

## Could dam plan be back?

### McClintock poised to lead in Congress for Auburn dam revival

*By Gus Thomson, Journal Staff Writer, December 2, 2010*

The power shift in Congress has positioned U.S. Rep. Tom McClintock to take over as chairman of the House water and power subcommittee.

And that will also mean he'll be positioned to advocate for an Auburn dam.

McClintock, R-Roseville, has served as ranking Republican on the subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee since being chosen by committee Republican ranking member Doc Hastings in July 2009.



Rep. Tom McClintock

He's made no secret before and after his initial election in 2008 to Congress that he's a proponent of building the Auburn dam – a long-delayed project estimated to cost as much as \$10 billion that his predecessor John Doolittle was unable to convince Congress to fund over his 18 years in office.

McClintock said that as ranking GOP member of the water and power subcommittee, he hopes to continue as chairman with the changeover to the Republican majority in the House next month. The decision rests with the Republican House conference steering committee, he said.

Auburn's Gary Estes, who has fought the dam as a Protect American River Canyons member for 20 years, said that McClintock should be asking himself whether the dam is financial feasible.

A recent federal study put the price tag for an Auburn dam at from \$6 billion to \$10 billion, he said.

**Depending on who's answering, project's a dead horse or a water, power marvel**

McClintock said financing the project could come through a joint powers authority that could build the dam using a federal loan and then pay it back from profits the dam would make from water and power.

“Personally, I don’t think the project pencils,” Estes said.

The congressman, whose district includes Auburn and the dam site adjacent to the city in the American River Canyon, said he considers his advocacy role as a long-term proposition.

“There are many obstacles to overcome before even moving forward,” McClintock said. “There are numerous issues with multiple jurisdictions but I do want to use the opportunity to discuss the structure for a project. The benefits are overwhelming.”

The dam discussion would tie in with McClintock’s political stance on natural resources issues.

“It can be summed up in one word – abundance,” McClintock said.

Until the 1970s, the federal goal was to assure the abundance of water and power from its natural resources, he said. But that was replaced with a rationing of shortages caused by an abandonment of the abundance perspective, he said.

“It’s now in its fourth decade and not working very well,” McClintock said. The subcommittee on water and power has responsibilities over water resources, power generation from federal water projects and interstate water issues.

Estes said one of the more significant hurdles facing McClintock and supporters like the local Auburn Dam Council would be the 2008 decision by the State Water Resources Control Board to revoke the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s water rights permit for the dam.

The bureau was unable to convince the board to extend its 38-year-old permit to divert water off the north fork of the American River without new, extensive environmental studies based on modern-day policies and laws.

The bureau had secured 2.2 million acre-feet of storage in 1970 but had been unable to use the permit after the dam was stalled by both budget and earthquake concerns.

“It sounds as if he’s trying to resurrect a dead horse,” Estes said.



Ben Furtado/Auburn Journal file photo  
The Foresthill Bridge was built as part of the Auburn dam construction project in the early 1970s as a bridge over what would have been a reservoir inundating much of the American River canyon in the Auburn area. The point where the concrete pillars meet the bridge’s steel trusses would be the high-water mark.

<http://auburnjournal.com/detail/166293.html>

## **Timeline: 55 years and no Auburn dam**

Here's a timeline on major events in the story of the much-debated, long-delayed Auburn dam:

1955 When Folsom Reservoir comes close to overflowing, an Auburn-based group of supporters presses for a federally funded dam at Auburn.

1964 Christmas week floods fill Folsom Reservoir in two days and pose another spill threat.

1965 Congress authorizes the Auburn dam, with water storage and power generation components as well as flood control.

1968 Plans move ahead on a 700-foot-high dam with 2.5 million-acre-feet capacity. Cost is an estimated \$428 million.

1972 Environmental groups sue the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation over what they say are inadequate environmental studies.

1974 Environmental documents are revised and approved.

1975 Oroville earthquake sparks seismic concerns and an Association of Engineering Geologists report stating the Auburn dam design would be unsafe in the event of a moderate earthquake.

1980 Dam shuts down construction after more than \$200 million spent.

1984 Environmental groups propose National Recreation Area at dam site.

1986 Drive for dam resurrected after heavy rainstorms and study showing Sacramento flood protection lower than first thought.

1992 Bill for Auburn dam funding by U.S. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Roseville defeated by a two-to-one margin.

1996 Another Doolittle Auburn dam bill fails in Congress.

2001 Federal funding comes for tunnel closure and streambed restoration at the Auburn dam site.

2003 Agreement reached on federal project to raise Folsom dam to increase downstream flood protection, raising flood safety level in Sacramento to one catastrophic flood every 200 years.

