

**American Rivers * Audubon California * California Trout * Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity * Clean Water Action * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition * Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of the Earth * Friends of the River * Grand Canyon Trust * Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters * Living With Wolves * Native Plant Conservation Campaign
Natural Resources Defense Council * Oceana * Sierra Club * The Bay Institute
Western Environmental Law Center * Western Watersheds Project * WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Workshop * Wildlands Network**

July 20, 2017

PLEASE OPPOSE H.R. 1654

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to urge you to oppose H.R. 1654 (McClintock, R-CA), a bill that would significantly limit meaningful public and environmental review of new dams and other surface storage projects throughout the west. H.R. 1654 would likely reduce protections for fish and wildlife, and could lead to further damming and destruction of western waterways. Similar provisions were included in H.R. 2898 and H.R. 23—anti-environmental bills from 2015 and 2017, respectively—and the Department of Interior has previously expressed opposition to these efforts.

H.R. 1654 would undermine existing laws by making the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (“Reclamation”) the lead agency for all environmental reviews, including reviews under the Endangered Species Act. Giving Reclamation this unprecedented power over project permitting could undermine the ability of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and N.O.A.A. Fisheries to share expertise and inform the development of major infrastructure investments, placing imperiled fish species at risk. H.R. 1654 also establishes strict project-review timelines, including provisions that could require expedited review under the National Environmental Policy Act. These fast-tracking provisions could make it difficult for responsible agencies to meaningfully analyze proposed projects, and could limit the public’s ability to weigh in on infrastructure that could affect communities for decades. Further, the bill permits non-federal public entities to contribute funds to expedite project permitting, raising questions about the fairness of the federal review process.

This damaging bill would affect states throughout the west, and could even impact how state agencies are able review proposed projects within their jurisdictions. H.R. 1654 allows states to subject state agencies to the bill’s procedures, thereby requiring those agencies to cede control to Reclamation and comply with Reclamation’s timelines. Consolidating project review in this manner could weaken the essential role that states play in reviewing water infrastructure projects within their jurisdictions.

As we recently learned from the emergency at Oroville Dam in California, careful planning and design for major infrastructure projects is critical for ensuring public safety and protecting the environment. Environmental review of surface storage projects is also essential for protecting endangered and commercially important salmon runs and the thousands of jobs that depend on healthy salmon populations. With so much at stake, the streamlining provisions in H.R. 1654 are unwise and irresponsible. Instead of fast tracking dam projects in the West, we should be investing in fiscally sound, environmentally friendly water supply solutions like conservation, water use efficiency, wastewater recycling, and stormwater capture.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to vote no on H.R. 1654.

Sincerely,

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