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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

December 19, 2005
For Immediate Release

NRD Average Water Use is 8.8 inches

Curtis – Irrigators in the Middle Republican Natural Resources District have reduced their ground water usage to an average of 8.8 inches in 2005, reported Manager Dan Smith at the District's recent board meeting. So far, 84% of the certified acres in the district have been calculated. Smith doesn't expect that usage number to change much with the remaining acres to be calculated. Smith said, "I don't expect our final average to show much more than 9 inches for 2005." Smith added that the Lower and Upper Republican also reported significant decreases in use.

Assistant Manager Bob Merrigan reported that meter repairs have begun. The number of meters needing repairs is down from previous years. The district notified producers whose meters needed repairs earlier this month. Merrigan also reported that tree sales are ongoing.

The Directors held a public hearing, the purpose of which was to receive testimony for a variance from the District's Ground Water Management Area Rules and Regulations. Two variances requests were received in the office. The first variance, which was submitted by Ruth Jurgens, requested 244 acres to be approved for certification. Written testimony from former Director Wayne Madsen was circulated. Madsen opposed the directors certifying any more acres since it has been two years since the December 31, 2003 certification deadline. Many directors expressed concern regarding allowing any further certified acres. A motion was made by Director Hoyt and seconded by Director Roberts to deny the request for certified acres. The motion failed 6 to 5. A second motion was made by Director Moore and seconded by Director Fornoff to accept the variance request with a 26-inch allocation

for the remaining two years of the allocation period. Director Anderjaska proposed to amend the motion to approve only 150 acres of the requested 244 acres. Additionally, according to District rules and regulations, for the acres under consideration, any allocation received cannot be transferred to other ground. The motion and amendment passed.

The second variance was submitted by Clara Grabenstein. Grabenstein requested a permit to drill an industrial well for use by a bio-fuel processing plant. A variance was issued a year ago and has expired. The ethanol plant that had been looking at Grabenstein's site chose a different location so the well was not drilled within the year allowed. Curtis City Manager Jerry Wilcox testified on behalf of Medicine Valley Economic Development. They are requesting a new permit to drill this well so that the ground could be ready if a bio-fuel processing plant wanted to use the ground. Wilcox announced that an informational meeting would be held in January concerning the bio-fuel plant. Wilcox told the board that potential industries find a location much more appealing if it already has access to water. The board discussed what might happen if an industry does not choose this location. The well would sit unused in this case. Director Anderjaska indicated that he would rather know what type of industry is going to come in before approving the permit. Anderjaska said "The way the rules are written now, an industry can come in and report how much water they plan to use and that is what they are given for an allocation." The Directors voted to approve the request for an industrial well with the condition that the allotment for the well be limited to an allocation of 39 inches in three years. This would give the industry 105 gallons per minute. In order to increase the allotment, the industry would need to request additional water from the board.

Chairman Haag requested that the board consider disallowing any further certified acres unless they are acres to be traded. Smith said that the board is not required to hold a public hearing for placing a cap on certified acres.

Anderjaska asked Smith what needed to be done to develop guidelines concerning industrial water usage. Smith responded by saying any change in the wording of the rules and regulations concerning industrial wells will require a public hearing. The board discussed reviewing the rules over the winter.

Benjamin Dietsch, a hydrologist with USGS, gave a presentation concerning Water Quality in the District. USGS has been monitoring nitrates and pesticide levels in the District. The initial study was done in 1993-1995. Annual nitrate sampling has been done since 1996. In 2002, pesticide sampling was also done. Observation wells near McCook have the highest nitrate levels in the district but are showing an overall reduction in nitrate levels.

District Conservationist Doug Whisenhunt reviewed NRCS activity. NRCS is still under a hiring freeze. The first EQIP signup was completed November 30. Whisenhunt reported that the majority of applications were for range practices. The second EQIP signup will end February 28, 2006. Whisenhunt reported that the state NRCS wants to decrease the NRCS cost-share rate to 50% for next year. He asked that the NRD consider increasing cost-share to 75% to help in maintaining the NRCS' current rate. Director Roberts indicated that the change in cost share rates should be placed on the Ground Water Committee agenda.

Roger Stockton reported on behalf of the Southwest Nebraska RC&D. Stockton circulated the RC&D Annual Report which included a survey concerning suggestions for the RC&D's next action plan.

The next regular meeting will be on January 10 at the McCook Fairgrounds Community Building at 1:30 p.m.

Full text of the meeting minutes, kept current, is available during regular business hours at the NRD office in Curtis or on the web at www.mrnrd.org.

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