

State funding unlikely for Centennial Dam?



Matthew Pera
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The Centennial Reservoir, if built, would inundate a stretch of the Bear River between two existing dams.

An initial review of the Nevada Irrigation District's application in pursuit of state funding for the proposed Centennial Dam showed that the project may not qualify for any money by the California Water Commission's standards, which could leave the bill for the \$342 million reservoir entirely in NID's hands.

The Water Commission on Friday released initial reviews of all 11 projects that are currently in the running for Water Storage Investment Program money, which funds the "public benefits" of

proposed water storage projects.

NID — which [applied for nearly \\$12 million](#) from the Investment Program — and two other agencies were projected to receive no money from the program, according to those reviews. All 11 agencies were projected to receive less money than they applied for.

But those agencies now have the chance to make a stronger case for their projects' public benefits. The initial reviews are just a starting point, according to the Water Commission.

“Applicants have the opportunity over the next three weeks to provide additional clarifying information and address specific comments from the review process.”

— Joe Yun, executive officer for the Water Commission

"Applicants have the opportunity over the next three weeks to provide additional clarifying information and address specific comments from the review process," Joe Yun, executive officer for the Water Commission, told NID in a letter dated Feb. 1. "It is anticipated that many recommendations from the technical staff review will change once the additional information is received and evaluated."

CENTENNIAL'S BENEFITS?

In its [application](#) for program funding, NID said Centennial's public benefits would include ecosystem and recreation improvements.

According to [Remleh Scherzinger](#), NID's general manager, the dam would provide recreation opportunities including backpacking, fishing, swimming, hiking, picnicking and camping.

Centennial would benefit the ecosystem by reducing the temperature of the water along the Bear River, providing more habitat for local cold-water fish and the invertebrate species they feed on, Scherzinger said. It would also benefit bald eagle and osprey populations, he said.

According to the Water Commission, projects eligible for Investment Program funding are required to serve the Delta ecosystem or its tributaries. NID noted in its application that Centennial wouldn't serve that function.

PROS AND CONS

Scherzinger on Friday said NID plans to appeal the Water Commission's initial review.

"There are many steps to this process, and NID looks forward to working with the CWC Board and staff to further define the public benefits this project will provide to our community both now and into the future," he said in an email.

But critics of NID's proposed project say the review was right on track.

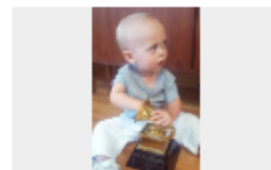
The South Yuba River Citizens League, a vocal opponent of the Centennial project, said NID is wasting resources by applying for Investment Program funding.

The proposed project, SYRCL said in a news release, "would not create a net public benefit because of the environmental, cultural and economic damage the dam would bring to the Bear River."

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"Centennial contradicts the goals of the Water Storage Investment Program," said Melinda Booth, SYRCL's executive director, in the release.

Will Stockwin, mayor of Colfax, told the Water Commission in a letter that, if built, Centennial would have negative impacts on his city's recreation opportunities.

"(Colfax has) no significant parks or hiking trail systems, nor does the city have a swimming pool," Stockwin said in the letter. "Our citizens enjoy this river and its existing trail network as their basic resource for hiking, swimming, fishing, gold panning, rafting, kayaking and just plain enjoying nature. ... We view (Centennial) as a serious taking of our recreational resources, and because of our status as an economically disadvantaged community, it is a serious social justice issue for our residents."

AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT?

Traci Sheehan, coordinator for the Foothills Water Network, said NID shouldn't bother appealing the Water Commission's initial review. The Centennial dam, she said, wouldn't benefit the Delta ecosystem or its tributaries — a requirement for Investment Program funding — and it would result in a loss of recreation and ecosystem benefits rather than a gain.

In a letter to Scherzinger and NID board members, Sheehan suggested "the (NID) board and district demonstrate their commitment to fiscal responsibility by not expending further resources in pursuit of (Investment Program) funding."

Sheehan requested NID put the application for Investment Program funding on its Feb. 14 board meeting agenda to allow the public and the board a chance to weigh in on whether NID should continue its pursuit of state funding for Centennial.

Susan Lauer, NID's communications director, said Friday an agenda for that meeting hasn't yet been drafted.

NID's board of directors has called for an independent audit of money spent so far toward the proposed Centennial project. District staff in December [estimated](#) NID had spent \$11.3 million on the project.

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