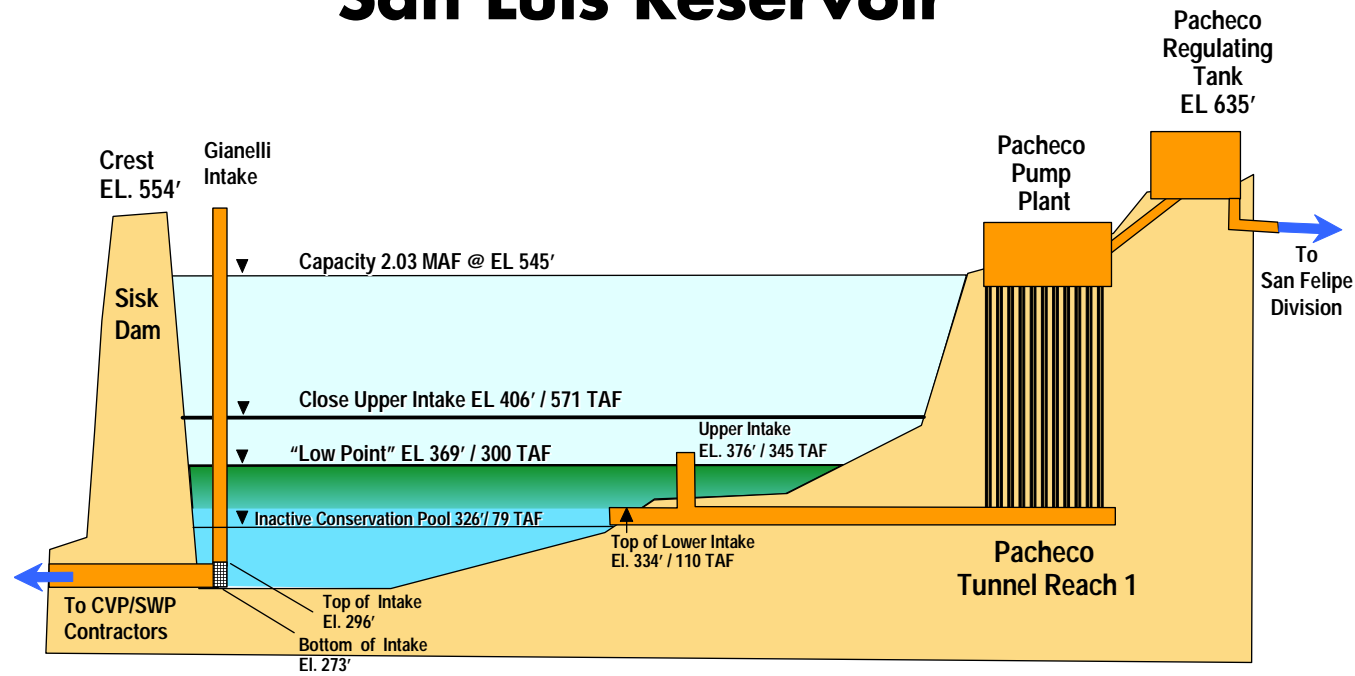
The San Luis Reservoir is one of California's largest reservoirs and is a key element of the state's water supply system. With a capacity of more than 2 million acre-feet, it is the largest offstream storage facility in the world. Each year, water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is delivered via the California Aqueduct and Delta Mendota Canal to San Luis Reservoir for storage until it is released for use throughout much of the state during the dry season. The reservoir is jointly owned and operated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources and stores water from both the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project.

San Luis Reservoir currently provides water to the Santa Clara Valley Water District and San Benito County Water District. The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency is expected to draw from this water source in the future. Water is delivered to these users through the San Felipe Division on the west side of the reservoir. Other users south of the Delta receive water through the William R. Gianelli Pumping-Generating Plant located on the east side of the reservoir.

