

Public views vary on NAWS study

By JILL SCHRAMM, Staff Writer jschramm@minotdailynews.com, 2-8-08

Rural area to benefit from NAWS

The State Water Commission and North Prairie Rural Water District have reached an agreement that will bring better water to the rural area around Des Lacs, Berthold and Carpio. The water district will be able to tie into the Northwest Area Water Supply line between Minot and Berthold every two miles, said Ralph Packulak, North Prairie manager. That will enable North Prairie to serve new rural customers along the NAWS line, including residents living between Des Lacs and Berthold who have been trying to get rural water for about 30 years, he said. "To see the transmission line coming was a welcome sight to them," he said. The city of Carpio also is working with North Prairie to see if it can get service.

NAWS is designed to bring Missouri River water to the area, but until a method of water treatment is determined, Minot will be providing water through any newly constructed NAWS pipelines. Packulak said rural water service could be in place by 2009. Berthold is scheduled to receive Minot's water through the NAWS line by the end of this year. Talbott Trailer Court and a housing development at Speedway Hill, west of Minot, were included in a water project this past year that is using a NAWS line. Households now are beginning to come on line. Packulak said the entire project area should be receiving water by spring. The North Central Rural Water Consortium, of which North Prairie is a part, conducted the expansion project.

Government agencies, Minot residents and an environmental group have been among those submitting written opinions on a draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Northwest Area Water Supply project. The Bureau of Reclamation has completed its public hearings on the draft, although it will continue to take public comments through Feb. 26. Letters already received include only one that indicated a significant concern over NAWS. The Great Lakes Environmental Law Center in Royal Oak, Mich., urged the bureau to strictly adhere to the Boundary Waters Treaty.

“The Draft EIS fails to stress the importance of resource management through a watershed approach and a shared international perspective,” attorney Nick Schroeck wrote for the center. “While the Bureau has participated in a cursory view of the project under the BWT and the 1975 recommendations of the International Joint Commission, the entire process has not respected the authority of the BWT and has continuously threatened to compromise U.S.-Canada relations. We urge the Bureau to follow the IJC’s recommendations when evaluating the treatment alternatives listed in the Draft EIS and work closely with the Provinces and Ottawa to eliminate the risk of biota transfer.”

The center noted that the Great Lakes are connected to the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers through the Chicago Sanitary Canal. While acknowledging that invasion of the Great Lakes has occurred through international shipping, Schroeck added, “Opening further channels for the spread of invasive species to and from the Great Lakes and to and from the NAWS project area is a proven folly, demonstrated by a history of ill-conceived decisions. The Bureau should heed the lessons of historic interbasin diversions and always first seek their avoidance.”

The center also cited the population decline projected for northwestern North Dakota through 2020 in refuting the claim that the project is needed to meet municipal needs. The Corps of Engineers also raised a concern about the proposed location for a treatment or pre-treatment facility near Max because the area is located outside the 100-year flood plain. The Corps noted the potential for flood hazard from heavy rainfall and runoff unless any facilities are placed above, or flood proofed, to a safe elevation. The State Water Commission is aware of an existing slough and the water issues related to the site, said Michelle Klose, NAWS project manager.

“We do know the water level is a concern there and will take that into consideration in the design of the plant,” she said. The water commission also provided information to the bureau related to cost figures for two of the treatment alternatives being studied in the EIS. The bureau’s \$68 million cost estimate for building a basic pre-treatment facility is nearly \$20 million too high, the commission reported. Basic treatment includes reducing particles in the water, and chemical and ultraviolet disinfection at a plant near Max.

A second alternative, involving a different method of settling solids from the water, is about \$5 million too low in the bureau’s estimate of \$73 million, the commission stated. The commission offered its estimates based on findings from a pilot study conducted for NAWA treatment. The other construction alternatives in the plan are \$90 million for microfiltration, or \$8.1 million to continue with an existing plan for only chemical disinfection in the pre-treatment process near Max.