

NID, SYRCL dispute the 'facts' about Centennial Dam



Matthew Pera
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Properties have sprung up for sale along portions of the Bear River that would be inundated with water from the proposed Centennial Dam.

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The Nevada Irrigation District estimates the proposed Centennial Reservoir project on the Bear River would cost \$362 million, but the South Yuba River Citizens League disputes that claim, saying the project would likely cost over a billion dollars.

Nick Wilcox, president of NID's board of directors, hashed out the need for the project Thursday night during a panel discussion at Lake Wildwood with representatives from SYRCL, who argued the proposed reservoir is an expensive boondoggle.

Wilcox said the population living in NID's service areas is likely to grow and snowpack levels in the Sierra Nevada are predicted to shrink, which could

leave the district with less water to serve more customers.

Building a new reservoir and increasing the amount of water storage available to the district, he said, is a smart move for the future.

But Isaac Silverman, a member of SYRCL's board of directors, said population growth in NID's service area is unlikely to grow as much as the district claims it might, due to constraints on the amount of available land for future housing developments. And NID had no trouble delivering water to all its customers during the most recent drought, he said.

He asked why NID would spend an exorbitant amount of money on a new reservoir and flood free-flowing river for a project that may not be necessary.

Wilcox said the district spent over \$2 million purchasing water from PG&E during the latest drought because it didn't have enough storage of its own.

"I'd much rather spend a couple million every thousand years than a billion right now," Silverman responded.

The two groups went back and forth Thursday night — one side presenting an argument and the other countering it.

When asked by an audience member whether district customers would have the opportunity to vote on the project, Wilcox said they wouldn't. The decision will be made by NID's five board members, he said.

But Silverman reminded the audience that the public has the ability to participate in other ways.

"You do have an opportunity to decide who makes these decisions for you," he said, making a plug for the importance of informed voting.

NID's board of directors is comprised of representatives from five districts, and each representative is elected by voters.

And if the directors were to approve the project, Silverman said, the community would have an opportunity to dispute the decision.

"Every action of a public agency can be challenged and appealed," he said.

Wilcox said NID will soon release an "alternatives screening document," which will provide a detailed analysis of water storage alternatives proposed by community members. A draft environmental impact report for the reservoir project is set to be released in spring, he said.

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