

February 16, 2006

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

Subj.: North Dakota Office of State Engineer and State Water Commission testimony
relative to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Red River Valley
Water Supply Project

My name is Robert Shaver. I am the Director of the Water Appropriations Division of the North Dakota State Water Commission. It is my pleasure to appear before you today on behalf of the Office of State Engineer, and the North Dakota State Water Commission to provide testimony relative to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project. Please note that we will be providing more formal, technical comments on the Draft EIS at a later time.

Before I provide remarks pertaining to drought, water supply shortages, water conservation, and alternatives, addressed as part of this draft EIS, I would like to point out that it was those same issues nearly seventy years ago that resulted in the creation of the State Water Commission. As it was at its inception, the agency's mission remains "to improve the quality of life and strengthen the economy of North Dakota by managing the water resources of the state for the benefit of its people."

As outlined in the Draft EIS, and the Needs and Options Report, it is clear that North Dakota, and the Red River Valley desperately need a supplemental source of water in place before the next drought strikes. Quoting directly from the Draft EIS "It is estimated that the present water supplies of the Red River Valley would fall short of meeting the current annual water demand during a severe drought like the 1930s." Thus, if a 1930s-type drought would leave us with shortages today, clearly these shortages will intensify as the region continues to grow. Therefore, the question becomes - how can the residents of the valley promise future generations a better way of life, without a plan in place to address this critical water supply issue? For that reason, this study must identify the best course of action, and then it must be implemented.

Without question, part of the answer lies in water conservation and living within our means. But I must stress to those out there with the opinion that conservation is the only answer, that conservation is a good start, but it won't be enough. The Red River Valley has already taken tremendous strides in implementing water conservation measures over the course of the last 10-15 years. And I applaud Fargo and Grand Forks for taking the initiative to develop comprehensive drought management plans. We must remember, however, that even with the most stringent conservation measures in place, shortages during a 1930s-type drought would be devastating - resulting in estimated economic losses of over \$2 billion annually.

All of us understand that low water levels in Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe are causing serious impacts. However, the Draft EIS should reflect that the proposed Missouri River water withdrawals of 120 cfs for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project are only one third of one percent of the 35,000 cfs the State of Missouri claims is needed for navigation.

Our written comments will also include a short report on other inter-basin water transfers occurring throughout the United States and Canada. Several projects are currently diverting untreated water across many basin divides. Examples include: the St. Mary's-Milk project, that diverts Hudson Bay water into the Missouri River Basin; the Chicago Sanitary Canal, that diverts 3,000 cfs from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River Basin; and two Hydro One projects in Ontario that divert Hudson Bay water into the Great Lakes drainage. The Draft EIS should reflect the fact that these are raw water transfers, while the proposed transfers in North Dakota would divert treated water.

Finally, ground water withdrawals in either North Dakota or Minnesota must include considerable study and analysis to adequately assess the impacts on existing water users and hydrologic systems. The ground water withdrawals will reduce future water based development in local communities near the proposed diversion areas. In addition, much uncertainty also remains with regard to the practical application of aquifer storage and recovery, as proposed in several of the alternatives.

Again, on behalf of the North Dakota State Water Commission and the Office of State Engineer, I appreciate your consideration of this testimony. I commend the United States Bureau of Reclamation and the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District for their efforts to study and address the valley's critical water supply problem through this comprehensive study effort. And, I express my sincere hope that all residents of the Red River Basin can work together to find a solution to the valley's current and future water supply needs, to ensure a promising future for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Robert Shaver
Director of Water Appropriations