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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

PRESS RELEASE

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District Uses Almost 40% Less Water in 2010 Than The 1998-2002 Average use

Curtis, NE--Following a nearly two hour adjudicatory hearing, the board voted, once again, to deny the request for a variance from Dave Koetter. Several months ago, it was determined that Mr. Koetter was in violation of the district's rules and regulations with regard to certification of groundwater irrigated acres and a rule that prevents the expansion of new irrigated acres. Testimony and evidence from both district staff and Mr. Koetter was considered by the board. A cease and desist order that was issued in August and affirmed by the board in September of 2010 remains in effect until such time as Mr. Koetter comes into compliance with the districts rules and regulations.

After approving the minutes of February's meeting, board members heard a request from the Frenchman Valley Irrigation District for a variance request so that they can account for surface water use on the supplemental wells that actually take delivery. The board has readily approved this request in past years and did so again this year. The Frenchman Valley Irrigation District has been extremely cooperative with the District in providing needed water usage data.

Staci Owens, Office Supervisor and Board Secretary for the Middle Republican NRD, submitted the annual water use report to the board. Dan Smith, General Manger, called attention to the 309,532.57 certified acres in the report. Only 286,860.4 of those acres were actually watered in 2010. When you multiply those acres with 7.85 inches used, you get a total water use that is almost 40% less than the average water use between 1998 and 2002. This average use standard language is part of a revised Integrated Management Plan designed to meet the 2003 Republican River Compact Settlement Agreement. We are only required to use 20% less than the standard.

Jason Kennedy of the NRCS told the board as part of his report that while only four Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWP) contracts were issued to landowners in the District, there was much interest from other landowners that either could not meet the deadline or did not match the program criteria. The four contracts amount to 167 acres retired with the possibility of 15 additional acres.

Smith shared a report on behalf of Nate Jenkins, the Republican River Basin Coalition Coordinator, on the Water Balance Study conducted by engineers Matt Lindburg and Frank Kwapnioski. The water balance report, similar to the presentation provided at the recent Southwest Nebraska Water Conference in McCook, shows an analysis of water inflows, outflows and the change in storage for the Middle Republican NRD. The analysis showed that just over 50% of the basin's consumptive use was E-T from range, pasture and grassland and just over 20% is from irrigated crops and just under 20% is from dryland crops. Smith did point out an apparent anomaly on the Courtland Canal and Republican River flow graph. The graph shows a gradual increase in river flow from 1904 to 1952. The Harlan County Dam was built in 1952 and the Courtland Diversion in 1955. Immediately thereafter, river flows show a gradual decline. Smith indicated that the engineers did not have an explanation at this time.

Smith also reported on the status of LB645, a bill introduced by Sen. Christiansen that would allow NRDs to begin to manage both surface water and groundwater conjunctively. Smith had expressed some concerns about the language, specifically the vague reference to 'agreements' which is not defined within the proposed legislation. After some discussion, the board voted to send Smith and interested Board members to Lincoln to testify on behalf of LB 645.

In other legislation, the board directed Smith to provide neutral testimony for LB 635 which "establishes a procedure whereby flows in times of flooding could be transferred from on basin to another", said Smith. The testimony does acknowledge benefit to the Republican Basin, "The Republican Basin can and does benefit from Platte Basin waters. Keeping Elwood reservoir near full benefits the Republican basin by maximizing our imported water supply credit already identified in compact accounting. If it were possible to divert additional water into the basin it could be used to increase stream flow or ground water recharge." The testimony also acknowledges that other districts may not benefit.

At the national level, a continuing resolution to continue federal funding of the government could "zero out the accounts which fund the Watershed Operations and Watershed Rehabilitation activities at USDA-NRCS and *it appears to* prohibit NRCS from working on current rehabilitation projects funded and in progress", according to Dan A. Sebert, Ph.D., Executive Director of the National Watershed Coalition

In short, The Senate's current CR language has \$0 for operations and \$0 for Watershed Rehabilitation. This would shut down the work started on the repairs of the Blackwood Creek flood control structure. The board has directed Smith to communicate the board's concerns to both US Senator Nelson and Johansen. Language in the CR would also discontinue salaries and expenses of personnel to carry out any project under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act.

Board member Kevin Fornoff reported that the first annual report for the Water Sustainability Task Force members is due out in May. This report will help the task force move forward with their assigned responsibilities.

Roger Stockton of the Southwest RC&D reported on the 2010 \$300,000.00 NET grant that funded mechanical removal of phragmites along the Republican River in all four counties. The RC&D effectively raised \$200,000.00 matching funds and in-kind service, \$15,000.00 of that coming from the District. Two NET grants were awarded to the Southwest Weed Management Area for 2011. The \$485,000.00 grant will continue the 2010 work along the river. The \$143,000.00 grant will help with phragmites control through deep disking of the sandbars and arial spraying by helicopter.

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