The low-point problem

The low-point problem represents a significant threat to the reliability and quality of our water supply. During the summer, as the San Luis Reservoir is drawn down, a thick layer of algae grows on the surface. When the amount of water drops to the beginning of the low point (300,000 acre-feet), algae begins to enter the San

San Luis Reservoir



San Felipe Division intake degrading water quality and making the water harder to treat. At the reservoir's lowest level, the water elevation would fall below the San Felipe Division intake interrupting the ability to pump water. The San Felipe Division intake is situated at a higher elevation than the Gianelli facility on the east side of the reservoir. Even without the algae problem, the water level has to be kept above the lower San Felipe Division intake or water deliveries are cut off.

In response, reservoir operators now manage the reservoir to maintain water levels above the low-point elevation; as a result, approximately 200,000 acre feet of water stored in the reservoir remains unavailable to state and federal users each year. The low-point problem will worsen as statewide demands for water grow, increasing the need to use the 200,000 acre feet of storage within San Luis Reservoir. In addition, new protections for the environment and fish habitat may restrict the amount of water that can be exported from the Delta, further impacting the state's water supply.

200,000 acre-feet of water, more than 65 billion gallons, remains unavailable each year.

CALFED – a consortium of state and federal agencies committed to restoring the Bay-Delta environment and improving the management of California's water resources – identified the need to solve the low-point problem in 2000. CALFED also recommended that the Santa Clara Valley Water District study the development of a canal bypassing San Luis Reservoir, in conjunction with expanded local reservoir storage serving the San Felipe Division. The Santa Clara Valley Water District is now working with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation under a Proposition 13 grant from the California Department of Water Resources to conduct a feasibility analysis and formulate a solution to the low-point problem.

Project goal:

To increase the operational flexibility of storage in San Luis Reservoir and ensure a high-quality, reliable water supply for San Felipe Division contractors.

Objective 1: Increase the operational flexibility of the San Luis Reservoir by increasing the effective storage. This provides an additional 200,000 acre feet of storage to the state and federal water projects. Solving the low point problem will increase the amount of water available for agricultural, domestic, industrial and environmental uses.

Objective 2: Ensure that San Felipe Division contractors are able to utilize their annual Central Valley Project contract allocation to meet their water supply and water quality commitments. Because San Luis Reservoir provides about one-third of the San Felipe Division water agencies' annual supply, and the low-point problem has the potential to affect about half of that allocation, this represents a significant concern. The low-point problem occurs in the late summer and early fall when these water supplies are needed the most. Potential effects of the low-point problem include:

- Interruption of water deliveries to domestic, industrial and agricultural users
- Interruption of water deliveries used to replenish groundwater supplies
- Blockage of agricultural irrigation systems
- Reduced ability to treat water effectively
- Increased water treatment costs
- Odor problems.



Algae bloom in San Luis Reservoir

Objective 3: Provide opportunities for project-related enhancements and other improvements. Consistent with Santa Clara Valley Water District policy, opportunities to enhance or restore natural resource benefits of streams and watersheds will be identified. Depending on the chosen solution to the low-point problem, various enhancements and improvements (for example, open space, trails and environmental restoration) could be integrated into the project.

A range of alternatives

Through initial studies and public input, 75 conceptual alternatives were initially identified. Using a multi-level screening process, the list has been narrowed down to seven preliminary alternatives to be fully analyzed in the environmental review process. Ultimately, a combination of the following alternatives may be needed to address the project's objectives.

- **Water treatment alternatives** would involve removing algae at existing water treatment plants using dissolved air flotation.
- Water quality problems could be addressed with **algae harvesting or algicide applications** at San Luis Reservoir.
- **Lowering the existing San Felipe Division intake facilities** would enable water agencies to continue pumping water directly from San Luis Reservoir from underneath the layer of algae.
- A **bypass pipeline** to deliver water around or beneath San Luis Reservoir to the San Felipe Division could be used when the reservoir level is too low.
- **Expanding the existing Pacheco Reservoir** would enable water agencies to store their share of federal water before the San Luis Reservoir reaches its low point each year.
- A **combination solution** could be formulated by combining elements of the above alternatives, reoperation of existing facilities such as Anderson Reservoir and integrating other regional solutions such as the expansion of Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County or connections to San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Hetch Hetchy water supplies.
- A **no action/no project** alternative will study the impacts of taking no action.