

Regional

Op-Ed | Peter Van Zant: Be Skeptical of NID Scare Tactics

By **Peter Van Zant** - July 24, 2017, 09:02:28 AM

NEVADA CITY, Calif. July 24, 2017 – Nevada Irrigation District (NID) still hasn't dropped its ill-conceived plan to build Centennial Dam on the Bear River. They have yet to demonstrate the need for the project or explained how they plan to pay for the dam's construction. And there is no assurance that the ratepayers won't get stuck with the \$1 billion tab either.

In the face of mounting public opposition, NID resorts to using scare tactics. The latest is NID's claim that someone is going to take our water if we don't 'use' it. However, California water rights laws guarantee that NID will always have priority over any other water agency for the rights to the water needed in the NID service area.

NID ratepayers need to ask the following questions:

Will hydropower sales pay for the dam? NID no longer plans to install hydropower at Centennial. But premium hydro-power revenues will eventually dissipate due to the ongoing construction of alternative electric power storage like PG&E's recently commissioned Browns Valley battery installation and many others coming on line. Why do you think PG&E wants to sell its local hydro operations to NID?

How much more water do we need? According to NID's own reports and local general plans there is very little additional water needed locally (including Placer County). And there's really no new local water need if NID would just lead us to take the modest steps toward wiser water use being implemented elsewhere throughout the State. The number of new rate payers will not be enough to service a new \$1 billion debt for the dam.

How will the dam be paid for? Most likely NID will need to finance the \$1 billion dam project. So what will NID do? Sell water. That's right, the huge debt needed to build Centennial will require NID to sell our water out of the area to water the lush lawns of Los Angeles and other Southern California desert towns.

Without the dam debt our water will be safe. The real threat is if NID finances Centennial Dam with out of district water sales. A water sale contract automatically removes county of origin protections for the water sold. When it's gone, it is gone.

Our complex California water rights laws give NID first rights to this water. No one will ever 'take' our water. NID has a variety of water rights, many of which are pre-1927 that cannot be affected by any other filings now or in the future. Also, if a true local need for more water emerges in the future, NID gets first take because of laws passed after 1927 to protect watershed areas like NID's from out of area water grabs.

Don't be scared. Be skeptical.

Peter Van Zant- Peter is a former Nevada County Supervisor, a former President of the SYRCL board of directors, and a SYRCL Dam Watchdog. He lives in Nevada City with his wife Mary and three goofy pets.