

Nevada Irrigation District votes to cap Centennial dam spending at \$2M a year



Liz Kellar
October 10, 2018

[Share \(13\)](#) [Tweet](#) [Comments \(0\)](#) [Email](#) [Print](#) [+](#)



Photo by John Hart

South Yuba River Citizens League Executive Director Melinda Booth spoke in front of the Nevada Irrigation District board members Tuesday evening.

More than 500 people packed a Nevada Irrigation District board meeting Tuesday that had been set to discuss a requested moratorium on spending on the controversial Centennial Dam project.

The board ended up not voting on that request, instead approving what the board called a compromise spending limit that left most in the audience at the Grass Valley Veterans Memorial Building confused and unsatisfied.

The district had called a special meeting to consider the agenda item proposed by South Yuba River Citizens League, which asked the water district to cease work on the reservoir, where legally possible, until its Raw Water Master Plan update is complete. That plan is intended to project the district's future water supply and demand conditions and develop alternatives to meet those needs.

[PREV](#) | 5 of 14 images | [NEXT](#)

PUBLIC COMMENT

After presentations by the nonprofit organization and by district staff members, and an hour of public comment both pro and con, the hearing grew chaotic and tense as the final half-hour ticked down with lines of people still waiting to have their say.

At about 8:15 p.m., Director Scott Miller proposed a potential compromise the board could vote on, telling the crowd, "I'm not shutting anybody down."

"I'm sorry to cut people off, but we could keep drawing swords till 10 (p.m.)," noted board member Nancy Weber.

At least one audience member loudly disagreed, shouting that the process was a sham and urging others to walk out.

NEW MOTION

Miller made a motion to "re-prioritize" the Centennial Dam project with updating the raw water master plan as the district's highest priority. His motion also limited the annual expenditure for the dam project to no more than \$2 million in the aggregate.

"Why don't we cap our expenditures?" he said. "This proves we are slowing down. ... Two million sounds like a big number, but we've been talking about \$14 million."

Weber argued for the compromise, telling the audience, "No one is going to win here tonight. The longer we argue, the more community dysfunction occurs. I'm asking you to put away your swords and see if we can work together."

After several audience members began shouting for the board to consider the South Yuba River Citizens League resolution, director Nick Wilcox offered to make a "courtesy motion."

His motion failed after it did not receive a second, to a chorus of boos from dam opponents.

The board then voted on Miller's motion, which passed on a 3-2 vote with board members John Drew and Will Morebeck voting no.

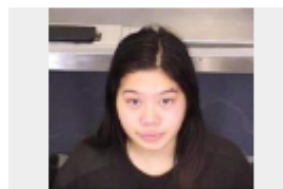
SYRCL DISAPPOINTED

SYRCL Executive Director Melinda Booth on Wednesday expressed disappointment that the water district failed to support her organization's "common sense approach to complete the raw water master plan first," and instead opted to continue wasting millions on the dam.

Booth said NID's failure to vote on her organization's resolution and its disregard for public input further eroded public trust.

"We asked for transparency, but the board rushed a decision on a resolution introduced at the last second, with no opportunity for public input or a chance for the public to review the resolution," she said.

RECOMMENDED STORIES FOR YOU



[Attorneys in vehicular manslaughter case now have toxicology, vehicle info](#)



[Nevada County officials arrest 3 after serving search warrant for drug sales](#)



[Meet Nevada County writers at library's first 'Local Author Showcase' in Nevada City](#)



[Don Rogers: A fast friend leaves us](#)

Booth further noted the language of the exact resolution voted on is still a mystery and has not been released to the public.

District spokeswoman Susan Lauer said Wednesday that Miller had only a handwritten version at the meeting. She was unable to release an official version of the resolution by the end of the day, because a draft had not been signed by the board president.

In Booth's view, the "compromise" resolution is no compromise, because NID's proposed budget for Centennial already allocates \$2 million a year through 2023.

"Compromise is about dialogue between two parties — and there was no dialogue," she said.

"This is status quo," Booth added. "This means that NID will continue to spend money on a project its own counsel stated is unlikely to happen, tainting the raw water master plan process with a predetermined outcome."

THE RESOLUTION

According to Lauer, the resolution approved by the board Tuesday will go into effect Jan. 1 for the 2019 budget year.

Lauer said the capital budget is a proposed budget, not the actual budget, which is set to be discussed by the board next month. Historically, she said, the capital budget often has add-ons and amendments.

The resolution by the board will "lock in" the \$2 million cap, she said, adding, "No amendments would be allowed."

Contact reporter Liz Kellar at 530-559-9269 or by email at lizk@theunion.com.