



FOOTHILLS WATER NETWORK

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Conservation Groups Question Need for Centennial Dam

Cite significant impacts on Bear and Yuba Rivers in comment letter to NID

Nevada City, CA – The Foothills Water Network, a coalition of conservation and recreation organizations, [submitted a joint letter to the Nevada Irrigation District](#) (NID) today stating its concerns that the proposed Centennial Dam will have significant environmental impacts on the Bear and Yuba River watersheds and surrounding communities.

The water agency's proposal to build a new 110,000 acre-foot reservoir with a 275 foot-tall dam on the Bear River would inundate six miles of the Bear River, completely flooding the Bear Campground, more than 25 homes and 120 parcels, and Dog Bar Bridge, the only crossing of the Bear River between Highway 49 and Highway 174.

In its letter to NID, the Network asked NID to describe how its \$300 million project would actually operate to meet a long list of stated goals. "Many of the goals appear contradictory, especially the one that proposes to benefit the Delta by diverting more water," said Chris Shutes of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. The Network suggested a range of alternative actions for NID to consider such as repairing or modifying its aging facilities, improving canal efficiency, incentivizing water conservation, stopping leaks, and metering water.

"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 Boardmember. "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."

Since nearly half of the South and Middle Yuba River water already gets diverted to the Bear River, the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) is concerned that Centennial could demand even more water.

"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, SYRCL's Executive Director.

The proposed dam site would completely inundate several sacred Native American sites as well as sites popular with the local community who swim, hike and fish this section of the Bear River.

"The Bear River serves as a territorial divide for three different Nisenan Tribal entities. We are extremely concerned about NID's plans to flood this cultural landscape that contains spiritual and ceremonial sites that are still used by Nisenan people today as they have been for countless generations," said Shelly Covert, Secretary and Spokesperson, Nevada City Rancheria Tribal Council.

"The proposed Centennial Dam will in effect create a twenty mile long reservoir, drowning the last stretch of irreplaceable, beautiful flowing river and oak woodland available to the public," said Allan Eberhart of the Sierra Club's Mother Lode Chapter.

The Network's letter expressed concern about the dam's growth-inducing impact in the region. Rather than provide for current NID residential customers, most of whom live at an elevation 1,000 feet higher than the dam site and won't be served by it, the new water storage may instead facilitate more residential sprawl including as many as 12,000 new homes in Lincoln alone.

"Sierra Watch already helped to stop one bad dam on the Bear River. Now the Foothills Water Network and SYRCL are asking the tough questions about another, and we're proud to stand with them," said Tom Mooers, Executive Director of Sierra Watch, a group that has challenged land-use developments in the Sierra including Garden Bar Dam.

The Centennial Dam proposal has alarmed community members throughout the Bear and Yuba watersheds. Nearly 400 people attended two public scoping meetings about the proposal on March 9th and 10th. Dozens of speakers expressed their concerns about the project's potential impacts on the environment and surrounding community.

About the Foothills Water Network:

The Foothills Water Network represents a broad group of non-governmental organizations and water resource stakeholders in the Yuba River, Bear River, and American River watersheds. The overall goal of the Foothills Water Network is to provide a forum that increases the effectiveness of non-profit conservation organizations to achieve river and watershed restoration and protection benefits for the Yuba, Bear, and American rivers.