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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

PRESS RELEASE

August 4, 2010

NRD Board Wrestles With Integrated Management Plan and Adopts Revisions

Curtis, NE - After a lengthy discussion, the board of directors of the Middle Republican NRD voted to adopt the Integrated Management Plan (IMP) presented at a hearing on June 8th, with minor changes. The Department of Natural Resources has concurred with the changes and will also adopt the plan. The DNR Director praised the Board by saying, "The adoption of this plan by the Middle Republican NRD Board of Directors shows their commitment to ensuring Nebraska will stay in compliance with the Republican River Compact, while also allowing for the continued economic viability of that part of the basin within the Middle Republican NRD."

While this plan does propose a possible shutdown of some irrigated acres in dry years, much of the discussion on this plan was about how to prevent that from ever happening and protecting the economic future of the District. The plan contains language that provides many alternatives to shutting down wells within the "quick response area". Discussion centered on the benefits and drawbacks of the proposal. Jim Schneider, the deputy director of the Department of Natural Resources was present and offered the state's perspective on the items under discussion. All members of the board were concerned about the implementation of this plan. Whether they were in favor or opposed to the plan, the importance of preventing the possible shut down of wells must be addressed through the rules and regulations to be developed. The board will now develop rules and regulations to implement this plan. That process will continue over the next few months and will include a public hearing. Funding possibilities available to the board through the occupation tax will allow for the development of projects and programs that will keep the district within previously agreed to standards and provide additional water to the system in a dry year, preventing the necessity of shutting down wells.

The board approved the proposed 2010-2011 budget for publication and set September 14, 2010 for the budget hearing date. This proposed budget has no property tax for the upcoming year. After several months of trying to find a legal way to refund the property tax levied under the authority granted by the legislature in LB 701 which was subsequently found unconstitutional, the board decided the most effective way to accomplish this was to allow for a return of those funds by not levying any property tax this year. All the funds received by the district, even the collection fees kept by the counties will be returned using district funds in the amount of \$778,831. The nearly five and one half million dollar budget includes over two million dollars in federal funds used

for the repair of two flood control structures and one and one half million dollars in occupation tax that will be used to fund the programs that allow for the IMP to work during dry years. These programs include the retirement of acres, augmentation projects, ground and surface water leases and the establishment of a new compensation fund that can be used should a shutdown of irrigation uses ever be needed. Other major components are two hundred thousand dollars in ongoing water management programs and another two hundred thousand dollars in match funds for several grants relating to water management.

In other action, the board approved additional funding for the cleanup project at Swanson Reservoir using funds from our Community Grant Awards program. The board also amended the project agreement with NRCS for repair of the dams. The next board meeting will be September 14 and will be preceded by the budget hearing.

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