

Minot area supports existing NAWS plan

By JILL SCHRAMM, Staff Writer jschramm@minotdailynews.com, 2-6-08

Water Commission awards bid on NAWS pump station

Construction Engineering of Grand Forks will be building a booster pump station in Minot for the Northwest Area Water Supply project this year.

The North Dakota State Water Commission awarded a \$246,250 contract to the company on Monday, according to NAWS project manager Michelle Klose. The pump station should be in place along 16th Street Southwest, across the street from the Minot Water Treatment Plant, by the end of July.

The new station will pump 2,400 gallons per minute, or up to nearly 3.5 million gallons a day, to provide interim service to Minot's South Hill and to the Berthold distribution line until an 18-million gallon per day, high-service pump station is completed.

The water commission will open bids in March for the high-service pump station. Construction will begin this year and finish by the end of 2009.

- Jill Schramm

Speakers at an environmental hearing on the Northwest Area Water Supply project Tuesday urged federal officials to stay the course and not require costly, additional water treatment. The Bureau of Reclamation held the second of three hearings on a draft Environmental Impact Statement on NAWS in Minot. A final hearing will be held in Four Bears Casino in New Town Thursday at 7 p.m.

Several speakers all favored the "no action" alternative in the draft EIS. The no-action alternative is an existing plan that calls for disinfection at a facility near Max and full treatment at the Minot Water Treatment Plant. The draft EIS estimates construction cost at \$8.1 million. The Manitoba government sued over the plan because of concern over potential transfer of organisms between the Missouri River Basin and Hudson Bay Basin. NAWS would bring Missouri River water across the continental divide to serve Minot and communities beyond. A federal judge ruled more environmental study is needed, and the bureau began the EIS a year ago.

In addition to the no-action alternative, the EIS is looking at three other alternatives that increase the treatment level. The draft EIS concluded that each of the alternatives carries "very low risk" of transferring invasive species between the river basins when compared to existing channels of transfer, including floods, storms, wildlife and shipping.

"Based upon the effectiveness, the relative risk to the environment and cost, the no action alternative could be called the logical alternative," said Bob Schempp of Minot, chairman of the NAWS Advisory Committee. John MacMartin, president of the Minot Area Chamber of Commerce, stressed the higher risk from other means of species transfer. The transfer of water through movement of fish from the government's Garrison Fish Hatchery to water bodies across North Dakota is among those other means, he said.

"Any biota transfer that's going to occur has already occurred through federal action," he said. Minot Mayor Curt Zimbelman said the city favors the "no action" alternative. "Some of the other alternatives are at least eight times the cost of the no-action alternative and do not provide a significant increase in reduction of biota transfer," he said. Zimbelman called for the bureau to reach its record of decision quickly to prevent further delay of the project. He mentioned the city's continuing support for NAWS, despite having already waited 20 years.

“There has been no wavering in support for this project from our community or from the region,” he said. Minot Alderman Art Ekblad reminded the bureau that North Dakota was promised water first through Garrison Diversion and then in exchange for Garrison Diversion. “Now we have given up land. We have given up money. We have spent a lot of time trying to get water up in the northwest and to provide water for the state of North Dakota. Folks, I think it’s time that we filled the pipes with water,” he said.

Al Larson of Minot talked about a report of sewage dumped into Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba in the past couple of years. In light of that news, he was critical of Manitoba suing to keep invasive species out of its waters. “It looks totally hypocritical. It would have to be more of a political agenda than an actual problem,” he said.

NAWS project manager Michelle Klose from the State Water Commission highlighted that the environmental study is finding that only one protozoa exists in the Missouri system that doesn’t exist in the Hudson Bay system. There is no secondary host in the Souris River to carry that organism through its life cycle, she said. The water commission is dismayed at the way the emphasis on species transfer has played out to delay bringing good water to the area, Klose said in urging the bureau to select the no-action alternative.

Other alternatives range in cost from \$68 million to \$90 million. The federal government is obligated to fund the treatment to comply with the Boundary Waters Treaty. The Manitoba government has indicated in the past that it prefers a form of filtration that would cost \$73 million to construct. The Manitoba government hasn’t formally responded to the draft EIS.

People can submit comments until Feb. 26. Information about the project, comments already submitted and directions for submitting comments are available online at (www.usbr.gov/gp/dkao).