

Sierra Club California has released a new statement of opposition to the November water bond. The water bond has continued to gain support from environmental groups across the state, and Sierra Club California remains the one of only two groups publically opposed to the measure. Our response to their concerns follows below:

1) It flies in the face of good governance by being written behind the scenes by those who would gain funds from it, rather than through the legislative process.

General obligation water and park bonds have a history of being written and passed through the citizen's initiative process rather than the legislature. Prop. 50 (2002) was a citizens initiative measure, as was Prop. 84 (2006), which was supported by Sierra Club California. Over 200 individuals including water agencies, agriculture, environmental groups, environmental justice groups, business, and many other sectors were all involved in the creation of the November water bond, which was designed and structured to fund the Governor's Water Action Plan. Governing through the legislative process is always preferable but sometimes has limitations, and the wide support for this measure demonstrates that this is quite the opposite of a narrow private-interest measure.

Sierra Club has strongly supported other funding ballot initiatives, including Proposition 70 (Park and Wildlife bond, 1988), Proposition 117 (Mountain Lion and funding, 1990), Proposition 180 (Park Bond, 1994), and Proposition 21 (License plate fee for parks, 2010).

2) It would bypass legislative oversight of the spending or programs it would create.

This is incorrect. The water bond allows for full legislative oversight. The Legislature has always reviewed the expenditures of programs created and funded through the initiative process. Just because the funds are continuously appropriated to the agencies, the Legislature is not prevented from having public hearings to carefully review the implementation of the programs.

The funding in this measure is appropriated directly to the state agencies, and would allow the agencies to fund their priorities in a strategic and public manner. Nearly all of the programs funded in this measure already exist within state agencies and continuous appropriation allows these agencies to pursue their strategic plans.

The Legislature itself has approved measures which do not require later legislative appropriation. Proposition 1 in 2014 directly appropriated \$2.7 billion to the California Water Commission for water storage programs, and did not require subsequent legislative action to appropriate these funds.

Proposition 204, a 1996 water bond placed on the ballot by the Legislature, continuously appropriated all the funds to state agencies, and did not require later legislative appropriation.

Both these measures were approved by the voters, and have been very successfully implemented, with careful legislative oversight.

3) It opens up state general funds to pay for repairs of water supply projects funded by local water agencies, and undercuts the principle of beneficiary pays.

Bonds are created to reduce costs for local agencies, allowing them to pursue projects that they might otherwise be forced to delay or forgo. Sierra Club California has supported many bond measures, including the June ballot's Prop 68, and all these measures serve to reduce local agency cost in constructing and repairing local projects.

Many important projects can't be built without state assistance. Leaving infrastructure to decay because local agencies cannot afford to fix it is not a sustainable practice, and goes against the Sierra Club's own water priorities of investing in repairing existing infrastructure rather than pursuing new projects. In addition, the Friant-Kern Canal serves a patchwork of cities and water districts, but subsidence was caused by groundwater pumping throughout the region, from thousands of individual pumpers and non-Friant contractors who were not yet restricted by SGMA. To quote our previous response,

"the beneficiary pays principle can be a slippery slope. The Sierra Club has often supported the use of state funds to build wastewater recycling plants, undertake water conservation and clean up polluted groundwater basins. In each case, it would have been possible to identify urban water users who would benefit from these programs. They could have been required to pay. But the idea that these were appropriate uses of general funds to better manage water prevailed, and the Sierra Club endorsed it. This was the right decision. Repairing the Friant-Kern Canal benefits a significant part of the state, populated by millions of Californians. It is not substantially different from urban water programs the Sierra Club has long supported."

4) The bond appropriates cap-and-trade revenues from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund to State Water Project and Central Valley Project water agencies to the detriment of climate goals.

As we originally responded to Sierra Club California, "This measure INCREASES the protection of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. Instead of allowing the Legislature and Governor to spend the funds generated by water agencies for any purpose, regardless of how questionable its climate benefits (as one can frequently find examples of), this measure requires that the water agency funds be used for water and energy conservation purposes which directly result in greenhouse gas reduction. Moreover, highest priority is given to projects which benefit disadvantaged communities." This funding must go to projects held to AB32 standards.

5) California just passed a bond measure to support water cleanup and restoration, and adding this new bond will substantially add to the natural resource debt dependent on the general fund for payback.

Proposition 68, the parks and water bond that appeared on the June 2018 ballot was a great measure, providing critical funding for urban park projects, conservancies, open space, and some water projects. However, the November water bond focuses fully on water, with only an 18% overlap with Proposition 68. In each area of overlap there is a much greater need than the cumulative amounts provided in the two measures. The main overlap is for funding for Salton Sea restoration, flood management, safe drinking water and wastewater recycling. The need for water investment in this state is enormous, and Prop 68 made an important contribution, but insufficient when compared to the need. With Prop. 1 (2014 water bond) mostly allocated, demand for water grant funding over the coming years will only continue to increase.

6) Some of the projects funded by this bond would worsen environmental quality.

This is simply not true.

This measure provides more environmental funding than any previous measure, with nearly half the funding going to watershed, land, and habitat restoration. There is no evidence whatsoever that this bond would worsen environmental quality, in fact quite the opposite. The two main infrastructure repair projects funded by this bill, Oroville Dam and the Friant-Kern Canal will result in improved flood management and a canal that can continue to serve one of its main purposes in groundwater recharge, stabilizing groundwater basins in the South San Joaquin. These are not “new” infrastructure projects that could cause environmental damage, but rather projects that repair existing water infrastructure, a priority for Sierra Club California. Moreover, this bond measure provides no funding dedicated to new dams.

The environmental benefits from this bond will be enormous and help continue the important work that the Wildlife Conservation Board, state conservancies, and local environmental groups do on a daily basis. The bond is supported by over 80 national, state and local environmental groups, such as the Planning and Conservation League, Sustainable Conservation, Save the Bay, Climate Resolve, CalTrout, and the National Wildlife Federation.