160

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

April 6, 2006

Ms. Signe Snortland
Red River Valley Water Supply Project
Bureau of Reclamation
P.O. Box 1017
Bismarck ND 58502-1017

Dear Ms. Snortland:

Enclosed are the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's comments on the Red River Valley Water Supply Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Sincerely,

John N. Holck
Assistant Division Director
Regional Division

JNH:smd

Enclosure

cc: William Haapala, MPCA Northwest Regional Manager
Kent Lokkesmoe, DNR Division of Waters

Red River Valley Draft Environmental Impact Statement Comments
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
April 5, 2006

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) Northwest Regional Office has reviewed the Red River Valley Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Our comments are limited to two issues:

1. The demographic analysis, and
2. The water quality assessments.

Comments regarding source water assessments, as stated in the MPCA's comments on the Red River Valley Needs and Options Study, September 2005, are still of concern, but will be addressed by Minnesota Department of Health.

Regarding the selection of counties included in the demographic and economic analysis: pages 134-135 list the counties included. Page 135 states: "The Minnesota study area counties include Becker, Clay, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Otter Tail, Polk, Roseau, and Wilkin Counties. The counties that comprise the economic impact area extend beyond the water user area and include counties where construction impacts could occur." The report does not provide a rationale for including these Minnesota counties in the overall population estimates.

The population estimates should describe the potential water users of the projects. There could be RRV project users in Wilkin, Clay, Polk and Kittson counties of Minnesota. There will not be water users in Lake of the Woods, Otter Tail and Roseau counties, therefore these counties should be excluded from the population tables.

Page 134 further states: "All of the counties in the study area experienced a population loss from 1990 to 2003 except for Cass, Pembina, Clay, and Otter Tail Counties." The accompanying chart shows that the population of Pembina County declined between 1990 and 2003; the text should be corrected to match the data in the chart.

Including the population of Otter Tail County as potential water users misleads the reader because it inflates the overall population increases. The Minnesota State Demographic Center predicts that the population of Otter Tail will grow 37 percent by 2030 (p. 12, McMurray, Martha, Minnesota Population Projections 2000 – 2030. October 2002 Minnesota Planning State Demographic Center. Accessed April 4, 2006 http://www.demography.state.mn.us/DownloadFiles/00Proj/PopulationProjections02Intro.pdf). Otter Tail's anticipated population growth is due to in-migration of retiring senior citizens moving to homes on lakes. This phenomenon is not related to the water needs of the Red River Valley, and Otter Tail county residents will not be users of any of the water provided by this project. Including Otter Tail County inaccurately represents the population growth for the project area because it inflates the projected need and the size of the project needed. The population projections should only include potential project users.

Regarding water quality, unlike the Needs and Options study, the draft Environmental Impact Statement examines water quality conditions with respect to existing water quality standards, guidelines and concerns, and examines water quality conditions with respect to the effect of the seven alternatives. These studies all document the fact that water quality of the Red River of the North is limited:

"Not all surface waters can be used for their intended purpose, usually because of poorer than expected water quality, some physical modification of the habitat, or a biological problem. The stressors within the Red River Basin, which cause use impairment are most often associated with the following: ammonia concentrations, materials that consume oxygen (e.g., biochemical oxygen demand), dissolved solids,

sedimentation, suspended solids (turbidity), bacteria from mammals, and trace metals like mercury," states p. 77 of the Draft EIS.

The report further states the number of samples that exceed numeric standards is less than:

- 3 percent of the sulfate samples;
- 12 percent of the fecal coliform bacteria samples collected during the recreation season;
- 15 percent of the TDS samples; and
- 4 percent of the dissolved oxygen samples.

Finally, the Draft EIS notes: "The total phosphorus concentration exceeds the recommended levels more than 50 percent of the time within the Red River Basin." (Ibid). The draft EIS predicts that the actual change in concentration of selected pollutants may be as low as 0.1 percent or up to plus or minus 15 percent for some pollutants in some locations. These changes are characterized as not of concern.

The state of Minnesota considers water quality to be of concern, or threatened, when 10 percent of water quality samples do not meet standards. Therefore, the seemingly small changes noted above could change the water quality from supporting standards to exceeding standards. Furthermore, it should be noted that in July 2004, the governors of North Dakota and Minnesota and the premier of Manitoba agreed to reduce by 10 percent the amount of phosphorus entering Lake Winnipeg through the Red River. Any increases would be contrary to this political agreement.

The study also notes that if the predicted drought occurs, base flow in the Red River of the North could be return flow or effluent flow dominated. "Whether water with the quality of effluent is more desirable than a lack of water quality because of little or no flow is a policy decision," states p. 125 of the supporting report on existing water quality standards. This is a policy decision that ought to be considered within the draft environmental impact statement. The results of this discussion could lead to specific permit language for some of the action alternatives, which would likely limit operation of those alternatives, as is the case with the permit for the Devils Lake discharge. The draft EIS ought to consider this issue.

Prepared by Molly MacGregor, MPCA, Red River Basin Coordinator, (218) 846-0494
Molly.macgregor@pca.state.mn.us