

Regional

Conservation Groups Protest Water Rights for Centennial Dam

Protest of NID's application based on environmental, public interest and legal grounds

By **Foothills Water Network** - October 25, 2016, 05:41:26 PM

Nevada City, Calif. October 25, 2016 – The Foothills Water Network, a coalition of conservation and recreation organizations, [submitted a joint water rights protest](#) to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) today demanding that Nevada Irrigation District's (NID) water rights application for the proposed Centennial Dam be denied based on environmental, public interest and legal grounds.

"Centennial Dam's alleged benefits are unlikely to justify the financial and environmental cost," said Otis Wollan, President of the American River Watershed Institute and a former member of the Placer County Water Agency board of directors, asserting that the dam will have negative environmental impacts on the Bear and Yuba River watersheds and surrounding communities. "Rather than build a new dam, NID should maximize the use of its existing resources and infrastructure."

NID's proposal to build a new 110,000 acre-foot reservoir with a 275 foot-tall dam on the Bear River would inundate six miles of the Bear River, completely flooding the Bear Campground, more than 25 homes and 120 parcels, and Dog Bar Bridge, the only crossing of the Bear River between Highway 49 and Highway 174.

"It is legally questionable and against the public interest for the State Water Resources Control Board to assign priority water rights reserved to the State for the coordinated development of water resources to NID for a questionable project that will do little to address the pressing water management challenges of today," said Chandra Ferrari, Trout Unlimited's Water Policy Advisor and Staff Attorney.

Since about 400,000 acre-feet of the South and Middle Yuba River water already gets diverted to the Bear River each year, the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) is concerned that Centennial could demand even more Yuba River water.

"NID has made it clear that this dam would support more growth and development. NID should be looking for alternative ways to protect our precious water resources that are environmentally sustainable such as restoring meadows, wetlands, and floodplains," said Caleb Dardick, SYRCL's Executive Director.

The Network suggested a range of alternative actions for NID to consider such as repairing or modifying its aging facilities, improving canal efficiency, incentivizing water conservation, stopping leaks, and metering water.

NID representatives have stated on multiple occasions that NID intends to add hydropower to Centennial Dam in the future. "NID's attempt to confiscate federal land owned by BLM, plus its efforts to bypass the hydropower licensing process, would set a bad precedent with national consequences," said Chris Shutes of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. "The new dam would also unravel the benefits of minimum flows below Rollins Dam that we just spent seven years negotiating with NID."

The Centennial Dam proposal has alarmed community members throughout the Bear and Yuba watersheds. Nearly 400 people attended two public scoping meetings about the proposal in early March to express their concerns about the project's potential impacts on the environment. NID's Draft Environmental Impact Report is expected late Spring 2017, which will be another opportunity for the community to raise its concerns.

Links to:

FWN's Water Rights Protest: <http://yubariver.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NIDWaterRightProtestFINALasfiled1025.pdf>

Attachment 1 (Notice): http://yubariver.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/a5634X01_noticeSWRCB.pdf

Attachment 2 (NOP Letter): <http://yubariver.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/FWNCentennialNOPComments4.18.16FINALPDF.pdf>

For more information: <http://yubariver.org/issues/nids-centennial-dam-proposal-for-the-bear-river/>

About the Foothills Water Network:

The Foothills Water Network represents a broad group of non-governmental organizations and water resource stakeholders in the Yuba River, Bear River, and American River watersheds. The overall goal of the Foothills Water Network is to provide a forum that increases the effectiveness of non-profit conservation organizations to achieve river and watershed restoration and protection benefits for the Yuba, Bear, and American rivers.