2008 The State Water Resources Control Board revokes the Bureau of Reclamation's 38-year-old water rights permits for the Auburn dam.

2011 U.S. Rep. Tom McClintock revives Auburn dam proposal?

FOUNDED 1852 

# The Sacramento Bee

## Auburn dam back in play as McClintock takes over House panel

By Michael Doyle

[mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com)

Published: Saturday, Jan. 15, 2011 - 12:00 am | Page 3A

Last Modified: Sunday, Jan. 16, 2011 - 11:33 am

WASHINGTON – Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, could start making waves in California water.

As new chairman of the House water and power subcommittee, McClintock can promote his pet projects while he squeezes environmentalists. Politically, this means renewed talk of an Auburn dam, stricter scrutiny of San Joaquin River restoration and more support for hydropower.

"We need to change the central objective of our federal water and power policy to one of abundance," McClintock said in an interview. "That means building more water projects."

In theory, McClintock's position strengthens the staunch conservative's ability to pursue his agenda. The House panel writes water legislation. It oversees spending by the Bureau of Reclamation, which operates California's Central Valley Project. It holds administration officials' feet to the fire.

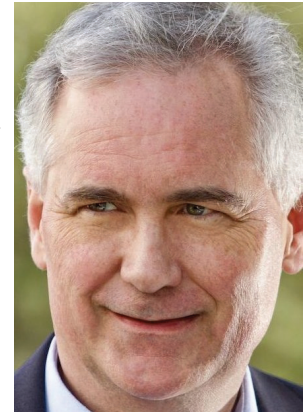
In practice, McClintock's ability to convert stature into action remains an open question.

The subcommittee's other members have not yet been named, including the key position of senior Democrat.

The subcommittee's staff is still being formed. McClintock said Thursday that his specific legislative agenda will be made clear over time.

McClintock has yet to show how he handles the chairman's reins. Though he's an experienced politician, first winning election to the California Assembly in 1982, persistent minority party status means the 54-year-old McClintock has never chaired a legislative panel.

"This is my 25th year as a legislator," McClintock noted, "and it's my very first week to be in the majority."



Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, says he'll pursue a policy of "abundance" as the new head of the House water and power subcommittee, and "that means building more water projects."

One reality check could arise over potential revival of an Auburn dam.

The long-debated proposal for a dam on the American River seemed to formally die two years ago, when the state water board revoked rights for the project estimated to cost upward of \$10 billion.



Renée C. Byer / Bee file, 2010

**River surfers paddle through the confluence of the north and middle forks of the American River, where a long battle was waged over an Auburn dam**

McClintock, though, insists the dam could live again given the proper cost-benefit analysis.

"Ultimately, it will be constructed," McClintock said. "The only question is if it's built in time to prevent the (Sacramento flooding) calamity."

Skeptics abound, including those who wonder how much time and energy need be spent on a political long shot.

"We have to talk about that," said Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento. "We have so many other challenges facing us."

As the panel's ranking Republican in the last Congress, McClintock could chastise Democrats without having the responsibility for negotiating compromises or passing complicated bills.

McClintock denounced a San Joaquin River restoration bill as part of a "massive land grab."

He blamed the Obama administration for creating a "man-made drought" in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, and he blasted the Bureau of Reclamation for focusing on water recycling and environmental protection instead of dam building.

"I fear that this agency is becoming a pawn of the environmental left and its crusade to crush the economy of rural America through the Endangered Species Act," McClintock declared at one March 2009 hearing.

Now under Republican control, the House Natural Resource Committee visually displays its revamped priorities through its website. The committee's lead picture shows hard-hatted workers at an energy project. A dam illustrates McClintock's subcommittee.

"Anybody who takes over a chairmanship has to decide early on if they want to be a problem solver or if they are more interested in scoring political points," said Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, a resources panel member who added that McClintock "has the potential to be constructive."

McClintock said he'll use his subcommittee chairmanship to target "superannuated and antiquated programs that can be eliminated."

He did not identify examples, though he has repeatedly criticized water recycling efforts like one he says benefits San Francisco's "pampered and privileged residents."

McClintock said he'll conduct oversight hearings, suggesting that San Joaquin River and Klamath River restoration projects might be ripe targets.

McClintock further suggested that a "captive breeding program" might quickly build up the population of the Delta smelt so that farmers could receive more irrigation water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.

<http://www.sacbee.com/2011/01/15/3325467/auburn-dam-back-in-play-as-mcclintock.html>