

Raise Monticello Dam!

Every few years or so someone starts a rumor about raising the dam – usually claiming the plan is to raise it ten feet. Where did this rumor start and why does it pop up every now and again? According to the general manager of the Solano County Water Agency, CalFed, a collaboration among 25 state and federal agencies (<http://calwater.ca.gov>), did a “brainstorming” survey many years ago of every potential future water project in northern California.

Although raising Monticello Dam made the original list of possible projects, after practical criteria (such as cost, safety, flooding adjacent property) were applied to screen the list down to real opportunities, raising the dam was dropped from the list. It has never been discussed seriously since then. It is NOT in any plan and never will be.

The number one project on the list continues to be Sites, east of Maxwell. Those who are ATV/dirt bike/jet ski enthusiasts have probably gone to Stonyford or East Park Reservoir to ride. You’ve driven through Sites and seen the narrow canyon at the brown rock quarry where a dam similar to Monticello Dam could be built.

A simpler approach to storing more water in Lake Berryessa would be to raise Glory Hole itself by installing movable gates that could be raised and lowered as necessary to impound more water during the rainy season. Raising Glory Hole by 5 feet to 445’ would increase Lake Berryessa storage by approximately 100,000 acre-feet without significantly affecting facilities along the shoreline. Although the highest the lake level has ever reached was 446.7 feet in 1983, and it has often exceeded 440 feet, according to SCWA, a review of the historical data shows that the level does not exceed 440 feet often enough to justify the expense of installing this type of control device on Glory Hole, much less justifying raising the dam itself. The lake level has reached or exceeded Glory Hole only 25 times in 65 years.

Tear It Down and Build It Bigger?

But there is another potential source to the rumor of raising Monticello Dam, and it was a much more ambitious project than just raising the dam.

According to “The Solano Water Story” published by the Solano Irrigation District, banner headlines in California's newspapers in September 1963 announced Governor Edmund G. Brown's startling new state water plan in which Berryessa would have a major role. The \$3.7 billion plan included 35 dams, 70 miles of tunnels, 10 pumping plants, and 15 powerplants. The timetable called for start-up in 1976 and completion by about 2020.

According to the plan, the still young, 304-foot-high Monticello Dam would be removed, rather than letting it remain as an underwater barrier. It would be replaced with a 650-foot-high earth and rockfill dam a mile downstream from the concrete arch dam. The new reservoir would be three times larger than Lake Berryessa, with 10 times its capacity or 16 million acre-feet (compared with Shasta's 4.5 million acre-feet).

The enlarged lake would extend into Pope Valley almost as far as Aetna Springs in Napa County and into Capell Valley, taking nearly 18,000 acres of agricultural and grazing land out of production. Estimated cost of the Greater Berryessa Project, as it was called, was put at \$360 million by the State Department of Water Resources (DWR). The timetable for this part of the project indicated a start-up in about 1990.

In essence, the idea was to integrate the Greater Berryessa Project with the \$280 million Clear Lake Diversion Project. The latter included three dams on the Middle Fork of the Eel River, with tunnels to the Main Eel River, Russian River, and Clear Lake to Putah Creek, then through two more dams and Lake Berryessa to the Sacramento River. From Clear Lake, the water would be diverted by a two-mile tunnel to Soda Creek in the

Upper Putah Creek basin, developing 400 feet of powerhead that would be harnessed with the construction of two dams on Soda Creek.

According to the DWR, discharges from the power facilities would be released into an enlarged Lake Berryessa capable of meeting the export demands of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and those of the Solano Project. Even the Bureau of Reclamation, which had never been accused of thinking small, was impressed by the scope of Governor Brown's plan, describing the overall project as "staggering but physically possible and since the Greater Berryessa Project would not be built for at least another 30 years, the present Monticello Dam by that time will have served its useful life."

Brown's master plan for the state's water problems never caught on with the public or the legislature. His grand plans are collecting dust at the DWR. The number one project on the list continues to be Sites, east of Maxwell at the narrow canyon at the present brown rock quarry where a dam similar to Monticello Dam could be built.