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IN BUSINESS 46 YEARS

EID looks ahead at 90th anniversary

Roberta Long
Democrat correspondent

Ninety years after El Dorado Irrigation District was formed to provide water for farming, the district continues to work to protect El Dorado County's rural economy with 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; hydroelectric; 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 same time, miners had to eat, and agriculture — farms, orchards and ranches — became a major enterprise. The miners, individual 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 issues water rights.

Water rights
The first California Constitution, in 1850, adopted the doctrine of riparian rights.

Landowners have the right to use, but not store, water adjacent to their land, but are required to share with other riparian owners in times of shortage. Senior riparian rights take precedence over other rights.

The second California Constitution, in 1879, dealt with appropriate rights. Appropriate rights stem from the miners' practice of claiming water diverted from a stream and put to beneficial use. Claims were filed with county recorders between 1872 and 1914. Appropriate rights are "first in time, first in right." The oldest appropriate claims are entitled to 100 percent of their water before others are satisfied. Riparian claims filed subsequent to appropriate claims are considered junior to the appropriate claims.

The 1879 Constitution set out the doctrine of beneficial use. Does it serve human needs? As a public resource, water cannot be hoarded or wasted. Water use must be "reasonable." The doctrine of reasonable use looks at whether the quantity or manner of use is acceptable in light of competing demands. This doctrine has been interpreted differently over time by courts and regulatory agencies.

EID owns different water rights, depending on when they were acquired. The most senior, the most secure, are "pre-1914 water rights." In 1913, the California legislature passed the Water Commission Act. The act created an administrative system, which is now the State Water Resources Control Board, for establishing and regulating appropriate water rights beginning in 1914. EID holds some of the most senior pre-1914 water rights in the state.

EID was approved by voters and formed under California Irrigation District Law in 1925, with 31,560 acres, including

the city of Placerville. It encompasses the South Fork of the American River watershed and the north Cosumnes River. The American River is the second largest watershed in the Sierra Nevada. It included a network of miners' ditches. In a 1952 report entitled "The Story of Water," Walter Jenkinson, EID manager at the time, said, "These ditches, dug almost solely by manpower and black powder, were so expertly constructed, and readily adaptable for irrigation purposes many years later, that the district actually owes its being to their existence."

At the beginning, EID owned 63 miles of ditch and the Weber Reservoir. Service extended to about 6,000 acres of land. The main water supply was obtained under contract from the Western States Gas and Electric Co., and was limited to a flow of 40 cubic feet per second during irrigation season.

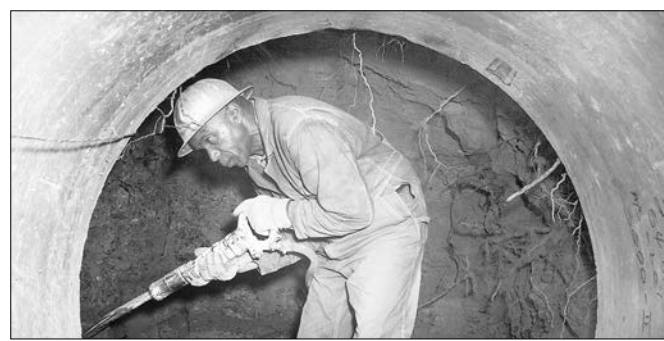
The first challenge was to deal with a water shortage for the irrigation season. California was in a drought from

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Democrat photo by Pat Dollins

JIM ABERCROMBIE first came to El Dorado County as district manager for PG&E. He went on to manage the Amador County Water Agency and now in his fifth year as manager of the El Dorado Irrigation District he oversees the same hydroelectric system he did for PG&E.



Photos courtesy EID
OFFICIALS and an equestrian color guard break ground for Jenkinson Lake at Sly Park in 1953. Left photo, a worker fits together the distribution system for Sly Park Reservoir's water when it was part of the Central Valley Project.



