

Hetch Hetchy context and sources

Read the case carefully

San Francisco sought water from the Hetch Hetchy area in Yosemite National Park. An earlier permit existed before Congress considered the 1913 bill. People and organizations disagreed about water needs, irrigation, scenery and public use. The National Archives overview supplies this historical context; the documents below let you study particular requests and decisions.

Institutions in these documents

- Congress is the federal legislature, made up of the Senate and House of Representatives. A senator receives a letter as a member of the Senate. One senator receiving a request does not alone enact a law.
- The President and Secretary of the Interior are executive officials. Some writers ask them to act on the earlier permit. Identify what the writer asks; do not assume that every requested action was legally available or carried out.
- The enacted Act assigns specific map approval to the Secretary of the Interior. Use that stated role rather than guessing general powers from a job title.

Four distinctions

- A petition or public resolution records what its writers request or endorse.
- A proposed bill contains language offered for legislation. Formal wording such as “Be it enacted” can appear in a proposal.
- An enacted Act is a law. In this packet, the official Act is dated December 19, 1913.
- Authorization permits specified actions under stated conditions. It does not prove that construction happened immediately or that promised benefits occurred.

How to read these pages

The source cards are Mentor Teaching paraphrases, not full transcriptions. Quotation marks identify brief exact excerpts. Use the original scans to see wording, dates and signatures. The sources folder holds full images and the government PDF; external links in Source credits are optional. Attribute a prediction or claimed benefit to its writer. The selected voices cannot establish what everyone believed.

Vocabulary: revoke = withdraw permission; rights of way = rights to use a route through land for specified purposes; grantee = the recipient of a grant; irrigation = supplying water to land; resolution = an adopted statement whose effect depends on who adopts it.

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Two requests in 1910

Hypatia Women's Club

Original: two-page letter, San Francisco, February 5, 1910, addressed to Hon. Frank P. Flint, U.S. Senator. Signed by Edith Webster, secretary of the club. National Archives, Records of the U.S. Senate, item 7268040.

Paraphrase of page 1: The club voted to ask that the government's existing permission for San Francisco to take water from Lake Eleanor and Hetch Hetchy not be revoked. It claims the city has no other available sufficient pure-water supply. Page 2 supplies more arguments and the signature.

Exact excerpt, page 1: "be not revoked". This asks to keep permission. The letter does not record that Flint acted or that a new law passed.

Graffort Club

Original: one-page letter and club resolution, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, February 4, 1910, addressed to Hon. Jacob H. Gallinger, Senate Chamber. Signed by Anne F. Howard, secretary. National Archives item 7268048.

Paraphrase of the final resolution: The club petitions the President and Secretary of the Interior to revoke the existing revocable permit. It also urges senators and representatives, especially members of the Public Lands Committees, to defeat any bill confirming the proposed use. It asks for copies to be sent to the Interior Secretary and its representatives in Congress. Earlier paragraphs argue that public park use would be restricted and that water could be obtained elsewhere.

Exact excerpt: "we petition the President and the Secretary of the Interior". A letter to Gallinger contains requests to several officials and legislators. Its club resolution is not a congressional Act.

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Public requests in 1913

Citizens of Merced and Stanislaus counties

Original: one-page resolution adopted at Livingston, California, May 30, 1913; National Archives item 7268067. The text describes 2,000 citizens assembled for a bridge dedication. This is the document's account of the meeting, not a survey of every resident.

Paraphrase of the resolutions: The assembly protests diversion of Tuolumne River waters away from irrigation and reclamation in the San Joaquin Valley. It calls on California's senators and representatives in Congress, and other members concerned with conservation and irrigation, to protect the valley's agricultural and commercial interests. It urges California's congressional delegation to enlist support against the Raker Hetch Hetchy bill or similar measures. This May resolution predates the particular August H.R. 7207 print shown later; do not assume it refers to that exact printed version. It also favors federal aid for water conservation and storage for irrigation.

