

U.S. DISTRICT COURT

Judge sets deadline for legal briefs in NAWS dispute

BISMARCK (AP) — A federal judge has set a March 31 deadline for final briefs in a legal dispute over the Northwest Area Water Supply project.

U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer in February granted Manitoba's request for more study of the \$145 million project that will bring Missouri River water to northwest and north central North Dakota. But she declined to immediately stop construction, as Canada had requested.

"The question before the judge is what kind of construction will she allow while that (environmental study) work is taking place," said Jim Lennington, the NAWS project manager for the state

Water Commission.

Nearly 30 miles of pipe has been laid from the Minot water treatment plant to the Max area, leaving about another 15 miles of pipe to go. The goal for completion of that stretch is October 2006.

Lennington said funding for the work is still being finalized, as the state and Minot try to make up a shortfall of federal money.

He said bids for the final 15 miles of pipeline came in lower than expected, at \$10.3 million rather than \$11.5 million.

Lennington said when the bid will be awarded is uncertain, given the legal issues. The state has 90 days from the Feb. 3 bid opening to award the contract, he said.