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April 12, 2006

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

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Re: Response to the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project*. As a representative body for 36 First Nations in Southern Manitoba, the Southern Chiefs Organization is compelled to respond to this report which presents several options that will have an impact on our environment and on the exercise of our inherent rights as indigenous peoples of North America.

The Southern Chiefs Organization is opposed to an interbasin transfer of water in order to meet projected needs in the Red River Valley. Although the risks are low according to the DEIS, any risk will in fact be disproportionately greater for the First Nations of Canada and others who rely on the water and aquatic resources for their livelihood.

The commercial fishery on Lake Winnipeg has a large proportion of First Nation fishers, and is a sole source of income for many families in the communities surrounding the lake. Lake Winnipeg also sustains our people who continue to exercise their right to hunt and fish in this area. The introduction of invasive species and foreign biota has the potential for tremendous impact on our commercial and traditional fisheries.

The water treatment plans as described will not be 100% effective at removing all harmful biota. Also, treatment plants are subject to failures which could allow untreated waters to flow into the Red River Basin. The most effective method for preventing foreign biota from entering the Red River and Lake Winnipeg watershed is to focus on in-basin solutions to water shortages.

The traditional knowledge of our First Nations people tells us that we have a responsibility to care for the earth and the systems that support life. Ecosystem dynamics

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are very complex, and it is arrogant to think that as humans we can have complete understanding or improve the functioning of natural ecosystems. To make alterations to water flow on the interbasin scale under consideration goes against common sense and precautionary logic. Many times in human history we have seen devastation arising from the unforeseen consequences of our actions.

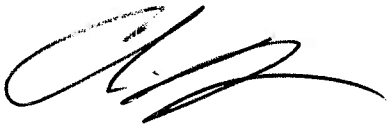
Although our specific concerns regarding the impacts on our environment and inherent rights may be outside of the scope of your DEIS, they are nonetheless important, and worthy of consideration.

We find a troubling aspect of the DEIS is its apparent exclusion of tribal governments from the development process and the Cooperating Agency Team. The sovereignty of tribal governments over lands in the area of potential effect and the impacts on their water rights seem to have been overlooked. Tribal governments must be included in any planning which involves land and water in their traditional territories.

Another point requiring attention is the implications of the Red River Valley Water Supply Project under the Boundary Waters Treaty. The GDU, Missouri River, and Lake of the Woods options would all require involvement of the International Joint Commission (IJC). The previous IJC ruling on the Garrison Diversion states that interbasin transfer issues must be resolved between the parties before any project can go ahead. Such resolution has not been reached.

The Southern Chiefs Organization will remain committed to protecting the inherent rights of its member First Nations. We strongly encourage the Bureau of Reclamation and the State of North Dakota to pursue water conservation, demand management, and local solutions in consultation with indigenous and stakeholder governments to ensure a sustainable water supply for the Red River Valley.

Sincerely,



Chris Henderson
Southern Grand Chief
Southern Chiefs Organization