

Melinda Booth and Ashley Overhouse: NID – a new step in the wrong direction

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Melinda Booth and Ashley Overhouse
Other Voices



After years of public outcry over its fiscal irresponsibility, lack of transparency, and misspending on the controversial Centennial Dam project, a narrow majority of the Nevada Irrigation District's Board of Directors recently took a huge step in the wrong direction and approved a budget for the upcoming year that NID's own General Manager Rem Scherzinger acknowledged was unsustainable.

By a narrow 3-2 vote (with Directors Ricki Heck and Laura Peters in the minority) the board on Oct. 23 approved the 2020 Budget even after Director Nick Wilcox told his fellow directors "this is an unsustainable budget." Scherzinger concurred, telling directors that NID needs "a resilient and sustainable budget and this isn't it" (You can hear their comments for yourself on the official recording of this meeting (See this story at TheUnion.com [for a direct link](#)).

Even worse, this budget was passed just a few days after it was released for public review, depriving the public of a meaningful opportunity to analyze it and provide comment and input.

"Highlights" of this indefensible budget include a series of water rate increases totaling 46% starting in 2021, a new \$30 million dollar bond, and \$500,000 in new spending on Centennial Dam each year until 2024.

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This last item represents a disappointing turn of events, especially since NID’s Administrative Practices Committee requested a staff report in the spring to determine the minimum amount NID needed to spend on Centennial in order to improve fiscal responsibility. Unfortunately, that report was never delivered and the board approved millions of dollars in new spending without staff input on more fiscally responsible options.

Since April 2018, SYRCL and our allies have repeatedly asked NID to stop spending on the Centennial project where legally possible. We feel this is even more necessary considering NID’s looming fiscal woes, which have led to the enormous water rate hikes facing NID customers.

Alarmingly, NID has depleted its budget reserves in only a few years. This irresponsibility threatens NID’s ability to invest in water conservation projects, upgrade its aging infrastructure, and fulfill its obligations to its dedicated staff.

NID is currently working on (but is far from completing) an updated Raw Water Master Plan, which will provide forecasts on future water supplies, customer demands and NID’s ability to meet those needs. NID has previously said that the Raw Water Master Plan will inform the Centennial environmental review process. But NID has continued to spend millions on the Centennial environmental review process without this updated Raw Water Master Plan – an egregious display of bad planning and poor financial management.

Finally, SYRCL is disappointed to learn that NID may consider to again purchase properties for the Centennial Dam project beginning in June 2020. NID has spent upwards of \$7 million for such property purchases without knowing whether Centennial will ever be a reality. This is a continuing and profound misuse of ratepayer money.

In light of the PG&E bankruptcy, priority projects such as the Raw Water Master Plan, NID’s proposal to purchase the Drum-Spaulding Hydroelectric Project and now purchase all of PG&E’s regional infrastructure – in addition to water rates increases –

SYRCL once again urges the NID Board of Directors to stop spending on the fiscally irresponsible Centennial Dam project – for the good of NID and its employees and customers, for the good of our community, and for the good of the Yuba and Bear River watersheds.

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