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Bass Lake Transfer by Mountain Democrat

On June 9 the El Dorado Irrigation District finally concluded a sales agreement with the Rescue Union School District for 58 acres adjacent to Bass Lake. The school district also gets the lake.

For the record, EID discontinued using the lake in 2009 and in October 2011 declared it surplus property.

EID had most recently used Bass Lake to store imported water to supplement the recycled water system in the summer when actual recycled water runs short. But, "Due to complaints of clogging and concrete staining from recycled water end users, the district discontinued this use in about 2009."

Bass Lake originally was the terminus for the Eureka Ditch system and it was expanded during the 1975-77 drought. There is even a water treatment plant long since abandoned and no longer meeting state standards. EID transferred about 6,000 acre-feet of pre-1914 water rights via Weber Creek to Folsom Lake, where it is pumped up to El Dorado Hills along with additional contract water from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. So EID has left Bass Lake to fill and fluctuate in accordance with the laws of nature since 2009.

How did EID come to sell 58 acres plus the lake to Rescue Union School District instead of a subdivision developer?

No. 1, it's the law. The Government Code requires "the district to first offer to sell or lease most properties to certain government agencies for certain purposes," according to the staff report prepared by EID General Counsel Tom Cumpston.

No. 2, "the El Dorado Hills Specific Plan limits the property to recreational or open-space use," Cumpston wrote.

So, that's how Rescue Union School District is buying land for a future school site and a lake for nature studies and perhaps even sailing and canoeing classes.

Did EID get its money's worth out of the deal? It appears it did. The district hired an appraiser who considered six recent comparable sales of vacant lands between four and 23 miles distant from the Bass Lake property. By excluding the lake, PCS Appraisal Service valued the property at \$260,000. EID sold it for \$300,000. That is \$40,000 above the appraisal and leaves the school district with the lease of a Little League Field.

EID Director Greg Prada voted against the sale, indicating he would have preferred the district had tried for a higher price. It's a legitimate point. Nevertheless, there are three negatives against the property: the law requiring the district sell to a public agency; the land already included a Little League field lease; the El Dorado Hills Specific Plan prevents any residential or commercial development.

Finally, the wider benefit to the whole community is to have a school site in hand without having to pay for land already designated for residential subdivision.

Bass Lake is 70 acres when full. Altogether EID owns 151.7 acres. EID will retain 25 acres that is used as a corporation yard. Rescue Union School District gets about 58 acres adjacent to county-owned land. Rescue also gets the lake, the dam and 60 acre-feet of pre-1914 water rights. The 4-1 board vote sets in motion a 120-day due diligence period for Rescue. Deadline for closing is Jan. 30, 2015. Rescue pays for title insurance, recording fees, survey costs and one-half of the escrow fees. EID will handle transfer taxes, though the property should be exempt from that, according to Cumpston.

Rescue and Buckeye school districts are the only ones that are expected to grow, since they both split El Dorado Hills between each other. EID got a reasonable price for the property and the lake and enabled a higher and better use of surplus property. We commend the board and staff for completing a mutually beneficial deal.