

The Hetch Hetchy Debate

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to re-decide whether or not to construct a dam in Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park.

Background:

This simulation is intended to stimulate each participant to delve deeply into the facts and the issues associated with this case study and to develop articulate and persuasive ways of presenting the argument or defense for against building a proposed dam at the Hetch Hetchy site.

Although this particular simulation is based on a historic event, the arguments for dam construction and the arguments against dam construction/for dam removal are as current today as they have ever been. Ultimately the final decision hinges on the perception of what constitutes the greatest public benefit.

Instructions:

You will read a bit of information about each of the six interest groups involved in the debate. Our class will be divided into six groups with each group consisting of 4-6 students. Each group will represent one of the following “interest groups”:

1. *For Building at Hetch Hetchy*
 - a. City of San Francisco
 - b. Army Corps of Engineers
 - c. Conservationists
2. *Against building at Hetch Hetchy*
 - a. San Joaquin Valley Farmers
 - b. Spring Valley Water Company
 - c. Preservationists

You and your fellow interest group committee members are to prepare an oral presentation in which you support the position of your Hetch Hetchy group. Each committee member needs to actively contribute to the 5 to 6 minute presentation. Visual aids are mandatory; posters, signs, maps, diagrams, pictures, etc.

During the 5 to 6 minute presentation, no questions will be fielded by the group presenting. After all six groups have presented, each group will have at least one member give a 60-second (maximum) final statement/rebuttal and a further 60 seconds will be allocated for several questions from those in attendance (keeping civil, of course).

After all groups have presented, we will cast votes on whether or not the dam will be built at the Hetch Hetchy site. The vote will be done according to how you would vote personally (not necessarily according to your group’s position)

Grading:

Your committee’s presentation will be graded based on your performance in the following areas:

1. support for interest group
2. clarity of presentation
3. visual aids
4. overall organization

Hetch Hetchy Valley (HHV) Assorted Information:

1. HHV was once a deep, flat-bottomed valley of lush meadows, with stands of oak and pine trees
2. HHV was visited by the Awahneechee and Paiute natives in order to gather acorns and grind them into bedrock mortars
3. The rock formations in HHV are similar to those in Yosemite Valley
4. The name Hetch Hetchy comes from a native American phrase, “atch atchie” for a grain mix made with a variety of grasses and edible seeds
5. In the 1840’s Nate or Joe Screech (sources vary on the first name) encountered/viewed HHV and several years later returned with others to use the land for grazing cattle
6. In 1870, John Muir made his first trip to HHV
7. In 1901, San Francisco Mayor James O. Phelan made the first filing with the Department of the Interior for the use of the HHV as a reservoir for the water supply of the City. This request was turned down.
8. The Sierra Club, with John Muir as president, worked to prevent the use of HHV as a reservoir
9. In 1908, the Department of the Interior grants the City the right to use the HHV for water storage, but the battle for HHV would continue for five more years.
10. In 1909, President Taft and Interior Secretary Ballinger visit Yosemite and meet with Muir; they agree that Yosemite National Park, including HHV is a unique, special place.
11. 1910-1913 saw a series of hearings to examine the City’s need for HH as a water reservoir, when other sites were looked at as well
12. Congressman John E. Raker, with the aid of others, pushed a bill through Congress. This act became known as the Raker Act authorized the used of HHV as a municipal (city) water source
13. The Raker Act was signed by president Wilson on December 19, 1913
14. Construction of the O’Shaughnessy Dam begins in 1919; named after the Chief Engineer M.M. O’Shaughnessy. The Dam is completed in 1923
15. 390,000 cubic yards of concrete and 6 million board feet of lumber are used to construct the dam. The lumber comes from within the HHV
16. In 1934, water begins flowing into San Francisco from HH
17. In 1938, the dam’s height is raised 86 feet, providing a final reservoir area of 1972 acres and a volume of over 117 billion gallons
18. The river flowing into the HHV is called the Tuolumne (too-oh-lum-nee) River

Two good starting points for gathering information are:

1. <http://www.sierraclub.org/>
2. <http://www.sfmuseum.org>

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Conservationists

San Joaquin Valley Farmers

Spring Valley Water Company

The Army Corps of Engineers

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