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District responds

Thursday, October 21, 2010
McCook Daily Gazette

Dear Editor:

This is Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District's response to Dan Smith's letter to the Editor in the Oct. 19th edition of the McCook Gazette.

We would just like to correct a few things that Mr. Smith falsely reported about the Department of Natural Resources' surface water controls as identified in the recently adopted Integrated Management Plans (IMP). I would also recommend that Mr. Smith concentrate on understanding the Groundwater controls.

Surface water has always had controls. When water rights are issued by Nebraska a diversion rate is granted based on the number of acres under permit. In Nebraska the maximum amount of water that can be granted is 448.8 gallons per minute per every 70 acres irrigated. Second, surface water permits in the Republican River Basin have had a moratorium on new permits in place since 1994. In addition the last time acres were added to Reclamation projects was in 1987.

The Department of Natural Resources surface water controls call for all "natural flow" permits and "Storage permits" to be closed, Mr. Smith apparently doesn't realize that every Reclamation project acre also has a "storage use permit" these permits will not be closed and could be irrigated with storage water if the water users of the Irrigation Districts choose to take this water from the Reservoirs. The area lakes could be drawn down to the elevation agreed to in our federal contract. When this occurs all reservoirs will be depleted including Harlan County Reservoir resulting in multiple years of water short year administration under the Compact. By-passing inflow based on a forecast by DNR is not a sound management decision.

Surface water use and Ground water use are far from being identical. In 2009 nearly 228,000 acre-feet of water was depleted from the River from just ground water use alone. Surface water use was only 56,000 acre-feet which includes uses from irrigation and evaporation from all reservoirs in the basin over 15 acre-feet of capacity; this includes all the NRDs flood control reservoirs. And half the evaporation from Harlan County Reservoir is charged to Kansas.

Last week Dr. Fanning and Mr. Smith reported that we have had over 100 meetings of collaborating, however I can report that this is the first mention that the Irrigation District would not be allowed to use the water in Storage. I need to verify with Mr. Smith that he and his directors understanding are the same. If so, was this misinformation present to his Board prior to the voting of the most recent revision to the IMP?

Thanks, on behalf of the Board of Directors for Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District.

Brad Edgerton,

Manager.

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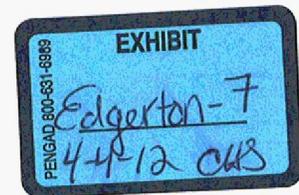
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After reading this letter and reviewing Dan Smith's letter it appears that both men are right. Dan is right that the IMP between the NRD and the state can NOT draw down the lakes and Brad is right that only the surface water districts CAN draw down the lakes.

-- Posted by omnibus on Thu, Oct 21, 2010, at 11:09 PM

With the MRNRDs vote and Director of DNR Brian Dunnigan's order. Not only will the reservoirs useage be changed from Irrigation to Compact Compliance the administrators of the reservoirs will be changed from the Bureau of Reclamation to the DNR and the URNRD and the MRNRD.

Section F of Director Dunigan's order 9/20/2010

During Compact Call Years, as determined from the procedures and analysis set forth in Section X of the MRNRD Intergrated Management Plan, DNR will regulate and administer surface water in the basin as necessary to ensure Compact compliance. During Compact Call Years, DNR will issue a "Compact Call" on the Republican River at Hardy or Guide Rock to carry out administration for the Compact in a manner consistent with the doctrine of prior apporpriation. A "Compact Call" will result in DNR issuing closing notices on all natural flow and storage permits in the basin until such time as DNR, in consultation with the MRNRD and other basin NRDs, determines that yearly administration is no longer needed to ensure Compact compliance, pursuant to Section X of the MRNRD Intergrated Management Plan.

So 11 men from the Imperial area and 11 men from the MRNRD with the DNR will be making the decisions about our Federal Reservoirs.

I wonder how much concern they will have with flood control, irrigation and recreation.

-- Posted by rw county irrigator on Thu, Oct 21, 2010, at 11:59 PM

As this debate continues, it is important that voters realize the ramifications of turning over control of the reservoir water to the DNR/MRNRD.

Suppose as a business owner you are trying to recruit an individual to move in to this area for a position you need filled in your company. This prospective employee has a family. He will be looking at Southwest Nebraska and all that it has to offer. Recreation will be a high priority.

If the lakes are drained to satisfy the compact call on a dry year I seriously doubt that they (lakes) will ever recover therefore taking from this area our number one year round recreational attribute.

Another false hood that I have heard concerns the candidates that are not incumbents, wanting to limit the entire area to 4.8" per acre. This is a blatant lie.

-- Posted by oldfarmer on Fri, Oct 22, 2010, at 8:30 AM

Omnibus; A reservoir stores water during the off season and then the Irrigation District is bound by law to deliver that water to its customers during the irrigation season. If a reservoir is not allowed to store water it will go dry. After that happens who will the NRD's blame and steal water from, the dryland farmers or the citys and towns?

-- Posted by rw county irrigator on Fri, Oct 22, 2010, at 7:49 PM

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