

NID describes Centennial's environmental, recreational benefits



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December 26, 2017

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The Nevada Irrigation District made a pitch to the California Water Commission in hopes of securing nearly \$12 million in state funding for the proposed Centennial Reservoir on the Bear River.

The money would come from a \$2.7 billion fund set aside by California's Proposition 1, the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014, which is earmarked for investments in the "public benefits" of proposed water storage projects.

Eligible projects are also required to benefit the Delta ecosystem or its tributaries.

NID [submitted an application for Proposition 1 funding in August](#). The district's general manager, Remleh Scherzinger, presented the project to the Water Commission at its meeting this month, which is [available for viewing online](#).

In its [application](#), NID requested \$5.9 million each for recreational benefits and ecosystem improvements.

"The district is asking for a modest \$12 million out of the \$324 million that we currently have slated for the project," Scherzinger told the commissioners.

The proposed Centennial Reservoir, he said, would turn existing terrestrial habitat into aquatic habitat.

According to Scherzinger, the reservoir would reduce the temperature of the water along the Bear River, resulting in a benefit to local cold-water fish and the invertebrate species they feed on. It would also benefit bald eagle and osprey populations, he said.

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Scherzinger told commissioners Centennial would provide recreation opportunities including backpacking, fishing, swimming, hiking, picnicking and camping.

Local environmental groups contested NID's presentation.

"NID's claim that the project adds net ecosystem and recreation public benefits is spurious and misleading," said Melinda Booth, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League.

Booth said the dam would wipe out "hiking trails, kayaking runs, beaches, swimming holes and the beloved Bear River Campground."

It would also result in the destruction of riparian and wetland habitat and endanger several animal species, she said.

"The public benefits that the applicant claims for Centennial are mere shadows of what currently exist. ... More public benefit would be lost through Centennial than created," Booth said.

Traci Sheehan, coordinator of the Foothills Water Network, said Centennial, which would be built between Rollins and Combie reservoirs on the Bear River, wouldn't add to recreational opportunities already available in the area.

"It seems irrational to suggest that sandwiching yet another reservoir between two existing recreational reservoirs provides more public benefit than the popular and affordable existing uses for the nearby communities and region," Sheehan said.

The Water Commission is scheduled to release "public benefit ratios" for all eligible projects in January, according to its [website](#).

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