

LOCAL**Biden's interior secretary backs West Side reservoir, more California water storage****BY JOHN HOLLAND**

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 06:00 AM

The area west of Patterson Calif. along Del Puerto Canyon Road is pictured on Wednesday afternoon May 29, 2019. A proposal for an 800 acre reservoir that would include a lake in the scenic canyon in the foothills west of Patterson is underway. BY **JOAN L LEE**

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland talked about dealing with drought, including a reservoir planned near Patterson, in a Zoom call with reporters Wednesday.

She was joined by Rep. Josh Harder, D-Turlock, who has urged increased federal spending on such efforts.

The 2022 proposed budget for the Interior Department includes \$15 million toward building Del Puerto Reservoir in the hills west of Patterson. West Side irrigation districts would pay most of the roughly \$500 million total cost.

The budget also would put \$50 million toward expanding Los Vaqueros Reservoir in the Brentwood area. It holds water pumped from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta for use in Contra Costa County.

The expansion could supply more water for wildlife refuges along the San Joaquin River. It also could mean more flexibility in the Delta supplies for West Side farmers.

Haaland also noted plans for increased water conservation, recycling, desalinization and other projects in the call from her office in Washington, D.C.

"We're committed to addressing the challenges of drought and climate change in the Central Valley by using science-based, innovative strategies," she said.

The 2022 spending does not include the \$8.3 billion for Western water projects in the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package now before Congress. Storage projects would get \$1.15 billion of this. Details on how to spend the money over several years would come later.

HAALAND SERVED IN CONGRESS REPRESENTING NEW MEXICO

Haaland represented New Mexico in the House of Representatives before President Joe Biden appointed her to his Cabinet. The department oversees federal water systems, national parks, Native American affairs, energy production and other matters. Our subscription allows us to provide our readers with quality, relevant journalism that makes a difference.

Del Puerto Reservoir could be built by 2028, adding 82,000 acre-feet of storage for the region. It would help farmers deal with reduced federal supplies from the Delta, including zero water in the very dry 2021.

The project drew a lawsuit from four environmental groups last year. They are concerned about habitat loss, earthquake safety and overuse of Delta water by farmers.

Los Vaqueros, by contrast, has drawn support from environmental leaders along with farm and urban interests that could benefit. The project would boost water for wildlife refuges that mimic the annual flooding that happened before dams and levees were built.

The original reservoir was completed in 1998, providing 100,000 acre-feet of storage for the Contra Costa Water District. An expansion in 2012 brought it to 160,000 acre-feet.

The current proposal could result in 275,000 total acre-feet as soon as 2029. Water agencies serving other parts of the Bay Area are looking at helping pay for the project. So are some of the West Side irrigation districts, which are constrained now by fish protections in the Delta. .

Federal sources could cover up to a quarter of the estimated \$895 million cost of expanding Los Vaqueros. The state is expected to provide \$470 million from a 2014 bond measure.

Harder noted on the call that Stanislaus County already has a major water recycling system. Farmers in the Del Puerto Water District use the highly treated effluent from sewage plants serving Modesto, Ceres and Turlock.

“Obviously, the best thing that we can do is get more use out of the water that we already have,” Harder said.