

# New Melones Dam

## California

**Description.** The New Melones Dam to be built by the Corps on the Stanislaus River would destroy California's most popular river for white-water recreation. Originally authorized in 1944 as a flood control and irrigation project, plans were modified in 1962 to prepare for the expected authorization of the East Side Division of the Central Valley Project, a \$2 billion irrigation canal which is still not authorized. Costing \$218 million, the New Melones Dam will be 600 feet high and create a 2.4 million acre-foot reservoir which will be managed by the Bureau of Reclamation.

**Water Rights.** The California State Water Resources Control Board has denied the Bureau of Reclamation the right to fill the reservoir. The Board found that the Bureau could not demonstrate a beneficial use for the water. In describing the river as a "unique asset to the State and the Nation", the Board barred inundation of the river because of "lack of evidence that the New Melones Project water will be needed for consumptive use outside the four basin counties for many years to come, if ever." Operation of the project according to Board requirements would leave the reservoir three fourths empty

gravate the crop surplus problem by bringing land under more intense irrigation. Studies at the University of California and by the California legislative analyst point out that there is no need to increase agriculture in California at this time. The East Side Division, in addition to being an unnecessary project, would constitute an intolerable diversion of fresh water away from the San Francisco Bay-Delta.

**Scientific, Educational, and Wildlife Values Destroyed.** Dr. William Wright, Professor of Geology at Sonoma State University, echoes the sentiments of many educators when he points out that the Stanislaus River Canyon offers "an accessible and concentrated assemblage of geological phenomena" unique in the Sierra Nevada foothills, of inestimable value in geological education. The National Speleological Society reports that New Melones Reservoir would inundate many limestone caves, including some of the largest and most unusual in California. The New Melones Dam would cause the loss of 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat with almost no mitigation and would inundate an important 15-mile stretch of first class trout stream.



*Here are some of the thrilling rapids which will be destroyed by the dam on California's most popular river for white water recreation.*

and would reduce the project's benefit-cost ratio to .5 to 1, even using the Corps' inflated benefit estimates. The Board pointed out that the Bureau has far more water in the Central Valley Project that it can beneficially put to use.

**Whitewater Recreation Destroyed.** The Stanislaus River receives the second largest number of visitors of America's whitewater rivers. The safe but exciting rapids provide an exhilarating experience as one travels past soaring limestone cliffs and picturesque side streams. Thousands of kayakers, hikers, and other visitors come to the river each year, making it one of California's most valuable natural resources. All 15 miles of this recreational paradise would be destroyed by the New Melones Dam; nevertheless, the Corps is still using flat-water recreation benefits from the reservoir to justify the project.

**Irrigation Benefits Questionable.** The New Melones Dam is being built to store water for the still unauthorized East Side Division irrigation project whose real effect will be to ag-



*The dam will inundate areas like the above which are of scientific and educational importance.*

**Mitigation.** Because the important whitewater section of the river will be destroyed by the dam, Governor Reagan and Senator Tunney have recommended that the project not go forward unless some sort of mitigation for this loss is provided. The Corps, however, has stated that it has no intention of even investigating mitigation possibilities until 1974.

**Recommendation.** The New Melones Dam is a mammoth waste of taxpayer dollars with about \$30 million having already been spent on initial phases. The Environmental Defense Fund and the Sierra Club have sued to halt the project because of its adverse environmental impact. Over 120,000 people have signed petitions asking that the Stanislaus River be preserved. The Corps admits that a much smaller dam could provide flood control, flows for fish preservation, and still leave undamaged this significant stretch of the Stanislaus River. Conservationists recommend that a smaller project be considered and funded if necessary, but that the present project be abandoned.