

Burlington interested in using Minot water

By JILL SCHRAMM, Staff Writer, Minot Daily News
POSTED: November 21, 2008

The city of Burlington and neighboring developments have joined the list of area cities interested in obtaining Minot's water while they wait for Missouri River water to arrive through the Northwest Area Water Supply project.

Representatives of Burlington and West River Water and Sewer District put in a request to the NAWS Advisory Committee Thursday.

"We are excited that maybe we will get good quality water from the city of Minot in the interim," said Richard Lokken, representing West River.

The advisory committee accepted the request but action must come from the State Water Commission and the city of Minot.

NAWS already is delivering Minot's water to Berthold. NAWS built a pipeline from Minot to Berthold last summer, then contracted with Minot for water to more quickly resolve Berthold's water quality issues.

Construction of the treatment facilities necessary to bring Missouri River water to the region have been held up by a Manitoba lawsuit.

NAWS officials look to an Environmental Impact Statement due out next month to alleviate the delay related to that lawsuit. However, design and construction of treatment facilities will take at least a few years.

In the meantime, NAWS is going ahead with construction of a line from Berthold to Kenmare next spring. A pipeline to serve Mohall and All Seasons Rural Water District is in the design phase and could be bid next spring.

Kenmare and Mohall hope to obtain Minot's water to blend with their existing water.

Serving neighboring towns would add less than 20 percent to the demand on Minot's water treatment plant, said Alan Walter, Minot public works director.

EIS to be released next month

The federal government could sign off on an environmental study on the Northwest Area Water Supply project before a new administration takes office in mid-January.

Michelle Klose, NAWS manager with the State Water Commission, said the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation hopes to release its Environmental Impact Statement during the week of Dec. 8. That would allow for a Record of Decision in mid-January, before the administration change-over on Jan. 20.

There is a mandatory 30-day wait between the release of the EIS and the Record of Decision.

Klose said the report is taking time to assemble because of the need for the bureau to respond to numerous public comments. The responses fill about 350 pages of the final EIS, she said.

The draft EIS was released in December 2007. The study examined four alternatives for treatment of Missouri River water for distribution to communities in northwestern and northcentral North Dakota. Estimated costs ranged from \$8.1 million to \$90 million for the different alternatives.

The bureau conducted the EIS in response to a federal judge's ruling that more study was needed. The province of Manitoba had sued over the potential for organism transfer from the Missouri River Basin into the Hudson Bay Basin.

Klose said once the Record of Decision is made, the State Water Commission will immediately go back to court to request removal of the injunction on construction of NAWS treatment facilities.

She said design of the treatment systems could begin in 2009 and construction could start as early as 2010.

"The Minot water supply can handle that," he said. "In the summer time we will have to take a closer look, but as far as the water supplies being there through 2012, I don't have any qualms about saying we have the water supplies."

Minot's water plant isn't capable, though, of producing the 26 million gallons a day that NAWS is designed to provide for the entire region.

Burlington Mayor Jerome Gruenberg said if his city obtains Minot water, it would keep its own water system functioning for blending or as backup.

West River obtains water from Burlington.

West River formed in 1974 after Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch discovered it needed to upgrade its sewer system. About 86 property owners in the areas of Del Nor Drive, King's Court, Robinwood and Country Club developments became part of the project.

The request from Burlington and West River raised the hackles of North Prairie Rural Water District, which accused NAWS of "cherry-picking" from its territory.

North Prairie needs to include the small towns in its rural projects to have enough subscribers to make those projects feasible, said board chairwoman Teresa Sundsbak.

"By going in and cherry-picking and taking the big cities like Burlington, the rural people around those areas end up paying more for their water," she said. "The plan of NAWS is to serve the northwest district, and that includes more than the cities."

North Prairie allowed NAWS to run a line across its district to Berthold even though the North Central Rural Water Consortium, of which it is a member, would have liked to serve Berthold itself, Sundsbak said.

North Prairie plans to serve Carpio and rural customers off the pipeline from Berthold to Kenmare once it's built. However, NAWS's reluctance to enter an agreement to permit use of the water until the pipeline to Kenmare is complete prevents North Prairie from beginning design on a project, said Ralph Packulak, North Prairie manager.

Bob Schempp, chairman of the advisory committee, said NAWS needs to concentrate on getting water to the communities that originally signed up. Once the NAWS treatment system is built and can provide the water capacity, the project can add additional customers, he said.

North Prairie asked for a meeting with representatives of the advisory committee, the city of Minot, State Water Commission and other interested parties to address issues of NAWS operation in the water district's jurisdiction.

The committee questioned whether a meeting could be set up but asked North Prairie to provide more information in writing.

Sundsbak said after the meeting that the issue needs more discussion.

"The district has rights and the consumer has rights, and somebody has to speak for the people out there," she said.