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April 27, 2017
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Homeowner potentially affected by Centennial project searches for answers

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A property sits for sale along the Bear River near Dog Bar Road in rural Nevada and Placer Counties that would be impacted by Nevada Irrigation District's proposed Centennial Dam.



UPDATE: This story has been update to reflect a correction on the estimated cost of the Centennial Reservoir itself is \$259 million, according to Nevada Irrigation District.

The letter that Andy Dooley-Miller said led to his first meeting about the Centennial Reservoir project provided little information.

It invited him to a gathering on Combie Road, where the Nevada Irrigation District would discuss the project he said could potentially force him from his home.

"It didn't really say much," said Dooley-Miller, a Woodbury Drive resident. "It just told us when and where the meeting would take place."

Dooley-Miller attended the meeting, and afterward examined a map to determine if the 110,000 acre-foot reservoir would affect him. It appeared that his home was on the edge of the proposed reservoir. Over a year later he's still unsure if he'll have to move, though he believes the project will have some effect on him.

"There weren't alternatives," Dooley-Miller said. "We never understood why there weren't alternatives."

That's a concern environmental groups and tribes like the Nisenan share with Dooley-Miller about the project that, if built, would put a new reservoir on the Bear River between the existing Rollins and Combie reservoirs.

DAM PROJECT

The project would impact 2,200 acres on the Bear River. A dam would reach 275 feet high and be 255 feet deep.

NID calls Centennial a "potential" project. State and federal officials are conducting separate environmental reviews, both of which are months away from completion. Significant hurdles remain for NID before construction can begin.

NID has already begun purchasing properties in or adjacent to the proposed reservoir site. It's paid a total of \$4,149,881.22, various fees included, to acquire the land, records show.

The money for the land purchases has come from NID's capital fund, an account that receives money from property taxes, said Susan Holt, with NID's public affairs.

According to Holt, all land owners who have sold to NID have approached district officials wanting to sell. It's unknown what NID would do with the land if the project never becomes reality.

"That will be a board decision at a later date," Holt said.

An exact cost of the entire Centennial project is unknown. Holt said the dam itself, not including other items, would cost \$259 million.

It's also unknown precisely how NID would fund the project, as more details are needed before a final number is reached. Holt said property tax revenue, bonds, loans and hydroelectric revenues all are potential sources.

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NID'S NEWEST PROPERTIES



The Nevada Irrigation District recently purchased multiple properties, spending a total of \$4,149,881.22.

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OPPOSITION

Caleb Dardick, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League, questioned the timing of the land purchases, noting the state and federal environmental reviews that remain pending.

"It appears to be a part of their tactic to make the dam seem like a done deal," Dardick said. "Given that the project is quite uncertain, it seems unfair to the community."

Dardick argues that NID should examine alternatives to Centennial — improving infrastructure and dredging existing reservoirs among them.

NID Director Nick Wilcox has said he'd examine any proposal that could provide the 110,000 acre feet of water Centennial is expected to bring. Fixing the district's infrastructure, however, won't meet that goal.

Living in the home where he wants to retire, Dooley-Miller said he wants to see project alternatives. Since that first meeting on Combie Road he's studied the project and talked to his neighbors. He's tried to learn as much as he can.

"We do not want to leave," he said. "We've been here for 15 years."

Over a year after attending that first meeting Dooley-Miller still doesn't know if he'll have to move. He said he's heard nothing from NID about wanting his land. Nothing's appeared in the mail from NID since that first meeting.

A map of the project area on NID's website isn't precise. Holt called it an estimation. NID doesn't know how many properties it must acquire.

"We don't have a firm number of parcels or which parcels," she said. "We're still in the very early stages of permitting."

It's that uncertainty that weighs Dooley-Miller's mind.

"It's something that I think about a lot," he said.