

# NAWS completion hinges on EIS but work goes forward

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About \$21 million in construction and design work is slated for the Northwest Area Water Supply Project this year.

Meanwhile, an Environmental Impact Statement is on track for completion next year, possibly as soon as next spring, said project manager Michelle Klose with the State Water Commission, Bismarck. NAWS has been plugging along in its efforts to bring Missouri River water to Minot and communities beyond since first conceived in the late 1980s.

The Lake Agassiz Water Authority in eastern North Dakota more recently developed its own plan for bringing Missouri River water to the Red River Valley. The Lake Agassiz group this week announced its goal to start construction of a \$400 million pipeline as early as 2009, with water delivered to the Fargo area by 2012.

Klose said NAWS hasn't a timeline for delivery of water to Minot. "We don't have a lot of firm dates because the EIS has to be completed and the treatment process decided on," she said. If the EIS wraps up next spring, treatment facilities could be built over the next two years. Minot then could have water sometime in 2010, Klose said. "That would be a really aggressive schedule," she said.

Completion of the Red River Valley project by 2012 also is a best-case scenario, said Dave Koland, executive director for the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District, Carrington. The Red River Valley is in a serious situation, though, with the potential for the river to dry up if a drought occurs. That would leave the region with no backup water supply, Koland said.

A supplemental EIS draft is due to come out on the project at the end of January. A 45-day comment period will follow before a final EIS is prepared. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior must sign off on the project, and if Missouri River water is to be used, Congress must give its authorization.

Funding would have to be obtained as well, Koland said.

The Red River Valley project proposes spending more than \$100 million on a treatment plant and \$200 to divert Sheyenne River water to Wahpeton. The water authority is going after federal dollars for the treatment plant and is looking at some combination of federal, state and local dollars for the remainder of the project.

Federal funds are to cover 65 percent of the cost of NAWS, with the remaining 35 percent coming from Minot's sales tax. NAWS still has costs remaining of between \$30 million and \$70 million for treatment facilities. The EIS is looking into what type of treatment is needed.

Also, still to be built are an intake, a control structure near the continental divide and a reservoir south of Minot. That work and treatment facilities are held up in court, pending the EIS, because of the lawsuit brought by Manitoba over potential biota transfer.

Canadians could sue over the Red River Valley project, but Koland said the state is addressing any concerns that might be raised. Having an EIS will help support the state's position.

The federal judge in the NAWIS case has been allowing non-treatment aspects of the project to proceed. Less than a mile of pipe is left to go in the ground between Minot and Lake Sakakawea.

Along with finishing the pipeline, work planned for this year involves building a high-service pump station, a 2-million gallon storage reservoir and four miles of pipeline, all within Minot. Klose said the pump station is expected to be a two-year project. Also planned is the laying of 20 miles of pipeline between Minot and Berthold.

If the EIS finishes early next year, the emphasis in 2008 will be on building treatment facilities, Klose said. If the EIS is delayed, the state could ask the court for permission to move on the next phase — construction of a high-capacity water line between Minot and Minot Air Force Base.