

Peter Van Zant: Centennial Dam: A long road ahead

Other Voices
Peter Van Zant
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I first learned that NID was planning another dam and reservoir on the Bear River on Aug. 25, 2012 after a Nevada Irrigation District board meeting.

The South Sutter Water District was there to report that they and their Southern California allies had abandoned their proposed Garden Bar Dam on the Bear River, but they would still need water for their farmers. I asked a NID Director about South Sutter's concern, and his answer was that there would be plenty of water from the planned "Parker Dam," now Centennial Dam.

When Centennial was finally made public, NID was proposing to dam the Bear River canyon between Rollins and Combie reservoirs inundating a beloved 6-mile stretch of river recreation, fishing, camping, hiking, and 140 Native American cultural sites. Centennial capacity would be a 110,000-acre-foot reservoir behind a 275-foot-tall dam and the projected cost began a steady increase from \$160 million to over \$1 billion.

Not surprisingly Centennial has drawn a broad spectrum of criticism and concerns, and opposition.

“Centennial is not a “done deal.” Over the next 18 months there are significant process steps ahead for NID and the community that can stop the dam.

The Foothills Water Network is the umbrella organization of the Save the Bear, Stop Centennial campaign. Some 13 organizations and over 200 citizens have protested the NID application for water rights to the State Water Resources Control Board that currently benefit South Sutter Water District's farmers and the

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Delta ecosystem. Protestants include neighboring Placer County, the South Sutter Water District, and the Placer County Water Agency.

Save the Bear, Stop Centennial supporters have been attending NID board meetings in droves, demanding openness and information about NID's dam plans. It took over a year, but NID finally installed a basic video system providing for more public involvement. Recently, concerned citizens have asked for Centennial project updates at every board meeting. However, NID decided to shuffle Centennial updates to their Engineering Committee meetings, that are not video broadcast, the staff and two board members cannot speak to policy issues, and the meetings are more easily canceled.

At the 2017 Wild and Scenic Film Festival, sponsored by the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), some 2,000 attendees registered as "Dam Watchdogs," committed to track and act on Centennial issues. That number has grown to 3,000.

On April 11, 2017 American Rivers listed California's Bear River among America's Most Endangered Rivers, shining a national spotlight on the proposed dam that would irreparably harm the river's fish, wildlife, recreation, and Native American heritage. Please go visit the day use area to experience the beauty and power of the Bear River Canyon.

NID submitted an application to the California Water Commission for some \$12 million dollars from Proposition 1 water storage funds. At this year's film festival, SYRCL gathered over 2,500 signatures on a petition to the water commission opposing state funding for Centennial and began sending representatives to water commission meetings. NID self-calculated a Public Benefits Ratio of \$4 of public benefits to every dollar spent. Independent California Water Commission evaluators calculated a Public Benefits Ratio of zero based on NID's incomplete and confusing application. One NID board member stated the zero ratio was "well deserved" and the board voted unanimously to not appeal the zero rating.

Concerned citizens have questioned why NID is wasting rate and taxpayer money buying private property, conducting engineering studies, and shamelessly promoting the project before it has been evaluated and approved. Homeowners report that NID is telling them they better sell now because the dam and reservoir is a "done deal" and future prices will fall. Ultimately homeowners are threatened by eminent domain seizures by NID.

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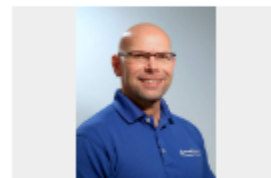
NID is required to produce a legally sufficient Environmental Impact Report and approve it by a vote of the board at a public meeting. NID must obtain a dredging permit from the United States Army

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Eve: Couple
preps year
round for
spooky
display
(PHOTO
GALLERY)

Green Knees.
Tax reform
changes that
may impact
your small
business



David Azen:
We are not
alone



Machen
MacDonald:
Trust your
team to build
your team

Corps of Engineers who are required to approve the least environmentally damaging project alternative based on a legally sufficient Environmental Impact Statement. And NID must secure water rights from the California State Water Resources Control Board against the wishes and better judgment of neighbors, wildlife agencies, and the public.

The future is still ahead, but the basic questions remain unanswered: Is it really needed? Is the dam the only way? What is the true cost and financing plan? What are we losing?

Peter Van Zant is a Centennial Dam Work Group volunteer. He is a former Nevada County supervisor and a former president of the SYRCL Board of Directors. He lives in Nevada City with his wife Mary.