EID looks ahead at 90th anniversary

Nineteen years after El Dorado Irrigation District was formed to provide water for farming, the district continues to work to protect El Dorado County’s need for a reliable water supply at a reasonable price.

At the same time, the district is called upon to provide reliable, safe drinking water for the growing number of residents in the communities of Cameron Park and El Dorado Hills. The farmers are at the eastern end of the service district and the new residential communities at the west end.

Operating an integrated water system is a challenge, and leads to a lot of consternation. But it is not the only challenge. EID has had to face. General Manager Jim Abercrombie says EID has five lines of business: water, wastewater, recycled water, hydro-electric, and recreation, which involves environmental stewardship and access to public lands.

At the core is water. Water is sometimes called Blue Gold. How appropriate for a place where gold was found in the American River that precipitated the 1849 Gold Rush. Miles of ditches and canals were constructed to capture the precious metal. Without water there would have been no gold mining. At the time, miners had to eat, and agriculture — farms, orchards and ranches — became a major enterprise. The miners, individuals or corporate, could stake a claim for the right to the gold they found. But in California, no one individual owns water; the state owns it and no one individual or corporate, enterprise. The miners, orchards and ranches and agriculture — farms, orchards and ranches and recreation, which involves environmental stewardship and access to public lands.

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1892-96. Surgeon engineer Joseph Spink was commissioned to do a feasibility study. Spink recommended two dams that would supply hydroelectric power reserves in the winter to offset the costs and store water to be released in the dry summer season. The directors decided Hazel Valley or Sly Park would be the best sites. Work was started on the Hazel Valley Project, but financial troubles led to its abandonment. Expanding Weber Dam was the next attempt. The Depression of the 1930s caused EID to stop work on Weber Dam and to apply for a loan from a federal agency to meet its obligations. While still suffering from a decade of Depression, EID, Engineer-Manager Fred Hinkley prepared surveys and plans for a new project at Sly Park. EID was prepared to build a dam for water, and contacted the Bureau of Reclamation for assistance. By 1938, the demand for water increased as residents planted Victory gardens. Reclamation sent geologists and engineers to study Sly Park and another project at Square Creek. The bureau advised that Sly Park would be the preferred project to pursue. Engineering studies showed Sly Park’s desirability, but whether EID could repay for the project was questionable.

Congressman Clair Engle was brought into the conversation. Jenkinson Lake was in the American River area to supply water to the Lower American River area to replenish groundwater basins until the water is required to meet future county needs. Scoping meetings for the El Dorado Water Reliability Project were held in April.

Managing EID

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