

Assembly panel kills Republican bill to speed dam construction

Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee, 4-27-15

Drought-inspired legislation to hasten the construction of water-storage facilities died in a California Assembly panel on Monday.

Assembly Bill 311, by Assemblyman James Gallagher, R-Yuba City, would have streamlined environmental review for the Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley and Temperance Flat on the San Joaquin River near Fresno.

The measure is part of a Republican package of legislation designed to address infrastructure needs. After being sidelined by the Assembly Natural Resources Committee last month, it was revived for a second pass when Gallagher narrowed the focus to the two projects, increasing pressure on Democratic lawmakers and Gov. Jerry Brown to focus more on storage as the state suffers through a four-year dry spell.

Gallagher, who held an earlier rally with farmers and business leaders, argued there should be no delays to building the facilities once funds from November's successful \$7.5 billion water bond are allocated beginning in December 2016. Sites Reservoir would hold 1.8 million acre-feet of water and Temperance Flat would add 1.26 million acre-feet, he said. For comparison, Folsom Lake holds about 1 million acre-feet.

He pointed out that lawmakers have been willing to grant expedited environmental reviews to professional sports facilities across the state. Recent examples were for the basketball arena in Sacramento and a football stadium outside Los Angeles.

But Democrats, including Assemblyman Das Williams, D-Carpinteria, argued that the comparisons with recent successful legislation to fast-track environmental opposition were unfounded, mostly because those bills dealt with specific projects and included various ways to mitigate their impacts.

"If people want to do bills that's like the Sacramento Kings bill, what they would want to do is identify a specific project, go to the supporters and opposition, have them meet together and come up with the mitigation measures," said Williams, the committee's chairman. "This has not been done in either case."