

Another View: Centennial Dam would mean higher water prices

By: Gordon Ainsleigh

NID's proposed new Centennial Dam on the Bear River has some "irregularities". For instance, I heard the General Manager of Nevada Irrigation District say that 55 percent of their customers live in Placer County, but also say in the same meeting that they would not be having any hearings in Placer County. Sound a little odd? There's more.

NID's GM stated at the Meadow Vista MAC that NID needs to catch and store more water in the Bear River Canyon because, due to climate warming, less water is being stored in the high-altitude snowpack - and then he bemoaned in the same meeting about the amount of water that spilled over Combie Lake's Dam and was lost to NID in the previous drought winter. Hmm ... those two statements don't exactly harmonize.

And there's another problem: but for spilled water from Combie Lake, Camp Far West Reservoir, about 15 miles downriver from Combie, would soon go dry. However, NID is unconcerned about Camp Far West going dry, because Camp Far West belongs to the South Sutter Water District, and NID has priority water rights to the Bear River prior to SSWD's water rights. What's painfully obvious is that NID plans to catch the water that would normally fill Camp Far West and then sell it to South Sutter, making them pay for storing their water twice, once at Centennial and again at Camp Far West, thus making SSWD and its farmers both water poor and cash poor, while enriching the coffers of NID to the point that they probably will give their general manager a big bonus for his predatory genius. And surely there will be enough surplus funds to supply bloated salaries for their general and other managers, and healthy raises for all employees, all paid for by the water-desperate customers of South Sutter.

Can it be an accident that Centennial Dam, proposed at 110,000 acre feet, is almost a duplicate of Camp Far West's 104,000 acre feet? NID knows that Camp Far West is economically viable, so if NID builds Centennial to take Camp Far West's water for themselves, they know that their Centennial Project will also be at least as economically viable.

In normal years, the Bear River flowing under Highway 49, a few miles downstream from Combie Lake, is so thoroughly diverted for water storage that it is a dead river for most of the summer and fall. NID's goal appears to be making the Bear River a dead river 8-9 months of the year. This isn't the Colorado River, where lowering water levels just uncover more camera-worthy sandstone canyons and parapets, and no one on this side of the Border cares whether any water remains to go into Mexico's Sea of Cortez. This is the foothills of Northern California, where trees on the high-water line emphasize the reservoir bath-tub ring that replaces a camera-ready canyon, where ugliness goes far down the canyonside to the water. This is Northern

California, where our neighbors, the farmers of our Sacramento Valley, will have to pay for high-priced water because of Centennial Dam. There will be no more economical water rates from their own Camp Far West Reservoir. Those farmers will soon be having to pay NID to release water into Camp Far West, on top of their own storage and distribution costs.

We are our brothers' keepers, and it is up to us to stop NID from dewatering Camp Far West Reservoir and driving up the price of water for our farmers down the hill, just so NID can reap flush funds and high salaries for turning another foothills canyon into an unsightly mud hole.

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