

El Dorado Irrigation District Celebrates a Century of Public Service

DISTRICT FACTS

Headquarters Location

Placerville, El Dorado County

Population Served

Approximately 134,000 people

Service Territory

220 square miles

Water Supply and Operations

- Jenkinson Lake
- Silver Lake
- Caples Lake
- Echo Lake
- Lake Aloha
- Forebay Reservoir
- Weber Reservoir
- Folsom Lake (EID-owned as well as contractual supplies)

Water Treatment Plants

- El Dorado Hills Water Treatment Plant
- Reservoir A (Sly Park) Water Treatment Plant
- Reservoir 1 (Forebay) Water Treatment Plant
- Strawberry Water Treatment Plant
- Outingdale Water Treatment Plant

Wastewater Treatment and Recycled Water Production Plants

- El Dorado Hills Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Deer Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant

Website

www.eid.org



In 2025, the El Dorado Irrigation District (EID) celebrates its centennial, marking 100 years of public service rooted in Gold Rush history and growing into serving farmers and thriving communities in the Sierra Nevada foothills.

Formed on Oct. 5, 1925, by county residents, the district's mission was clear from the start — deliver water to sustain local agriculture and a growing population. Yet the story of EID is intertwined with the deeper history of El Dorado County, where water was once valued more than gold.

Water and the Gold Rush

The Gold Rush of the mid-1800s brought tens of thousands to the Sierra Nevada in search of fortune. But the miners quickly discovered that water was the real currency. Hydraulic mining, introduced in the 1850s, used high-powered water cannons to wash away entire hillsides and expose buried deposits of gold. This technique demanded vast amounts of water, prompting the construction of intricate

networks of canals, reservoirs, and wooden flumes that redirected Sierra snowmelt into mining camps.

In El Dorado County, engineers like John Kirk and Francis Bishop were at the forefront. Kirk staked a claim on the South Fork of the American River in 1856 and partnered with Bishop to construct the South Fork Canal, a gravity-fed system that wound across rugged terrain. Their engineering feats not only sustained mining but also laid the foundation for modern water delivery in the region.

From Gold to Agriculture

Hydraulic mining came at a cost. The massive amounts of sediment washed downstream and clogged rivers, buried farmland, and threatened communities. In 1884, the landmark Sawyer Decision effectively banned hydraulic mining, declaring it a public nuisance. With mining diminished, El Dorado County shifted toward farming, relying on the same canals and reservoirs once built for gold mining to irrigate orchards, vineyards, and fields.



Opposite page: Workers float down a canal in this 1922 photograph from EID's historical archives. EID built upon Gold Rush era mining infrastructure to become a thriving water supplier serving domestic and agricultural customers.

Above left: (l-r) ACWA Interim Executive Director Marwan Khalifa presents an ACWA resolution honoring EID on its centennial to district General Manager Pravani Vandeyar and Board President Pat Dwyer during a community event celebrating the milestone.

Above right: A crowd gathers for the dedication of Sly Park Reservoir in 1956. Today, the reservoir serves as EID's single largest water storage facility as well as a popular recreation area hosting more than 300,000 visitors a year.

Photos courtesy of EID

As agriculture flourished, so too did the need for a reliable, organized water system. By the early 20th century, competition with hydropower producers and inconsistent access to water left farmers vulnerable to unreliable water supplies. Seeking water security, in 1925, residents voted to form the El Dorado Irrigation district, cementing local control over the county's most vital resource - water.

Building a System for Public Services

Just two years later, EID purchased the assets of the El Dorado Water Corporation, which had struggled financially despite constructing Weber Reservoir in 1924. The acquisition included 70 miles of canals and laterals, giving the district the infrastructure backbone it needed to stabilize water delivery. The Great Depression brought financial strain, but EID pressed forward, expanding its system to serve both farms and a growing population.

Over time, the district's mission evolved beyond serving irrigation water. Today, EID operates and maintains drinking water,

wastewater treatment, recycled water, hydropower generation, and recreation facilities while staying true to its founding commitment: delivering safe, reliable service in a fiscally responsible way.

Challenges of the Modern Era

The district's century of service has been defined by resilience in the face of challenges. Fires, floods, droughts, and winter storms are part of EID's history and will remain part of its future. For example, in 2021, the Caldor Fire tore through El Dorado County, destroying four of the district's raw water conveyance flumes and causing approximately \$30 million in damages, and threatening critical supplies. Thanks to the rapid response and dedication of EID staff and local contractors, service to customers continued uninterrupted, and the damaged infrastructure was quickly rebuilt. The experience reinforced the district's wildfire preparedness strategies, which remain central to operations today.

Another looming threat is ecological, and happening right now. The golden mussel, an invasive species capable of devastating

California's water systems, is now closer than ever. To protect Jenkinson Lake at Sly Park, one of EID's most important reservoirs that serves all district customers throughout the year, in collaboration with its regional partners, the district has imposed strict boat-launching restrictions in an effort to prevent the introduction of this destructive species. These measures are critical to ensuring safe, reliable water treatment and conveyance, now and into the future.

Looking Ahead

The story of EID is one of adaptation. To meet the growing needs of families, farms, and businesses, the district has evolved alongside the community it serves.

As EID marks its centennial, it honors the early regional visionaries who built the foundation for local services and the generations of employees, leaders, and residents who carried it forward. The challenges of the future loom large, but the district's century-long track record of providing reliable public services demonstrates it is well-equipped to persevere during its second century. ♠