



July 17, 2003

Signe Snortland  
 Bureau of Reclamation  
 PO Box 1014  
 Bismarck ND 58502-1017

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Re: RRV Water Supply Project EIS – Recreation Needs Assessment

Dear Ms. Snortland;

We've been asked by the Garrison Conservancy District to comment on the Recreation Needs Assessment for the Red River Valley. First of all, we'd like to give you some background of our organization and provide some general commentary on recreation on the Red River before providing specific comments to your document.

River Keepers is a nonprofit organization that works with the Red River of the North. Our mission is to advocate the sustainable use of the Red River of the North. We were created in 1990. Some of our work includes the promotion and development of the recreational use of the Red. Our primary focus is the Fargo area but we definitely have interest in areas or projects that in anyway affect the Red River especially in relation to aesthetics, water quality, and recreational use.

The Red River was an important resource for the early European settlers of the valley. The Red River was used as a source of food, as a mode of transportation and commerce, the riparian forest provided wood for heat and construction and it served as an important source of recreation. Until the 1950s the Red hosted canoe and boat rental operations, public swimming, riverfront concerts, races and floating parades. After a period of disuse by recreational interests the Red River of the North is experiencing a resurgence. Valley residents and visitors are rediscovering the river.

In the Fargo-Moorhead area the modification of the dams has been a significant reason for this resurgence. Dangerous currents at the dams are being eliminated by the addition of rock slope ways. Previously, government agencies and other organizations warned citizens to avoid the river after numerous tragic deaths at dam sites. Now these same government agencies are participating in activities and events to bring people back to the river. Two dams owned by the City have Fargo have recently been rebuilt with the rock slope ways. One more will be rebuilt this fall and there are explorations underway to

“Promoting a renewed vision for the Red River of the North.”

examine two other dams owned by the city. In the United States portion of the valley two other dams also recently underwent similar treatment.

Another benefit of the rock slope ways is that fish can more easily traverse the dams during spawning. While the Red has always been a good fishery, these dam modifications will allow continuing use of the fish resource. The reputation of the Red as a source of trophy fish is spreading. For example this last season at least two syndicated television shows featured the Red River fishery. Currently there are three fishing guides that serve the lower part of the Red and their schedules are often booked months in advance. Tourists, who have traditionally used the Red in Canada, are now discovering that the Red is in the United States also. Because of this increased use the State of ND and the State of Minnesota have collaborated on a recently published guide to fishing on the Red. Also, due to increased demand there have been four new boat ramps constructed on the United States portion of the Red in the last 3 years.

Parks departments and other organizations located in cities along the Red are increasingly including activities in their programming that features the Red. Activities such as canoe races, youth and adult fishing clinics, tour boat rides, and riverfront bird watching are becoming commonplace. Many cities, including Moorhead and Fargo have placed considerable resources into improving riverfront bike and walking trails. Canoe rental and outfitting services are starting to serve the Red.

The State of Minnesota recently declared the Red River of the North an official canoe and boating route. A master plan for that designation was published this last year. The plan indicates that the potential is great but that increased infrastructure such as campsites and ramps are need to support additional recreational use. This fall the State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will be supervising the creation of the first ever canoe/boating map for the first 120 miles of the Red.

We believe its obvious that Red River based recreation is increasing in popularity. Water supply and other studies of the Red must take into account recreational use and insure that increased use of the Red for other purposes does not detract from its recreational potential.

Specifically, we provide these comments to your recreation document.

The Recreation Needs Assessment is very general which is what you'd expect using information readily available in existing studies that do not specifically address the Red River and it's tributaries. Beginning at the bottom of page 2, you describe methods found in the literature to quantify recreational water needs. It does not appear that any of these methods were used. Since there very little existing data and this study is quite important to those of us living in the valley, we think more effort should be put into getting more data. We don't believe relying on regional or national studies meets the intent of the DWRA. For example, the discussion on page 2 concerning conflicts among users like hydropower and the examples given regarding rafting and swimming are not germane to

the Red River mainstem. Hydropower generation, swimming and rafting do not occur on the main stem of the Red.

On the top of page 3 there is a statement regarding the ND canoe rating system and is further explained on page 15 in regards to the Sheyenne River. Further discussion on this subject would be helpful. It seems too simplistic to rate canoeing in terms of depth in feet which is then related to the flow. The system certainly does not take into account the effect of the dams located in the major cities, which is currently where most of the canoeing currently takes place. This is an important subject since it is the only reference in the study where flows are actually quantified and related to some recreational benefit.

On page 8 there is a discussion of the changing participation levels of outdoor related activities. On the Red, I think the biggest influence has been attitude. If the community has bad feelings about the Red they will not use it. Groups such as River Keepers which are changing that perception by talking about water quality, teaching canoeing and fishing classes etc may have as big an influence as national trends. Also, discussion of primary purpose trips etc. is interesting; however most of the users of the Red currently have been and will probably continue to be people who live within 15 minutes of the resource. They use it after work, on Saturday afternoon, etc. My point is the document should be focused on the Red River Valley and not national trends.

Carrying capacity has been addressed in several places. It should be noted that with the minimal current infrastructure in place i.e. boat ramps; the carrying capacity could be managed or controlled for certain types of use. For instance canoes could be encouraged and boats discouraged just by the placement of ramps. Because of its size the Red can carry many more canoes than boats.

On page 18 there is a discussion of decreased fishing on the Red. I believe this data is dated. I think there has been an increase. Today there are 3 fishing guides serving the lower reaches of the Red. Five years ago there were none.

Also on page 18 the flow ratings for canoeing do not take into account dams. I also question if a flow of 800cfs results in a depth of 2 feet. This needs to be reexamined. Several assumptions are made in the document based upon this information (for example the discussion on p 25). There is also a statement on page 26 stating that canoeists will have a better experience with a bank full flow. What is the discharge at bank full flow and where is that documented?

On page 21 there is a discussion on diversity. This should be expanded. Increasingly new cultures in the valley are using the fishery. Fish, in some cases, may be used for a significant food source for certain groups. In addition, because of the types of fish that these New Americans prefer, it may significantly increase the use of the fishery.

In the references section (the page after 32) the Red River anglers guide is listed. The current edition should be used.

In addition, we'd like to point out the State of Minnesota recently declared the Red River of the North an official canoe and boating route. The Red River Canoe and Boating Master Plan (MN DNR) was developed last year as a result of that declaration. It is the most specific source for Red River canoe and boating information and was not cited in this study. The plan indicates that the potential is great but that increased infrastructure such as campsites and ramps are need to support additional recreational use. This fall the State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will be supervising the creation of the first ever canoe/boating map for the first 120 miles of the Red.

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Robert Backman  
Executive Director

cc: Garrison Diversion Conservancy District at PO Box 140, Carrington, ND 589421