

Auburn Dam Testimony 7/21/2008

My name is Larry Boll. I am a retired engineer from the Bureau of Reclamation, and former Project Superintendent of the Folsom Office, with operational oversight responsibilities for the Auburn Dam Project as well as Folsom Dam.

I believe that the water rights permits for the Bureau of reclamation should be extended. Auburn Dam is needed more today than when it was first authorized. Most of the delays for completing the Project were not the fault of the Bureau. The Viet Nam war delayed funding for a number of years; President Carter then stopped funding nearly all water projects in the West; the Oroville earthquake resulted in modifying the design of the Auburn Dam- and modifications to Folsom Dam as well; and subsequent revisions to Federal cost-sharing guidelines all contributed significantly to the delay. The Project remains a congressionally authorized project, and there is considerable Congressional interest in completing it.

A brief review of the history of the project is in order. Auburn Dam was part of the original State water plan that was formulated in the 1920's. Folsom Dam was authorized initially as a flood control only facility in 1944, with a reservoir capacity of approximately 400,000 acre-feet. It was reauthorized as a multi-purpose project in 1949, with a reservoir capacity of 1,000,000 acre-feet. When the dam was nearing completion in December 1955, the largest flood in the 20th century to date hit the Sacramento area. Folsom Reservoir filled within one week, preventing a major flood in the American River flood plain. The damage prevented more than paid the entire cost of the Folsom Project.

There was a group of local men that worked closely with Congressman Bizz Johnson and other local congressman to get the Folsom Dam reauthorized and enlarged. When they saw the 1955 flood, they immediately formed the Auburn Dam Council to seek federal authorization for Auburn Dam. Their efforts were instrumental in the Auburn Project authorized in 1965. The Council has actively sought to get the Project completed ever since.

Flood protection for the American River flood plain is inadequate. Even after the present modifications to Folsom Dam are complete, Sacramento will still have less flood protection than any major city in the United States, including New Orleans and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. With an average of 2,600,000 acre-feet of water flowing down the American River, Folsom Reservoir is simply too small to provide safe flows downstream in times of heavy precipitation. The capitol city of the most populace state in the union needs a high level of flood protection, and that can only be provided with the Auburn Dam.

California is critically short of its water needs- now and in the future. We are over-drafting the groundwater basins by some 2,000,000 acre-feet per year now. It will require more surface water storage projects to meet future needs, and there are precious few sites available. Auburn is one of the best available.

Folsom Dam and Reservoir are inadequate to meet the future needs of the region. The desired minimum flows in the lower American River cannot be provided without Auburn Dam. Temperature control of the water in the river for the fall run of the Chinook Salmon cannot be provided in most years, including this year. Folsom Lake State Park is the most popular state park in California, in spite of low reservoir levels in Folsom Reservoir during the summer and fall. The Auburn Dam would significantly enhance all these issues.

Power generated from the Auburn Powerplant- up to 800 mw- would be an excellent source of peaking power for the region. The large Folsom Reservoir downstream provides great flexibility as to just when the power is generated. The energy is renewable, with zero emissions. It is a resource that lasts over 100 years, longer than any other major generating powerplant.

The environmental benefits of Auburn Dam more than offset the detriments of flooding the canyons behind the dam. The flood protection, water supply, Lower American River flows and temperature control, and helping maintain suitable water quality in the Delta are all significant environmental benefits of the Auburn Dam. The cost of not building this facility will greatly exceed the initial investment. We need to complete it soon.