

# Minot seeks assurance

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Minot officials want the freedom to get out of a water supply contract with the state Water Commission if the Northwest Area Water Supply project does not bring Missouri River water to northwestern North Dakota.

Commission officials say the request is not being viewed as pessimistic.

"We can understand the city of Minot being cautious on this," said Michelle Klose, NAWS project manager for the commission. "NAWS has taken a long time."

Minot has agreed to sell water to the Water Commission for resale to the city of Berthold through the NAWS pipeline. The deal will provide Berthold with drinking water until NAWS begins receiving Missouri River water. A pipeline from Minot to Berthold is finished and should be supplying water on Aug. 18.

However, the Minot City Council also wants the Water Commission to consider an amendment to the contract that would allow Minot to opt out if the Missouri River water never materializes.

"We need to have some ability to take care of our citizens first," Mayor Curt Zimbelman said.

The Canadian province of Manitoba has held up the river water with a lawsuit. Officials there are worried about the possible transfer of unwanted organisms between the Missouri and Hudson Bay basins and are calling for an expensive treatment system, which North Dakota officials say is not necessary.

NAWS was first authorized by Congress in 1986 and has been under construction since 2002. But the federal Bureau of Reclamation is not expected to make a final decision until late this year on the best of four water treatment alternatives.

The estimated construction costs of the four options range from \$8.1 million to \$90 million, with annual operating and maintenance costs ranging from \$232,000 to \$2.1 million.

The treatment option preferred by the Manitoba government would cost an estimated \$73 million, with operation and maintenance costing about \$1.8 million annually.

Minot council members wonder how long the city should wait for the river water before reconsidering the sale of city water to NAWS.

"At what point do we say we can't do it anymore?" Alderman Dean Frantsvog said.

Klose said the contract is for 10 years but such things as water rates and potential expansions of the contract to involve other cities such as Mohall and Kenmare will be reviewed annually.

"They do have a lot of flexibility as to how much water they supply," she said.

Klose said the decision in a few months on what type of water treatment will be required for NAWS will give officials a better indication of when Missouri River water might actually flow north.