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Foothills Water Network submits 33-page public comment about NID's Centennial Reservoir project

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Laura Mahaffy/lmahaffy@theunion.com | The Union

Groups have submitted lengthy comments to NID concerning the Centennial Reservoir, which might dam the Bear River. Pictured above is a section of the river near Dog Bar Bridge.

A coalition of conservation and recreation groups has submitted lengthy written comments to the Nevada Irrigation District for its Environmental Impact Report, detailing a series of steps it says must be completed before the Centennial Reservoir project can move forward.

The Foothills Water Network cites mercury in the water, aesthetic concerns and the impact to private property, among other concerns, in its 33-page public comment — one of more than 300 written and emailed statements NID received about the reservoir project.

The EIR must be completed and voted on by NID's board before the project, slated for completion in 2023, can proceed. That vote is over a year away.

Network members slam the proposed \$200 million to \$300 million project in a release, arguing NID should instead consider repairing its existing facilities, urge water conservation and stop leaks.

"In a time of record drought and climate change, we need creative, environmentally sustainable solutions such as recharging the groundwater and restoring meadows, wetlands and floodplains," said Caleb Dardick, executive director of South Yuba River Citizens League, in an email.

In its public comment, the network states goals the EIR must complete, including how the project would impact water quality. The letter states that the Sierra Nevada is “plagued” by mercury from abandoned mines. NID currently is remediating mercury in sediment, which increases the capacity of existing reservoirs.

“Dams are an example of 19th century thinking,” said Otis Wollan, president of the American River Watershed Institute and a former Placer County water agency board member, in a release. “Rather than build a controversial and expensive new dam, this is an historic opportunity for NID to demonstrate how it could meet its needs through increased conservation and efficiency.”

The EIR, the letter continues, also must address any loss to the area’s visual character and quality. The document must identify how a degradation of the area’s aesthetics would affect locals, passing motorists and recreational users.

Additionally, the EIR must show how the project would impact private land. It states 25 homes and 120 parcels would face direct impact.

“Property owners are blocked from the open market, and are deferring repairs, maintenance and/or improvements due to the uncertainty of property disposition,” the letter states. “Damage and losses to these landowners will continue in perpetuity even if the No Project alternative is chosen, because the specter of Centennial will remain.”

The project, if approved, would build a reservoir on the Bear River, between the existing Combie and Rollins reservoirs.

To contact Staff Writer Alan Riquelmy, email ariquelmy@theunion.com or call 530-477-4239.

[Coaliton's public comment about Centennial Reservoir](#)

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