

# Treatment urged for NAWS project

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BISMARCK — The federal government is recommending a \$17.5 million water treatment plan for a project to move Missouri River water to northwestern North Dakota — costlier than state officials preferred but much cheaper than what Canada wanted.

Completion of the Northwest Area Water Supply project — first authorized by Congress more than two decades ago — likely is still a long way away.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's treatment choice will not be final for at least another month. Officials then will have to take their decision to the federal judge who ordered the environmental review.

North Dakota also likely will seek federal money for the treatment, which has a construction price tag of \$17.5 million and an estimated annual operating and maintenance cost of \$306,000.

The water treatment study, ordered by U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer, is the result of an October 2002 lawsuit filed in Washington by the Canadian province of Manitoba, which fears NAWS will transfer harmful material into its waters. Only construction unrelated to treatment — such as the laying of pipeline — has been allowed to continue with the judge's permission.

The Bureau of Reclamation study considered four treatment options, including the chemical disinfection method selected in 2001 that was later challenged by Manitoba.

The bureau chose a hybrid of the alternatives. It involves using chemicals, as well as ultraviolet disinfection at a treatment plant to be built near Minot. The location is between Minot and Lake Sakakawea, and south of the divide between the Missouri River and Hudson Bay basins.

The "no action" alternative also called for ultraviolet disinfection but at the Minot water treatment plant.

"We're moving it to the south side of the divide as an additional safeguard," said Alicia Waters, the bureau's team leader on the review.

Michelle Klose, NAWS project manager for the state Water Commission, said the agency was still studying the bureau report and had no immediate comment.

Tristan Landry, spokesman for the Canadian Embassy in Washington, said officials had not yet seen the report but that in general the country remained worried about major diversions of water between basins "and endorses other less disruptive alternatives, such as demand management and water conservation."

The updated estimated construction costs of the four treatment alternatives studied ranged from \$11.5 million to \$92 million, depending on the level of treatment, with annual operating and maintenance costs ranging from \$271,000 to \$2.2 million.

North Dakota officials saw no reason to go with anything other than the cheap-

## NAWS breakdown

### FEDERAL DECISION

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is recommending a water treatment option for the Northwest Area Water Supply project that would cost \$17.5 million to build and \$306,000 a year to maintain. That's a little costlier than what North Dakota preferred but a lot cheaper than what Canada wanted.

### BASIS OF DISPUTE

Manitoba fears the potential transfer of harmful material into its waters through NAWS, which will bring Missouri River water to northwestern North Dakota. North Dakota officials say Manitoba's fears are unfounded.

### WHAT'S NEXT

The preferred option will not be final for at least another month. Officials then will have to take their decision to the federal judge who ordered the environmental review. North Dakota also likely will seek funding from the federal government for the treatment. Canada has not said what its next action might be.

est option, the one chosen in 2001. The level of treatment preferred by the Manitoba government would cost an estimated \$76 million, with operation and maintenance costing about \$1.9 million annually.

The environmental study found that NAWS posed little risk to Canadian waters under any of the options studied.

"The preferred alternative includes treatment processes which are capable of reducing the project-related risks of a biological invasion even further than what can be achieved by the no action alternative, which... has already been determined to be an adequate level of treatment," the study said.

The report also said the threat of invasive water species transferring between the Missouri River and Hudson Bay basins exists even without NAWS, through the movement of people and animals and through such weather conditions as wind or major floods.

North Dakota's Health Department had argued earlier that in light of those findings, money would be better spent on such things as education and surveillance than on the advanced water treatment.

Dave Glatt, head of the department's environmental health section, said the treatment option recommended by the federal government "is a fair and technically sound approach."

"What they have proposed, quite frankly, it's kind of what we thought was the appropriate way to go," he said.

A public comment period that ended in late March on the draft environmental study raised other issues involving the impact of NAWS, such as water depletion in the Missouri River and the effects on global climate change. The bureau said in its report that those issues were outside the scope of the court-mandated study of treatment options.