

From: The Native Nevadan, Aug. '96 (Bering NV, USA)

NEVADA REPORT

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Lander County Commissioner reponds to Rock Creek Dam project questions

In past issues we have run several pieces about the Rock Creek Dam Project. These articles have consistently pointed out the Native American viewpoint regarding the construction of the dam which would devastate or eliminate sacred Native American ground. Just this month, our offices received the following interview submitted by Paul Nellen of West Germany. Nellen had interviewed Gloria Derby a Lander County Commissioner about the dam project. Unlike American journalists who usually take the 'factful' approach in an interview, Nellen barreled ahead with some stark questions and strong declarations of emotion, most of which we all feel but usually do not express. We have reprinted his interview as we felt that you would be interested in the reactions and answers of a Lander County Commissioner when faced with some real questions about motive, respect, and honesty in relation to the Rock Creek Dam Project. Ed.

Interview with Gloria Derby, Lander County Commissioner About: The Rock Creek Dam Project

By Paul Nellen

Q. What is the reason behind establishing the Rock Creek Dam?

A. The purpose of the dam is for flood control and recreation.

Q. Are you aware that Indians reclaim some religious and medical approaches there, that they have claims there? How do you fulfill their claims?

A. We don't ignore what the Indians say. We have heard that they have religious activities and/or training for their medical doctors in this area. We are currently working with these Indians to try to come to a mutual agreement. But we don't ignore the Indians.

Q. What is your definition of a 'mutual agreement'?

A. Something which satisfies them and allows us to build the dam also.

Q. Do you think that the interests of recreation are so important that the possible destruction of this area is a wise decision?

A. First of all, I don't think it's destruction when flooding an area. It puts them under water but it doesn't destroy (the area).

Q. How can the Indians reach (the area) when it is underwater?

A. You're asking two separate questions. First of all, we're talking about destruction. I don't think it is destructive to an area to be flooded. I'm saying that it will limit access. Limiting access is not the same as destruction. If there is water in the area, and they cannot get to the sites as they do—yes they lost their access. Their

area is not destroyed! They cannot reach the exact spot where they want to be. So, in that case, if we do not want to interfere with that, we couldn't build the dam. That is the only answer.

Q. If you build the dam, you will take the healing area, and you will take the water. It will dry out their cultural place. It is like a temple, it is like putting the Vatican underwater. You cannot say putting the Vatican underwater is not destructive.

A. The reason I don't think it is destructive is because if you build the dam and flood it, and then broke the dam down, the water rushes out and the land will still be there. It would not be destroyed! If I understand the Indian's purposes correctly, it is only the moving water that they worship. But the water will not be totally dammed. It will go over the spillway. I have never heard that the Indians respect the Rock Creek Cliffs as a temple.

Q. There are other opinions that this water reservoir will not be for recreation only. The very first reason would be for the mining companies.....

A. No!

Q.which need this water, example, the expanding company in Tuscarora.

A. That is absolutely, totally false! The mine that is currently in Tuscarora has water right on site. It has water in their pit, and has purchased pumps to get rid of the water. They do not need the (Rock Creek) water. This dam is too far away for them if they need the water. But they don't need water. This dam has nothing to do with any mine!

Q. Why do you want to build a recreation area so far away from the highway?

Americans are very mobile. Why do they need this very expensive and in the opinion of the Indians, very destructive recreation area?

A. If we can't solve all the problems between all the parties, we'll continue to drive to other recreation centers for maybe a lot of dollars.

Q. You did say there could be an agreement between the Indians and the County authorities on behalf of the Rock Creek Dam Project. When you really respect the Indian rights, then you can really do nothing. They have rights there. They have the Freedom of Religion Act. They have a say in what is good for their land—not you. What would you say if the Indians came and said, "Oh let us destroy your Church where you always pray on Sunday"?

A. There is a difference between burning down a structure and flooding a piece of land which can be reclaimed. You can not reclaim a structure that has been burned down.

There are two or three options here: either an agreement that has been worked out with the Indians and the County whereby the Indians agree with the building of the dam.....

Q. But it doesn't look like that option (will develop).....

A. Or the other option...start construction and it goes to court. In recent years the Supreme Court has several times ruled that certain religious beliefs are not enough reason to hold up progress for a majority of the people. Those are the (decisions) of the Supreme Court, it has nothing to do with me. This has happened it might happen again. That's all.