Sly Park Reservoir (Jenkinson Lake) Ground Breaking, Circa 1953

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EID Continued from 7

1922-26. Sacramento engineer Joseph Spink was commissioned to do a feasibility study. Spink recommended two dams that would supply hydroelectric power revenue 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 abandoning it. 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 Hosking prepared surveys and plans for a new project at Sly Park. In 1942, EID was desperate for water, and contacted the Bureau of Reclamation for assistance. By 1943, the demand for water increased as residents planted Victory gardens. Reclamation sent geologists and engineers to study Sly Park and another project at Squaw 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 reported the question: "Why are we mountain people any different from our valley neighbors? They have their great Central Valley Project which is a widespread, coordinated development utilizing multiple purpose reservoirs. Its benefits are spread from Redding to Bakersfield, and the costs are reduced by the power generated by the falling waters — the water

that originates in the mountain counties. The only difference appeared to be that the users of the Central Valley Project are below the large multiple reservoirs, while we in the foothills are above them."

The solution came to be known as the "Folsom Formula," as it was called by President Harry Truman. The federal government was planning to build Folsom Dam. It would be completed in 1956. Engle's bill placed Folsom Dam and the Sly Park project in the Central Valley Project. It allowed EID to finance Sly Park with the majority of the cost paid for by power revenue from electrical energy sold from the Folsom Power House.

The Sly Park Project, operated by the Bureau of Reclamation, was dedicated in 1956. In 2003, with the aid of Rep. John Doolittle, EID was able to negotiate the transfer of Sly Park Recreation Area, including the water rights at Jenkinson Lake, to the district.

EID received Project 184 in a transfer from PG&E in 1999. The project is made up of four alpine lakes, 22 miles of flumes, canals, tunnels and siphons, plus a 21-megawatt powerhouse. The system dates back to the 1850s and was in need of upgrading. The investment gave EID control over 15,080 acre-feet of water and the ability to produce clean, reliable power for sale to California's electrical grid. With the acquisition of Sly Park and Project 184, EID has local control of 85 percent of the district's water supplies.

EID and other water purveyors cannot use their water rights without permission from the State. They have to prove they will use it for the benefit of their customers. The El Dorado County Water Agency assists the purveyors in planning for future water needs and



Photos courtesy EID

CHINESE workers prepare a bench for a flume in about 1874. It took 1,500 men 2.5 years to build the canals and flumes to bring water from alpine reservoirs for the El Dorado and Deep Gravel Mining Co. The project cost \$650,000 and was completed in 1876. Below, workers float down a canal as Western States Power Co. enlarges the original canal system after acquiring it in 1916. EID bought the hydroelectric system in 1999 for \$1. PG&E paid EID \$15 million to take the project. During the 2013-2014 drought water from Hydroelectric Project 184 helped to keep up the level of Jenkinson Lake.

making the water rights applications to the state. The demand for water is determined by the county's General Plan. The process of increasing water supply takes 20-30 years of planning, engineering, regulatory hoops and construction. Abercrombie says it is important to protect EID's water rights because El Dorado County is so small and removed from major population centers. California has 38 million people. El Dorado County has 180,000. El Dorado County has 0.0047 of the state's population.

The El Dorado Water and Power Authority, in cooperation with other agencies in the American River watershed, is applying to the State Water Resources Control Board for 40,000 acre-feet of water under a 1927 priority area-of-origin right. The project concept is to allow El Dorado County to transfer unused 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

Abercrombie extends kudos to Harry Dunlop.

Dunlop worked for Reclamation as an engineer on the Sly Park project. When that was finished in 1955, he became manager at EID, where he remained until 1980. Dunlop is credited with moving EID from a small ditch system to a multi-purpose agency. "It's an honor to serve EID in Harry's shadow," Abercrombie said.

Going forward, Abercrombie recognizes three necessary principles to manage EID effectively, similar to the three legs of a balanced stool: 1) provide safe, reliable water and wastewater services; 2) maintain and replace assets; and 3) generate sufficient rate and non-rate revenue to be able to serve customers effectively.

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