

# NAWS timetable still in limbo

Project still moving forward 1/11/06

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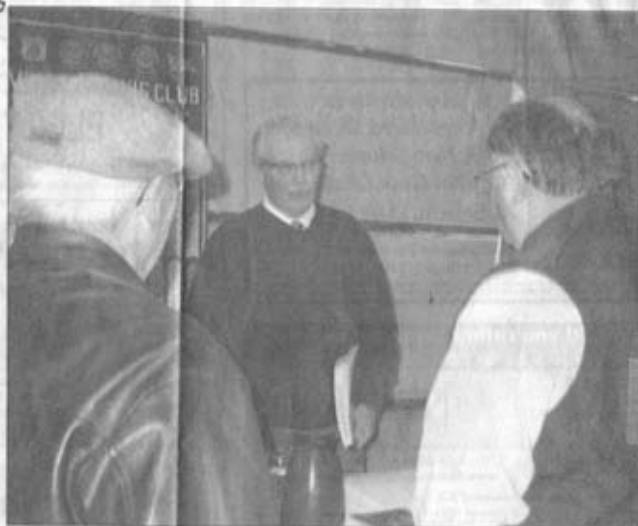
The Northwest Area Water Supply Project is still moving forward despite some glitches but the timetable for completion remains in limbo.

The project was designed to transfer water from Lake Sakakawea to Minot and then to communities, mainly north and west of Minot. It was supposed to be bringing water to Minot as early as 2007, but that has been extended by a number of problems including lawsuits and calls for a complete environmental impact statement on the project.

Alan Walter, city public works director, told members of the Kiwanis Club of Minot and others Tuesday he hopes to get some bids this fall for improvements at the Minot water treatment plant.

But, because of a lawsuit brought against the project by the Canadian province of Manitoba, before any construction work on the water treatment plant is done, the proposals have to go before federal Judge Rosemary Collyer in Washington, D.C., for approval.

The three-phase improve-



Ken Crites/MCN

Minot Public Works Director Alan Walter, center, brings members of the Kiwanis Club of Minot up to date on the Northwest Area Water System Tuesday. Walter said the project is still moving ahead despite some problems.

ments to the Minot treatment plant are outlined in a report that Walter said was released just before Christmas. The improvements would increase

the water capacity of the plant to about 27 million gallons, an increase of about 10 million gallons more than is being processed now, and get the

water moved to the other communities in the NAWS project area.

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The lawsuits and other delays are causing the \$165 million price tag for the project to increase every year by 5 percent, Walter said.

Walter said the Canadians are talking about a full-blown EIS for the project that could cause a three- to five-year delay. If the full environmental study is started, nothing will be done south of the continental divide that runs near the former radar base south of Minot.

Water north of the divide flows into Hudson Bay drainage, while water on the south side flows into the Mississippi drainage. The Canadians are concerned about biota from the Missouri going into the Hudson Bay drainage.

Walter said trying for a compromise with the Manitobans is frustrating. "Every time we answer a concern, they raise another issue." As for the biota transfer issue, Walter said, "Ducks and geese are flying over the divide every day and they carry biota along with them. The chance of the NAWS system carrying biota is almost negligible."

According to Walter, the government of Manitoba wants full treatment of water taken from the lake. "Partial treatment using ultraviolet would kill all biota in the water, but that's not good enough for the Canadians."

To treat the water near the source, as the Canadians want, a separate water treatment plant would have to be built. That would carry an estimated \$75 million price

tag. "If such a plant has to be built, the treatment plant in Minot would have to be on standby," Walter said, because to maintain both treatment plants would cost "a lot of money."

There was some good news from Walter on Tuesday, however. He said that the pipeline designed to bring water from the lake is complete down to a point about 3 1/2 miles south of Max. This spring, two crews will resume working on the project and the pipeline is scheduled to be completed by October.

The big holdup then will be getting something to put into the pipeline. "We can't get water in the line until the lawsuit is resolved," Walter said.

There are a couple of other problems to contend with as well. The Red River Valley is planning to get Missouri River water for its needs and plan to take it from the same place as NAWS. The Red River interests will also be competing for construction money with the NAWS project. "They'll be going after the same money we want," Walter said.

If the Manitoba lawsuit is settled this year, work could begin on improvements to the city's treatment plant and on an intake structure at the lake.

Walter said an important NAWS development last year was the resignation of project manager Jim Lemington of the State Water Commission, who took a job with an engineering firm.

Michelle Klose, a civil engineer formerly employed by the Bureau of Reclamation, has taken over that post.