

N.D. officials ^{11/4/08} hope for NAWS decision soon

BISMARCK (AP) — A state official says the change in the White House administration early next year might mean an even longer wait for a final decision on the best water treatment option for a project to move Missouri River water to northwestern North Dakota.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation had anticipated wrapping up a court-ordered environmental study on the Northwest Area Water Project this fall. But the report is not expected until late in the year because officials still are reviewing public comments.

Michelle Klose, the NAWS project manager for North Dakota's Water Commission, said the state would like to see a decision before

the change in presidential administrations. She said officials still will have to deal with many other issues, including the Canadian opposition and the need to get federal funding. The federal government will be responsible for the entire cost of whatever treatment method is chosen, and there is no guarantee of funding for the more expensive options.

If a final decision is delayed until next year, "It might take some time to get (new government officials) up to speed," Klose said.

Parts of northwestern North Dakota have been waiting more than 20 years for a pipeline that will bring a

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stable supply of Missouri River water. NAWS was first authorized by Congress in 1986 and has been under construction since 2002.

A more extensive environmental study was ordered by a federal judge as the result of an October 2002 lawsuit filed

in Washington, D.C., by the province of Manitoba, which fears the potential transfer of harmful material into its waters through NAWS.

Preliminary study findings said NAWS poses little risk to Canadian waters under any of the four water treatment options. The final report will name a preferred option from the four, which range in price from \$8.1 million to \$90 mil-

lion, with annual operating and maintenance costs ranging from \$232,000 to \$2.1 million.

North Dakota also will have to go back to U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer to get an injunction lifted on construction related to water treatment, Klose said. Construction unrelated to treatment has been allowed with her permission.