Exact excerpt: "against the passage of the Raker Hetch Hetchy bill". The resolution opposes this proposed diversion; it does not oppose every reservoir or record a congressional defeat.

Widows and Orphans and Mutual Aid Associations

Original: one-page petition of the San Francisco Fire Department associations, November 24, 1913, addressed to Hon. Charles S. Thomas, United States Senate. National Archives item 7268071.

Paraphrase: The officers ask for the senator's vote and support in favor of giving San Francisco the right to use the water supply. They ask for a favorable vote on the bill and claim the present water supply is inadequate for current and future needs. The letter names Hetch Hetchy Valley and the Tuolumne River. It does not itself state a firefighting argument.

Exact excerpt: "we ask your favorable vote on this bill". The petition documents a request for a vote, not the vote itself.

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A proposed bill and an enacted law

H.R. 7207 proposed bill

Original: first-page bill image held by the National Archives. Heading: House of Representatives, 63rd Congress, first session. It records introduction by Mr. Raker on August 1, 1913, and commitment and printing on August 5, 1913. Its heading is “A BILL”.

Paraphrase: The title proposes granting San Francisco certain rights of way in public lands, Yosemite National Park and Stanislaus National Forest, and certain lands there. The first lines use formal enacting language. This image is only page 1 of the proposal; it does not show the bill's full terms, later votes or enactment.

Act approved December 19, 1913

Original: U.S. Statutes at Large, volume 38, chapter 4, pages 242–251, Public No. 41, H.R. 7207. The government PDF begins at page 242 and continues into other Acts after this Act ends. Use only the labeled sections for this inquiry.

Paraphrase of section 1, page 242: Congress grants San Francisco specified rights of way for water works and other stated purposes, together with lands for reservoirs and dams as determined necessary by the Secretary of the Interior. These are legal grants with stated terms, not evidence that the works were built that day.

Paraphrase of section 2, page 243: Within three years of passage, the grantee must file maps showing the boundaries, locations and extent of the proposed rights of way and lands. No permanent construction may begin on that land until the maps have been filed and approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

Exact excerpt from section 2: “no permanent construction work shall be commenced”. The sentence continues with the map-filing and approval condition. The Act ends with approval on December 19, 1913, on page 251.

A bill and an Act may both say “Be it enacted”. Use document heading, dates and the official approved Act, not that phrase alone, to decide document status.

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Sources for a later check

Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs

Original: two-page resolution adopted at Whitman Town Hall, November 25, 1913. National Archives item 7268076. The text describes a federation representing 262 clubs.

Paraphrase of page 1: The federation opposes changing Hetch Hetchy into a reservoir and urges more transportation and lodging so people can enjoy the national parks. Page 2 petitions the President and urges its senators to defeat bills authorizing the proposed use of Hetch Hetchy or transfers of public lands to private use unless public-welfare necessity is established beyond reasonable doubt. The club resolution does not record either official's response.

Exact excerpt, page 2: "we do petition the President". Do not turn the federation's opposition to this reservoir into opposition to all development.

Maine Central Labor Union

Original: one-page resolution with no printed date. National Archives item 7268079 identifies 1913; no month or day is supplied. The typed name reads Augusta, Hallowell, & Gardner Central Labor Union. The feature's filename uses Gardiner; retain the source's wording here.

Paraphrase: The union endorses San Francisco's petition to Congress for rights in the Hetch Hetchy region. It claims a reservoir would meet human water needs without impairing the scenery. Its final resolution petitions the U.S. Senate to grant the rights embodied in the Raker bill, which the writer says had already passed the House of Representatives. This endorsement and request are not themselves enactment.

Exact excerpt: "we petition the Senate of the United States". The resolution's account of House passage is a source statement; the selected image supplies no exact House-vote date.

Whose views can we hear

The supplied National Park Service context explains that Indigenous peoples lived in Hetch Hetchy for thousands of years and used its resources. None of these six selected requests gives an Indigenous-authored position on the 1913 bill. Their absence leaves a limit in this packet, not evidence of agreement or absence from the valley. See Source credits for the context source.