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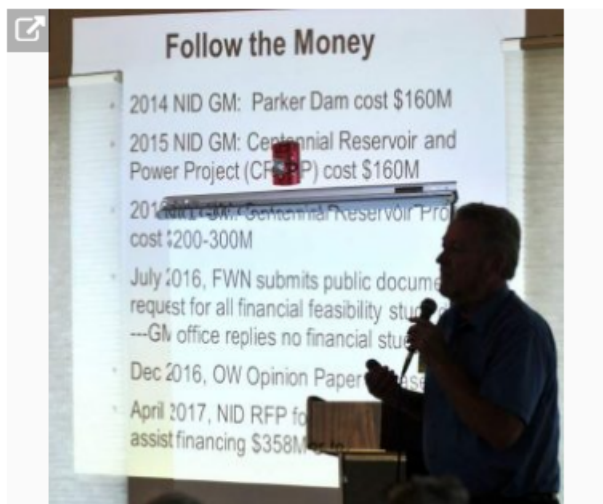
Supporters, opponents of Centennial Dam spar at forum

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Otis Wollan, a former Placer County Water Agency Board of Director, says that the public should follow the money when it comes to the Centennial Dam.

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Funding for the Centennial Reservoir is a key component of the project that would place a new dam on the Bear River.

Supporters and detractors of the project disagree on its costs. Opponents like Otis Wollan, a former Placer County water official, argues the dam could exceed \$1.2 billion. Nevada Irrigation District officials say all costs can't be pinpointed at this time because many aspects of the project remain in flux.

"There is no way for anyone to do a cost estimate," said Remleh Scherzinger, NID's general manager, at a forum on the Centennial project.

Scherzinger added that the total project cost is unknown, though officials say the price of the dam itself and a new Dog Bar Road bridge — \$259 million and \$54 million, respectively — are known.

NID officials and opponents sparred over those costs, along with possible alternatives, at the First Tuesday educational forum hosted by the Nevada County Democrats.

Nick Wilcox, an NID board director, and Scherzinger argued that climate change is reducing snow pack, referred to as the district's largest reservoir. Additionally, weather changes affecting the intensity of rainfall mean the district can't capture the water it needs.

The Centennial Reservoir, between the existing Combie and Rollins reservoirs, is the best place to capture that water, Scherzinger said.

"Believe me, this is upon us," Wilcox said. "This is the existential threat of our time."

ALTERNATE OPTIONS

Wilcox has said he'd examine any alternative that could provide the 110,000 acre feet of water that Centennial's forecast to hold. On Tuesday he said that suggestions like dredging Rollins Reservoir fall short.

Residual mercury sits underwater, leftover from the county's mining legacy. Dredging a reservoir could stir that mercury and send it into the food chain, Wilcox said.

Dredging also would require an empty reservoir. NID would need a place to put the water currently in Rollins, and Wilcox pointed to the Centennial Dam as that spot.

"This has been kicking around for almost 100 years," Wilcox said of the project. "It's very important for the public to track this process."

Traci Sheehan, coordinator of the Foothills Water Network, told a crowd of about 100 people that NID could gain another 110,000 acre feet of water through infrastructure fixes and conservation. She suggested the water district fix leaks, raise the height of Rollins Dam, modernize its canals, adopt best practices and conserve residential water instead of building a new dam.

ACCURATE ESTIMATES?

That dam, Sheehan claimed, would inundate campgrounds, swimming holes and Nisenan cultural sites while enabling the growth of sprawl. Home and property owners, some of whom already have sold to NID, would be forced from their homes.

"Not everyone is ready to sell, so NID will need to use their powers of eminent domain," Sheehan said.

NID officials have said they won't know if eminent domain is needed until after the release of an environmental impact report, still months away from completion.

Wollan claimed that the water district must make another \$20 million in property purchases for the Centennial project. Records show it's already spent over \$4 million.

Wollan also asked where NID would get \$30 million needed for cultural mitigation, an amount he said is necessary for Native American sites.

Wilcox asked how Wollan and others can make cost estimates when they've completed no formal analysis.

Sheehan said it's important that people ask questions about the project, as NID will present it in a positive light. Wollan said the responsibility of cost analyses rests with the water district, not environmental groups.

"So the answer is 'No,'" Scherzinger said of any cost estimate opponents had completed.

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