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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

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For Immediate Release

Board votes: No more than 2.5% increase in NRD budget

Curtis – The Middle Republican NRD will increase their annual budget for fiscal year 2005-06 by no more than 2.5%. The decision was made at the NRD's monthly board meeting on Tuesday, August 9, 2005 at the Middle Republican NRD Office. Directors questioned Manager Dan Smith about possible incentive program funding from the state. Smith reported that the Water Policy Task Force is considering a variety of ideas that could be used to raise the funds needed for cost share for converting to dryland. At the local level, ideas include increasing the taxing authority of natural resources districts, up to a \$10 per acre fee on irrigated acres and charging irrigators based on inches of water pumped from the ground or diverted from canals. At the state level, funding suggestions include using a dedicated portion of the current sales tax, placing a sales tax on water bills or bottled water and soft drinks, and charging a \$5 fee on each of the state's approximately 1 million property tax records.

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. Smith reviewed the variance request for Virgil McClatchey. McClatchey was issued a cease and desist order due to no acres being certified. At the hearing, provided pumping information, which included several changes in their system over the last 6 years, including an EQIP contract approved in 2002. The well, originally registered with DNR as irrigating 50 acres, was metered in 2001. McClatchey testified that this well pumps 150 gpm. There are 102 acres inside the fence, with 92 of those acres taxed as irrigated for the last 3 years. McClatchey is requesting 97 acres be certified as irrigated. McClatchey indicated that he called the District office after notices to certify acres were sent out and reported that as soon as he had updated records, he would come in for certification. The board approved the variance.

Smith reviewed the requests for transfers. Lynn Ewald requested a transfer of the allocation for 173.6 acres to Hanes and Hanes. John Hubert requested a transfer of the allocation for 20 acres to Roger Goltl for a variety of locations. Walsh-Brady Trust requested a transfer of the allocation for 30.8 acres to Lynn Westkamp. Westkamp is the operator on the Walsh-Brady ground. Bob Stinson requested a transfer of the allocation for 118.2 acres to Fred Mustion. All requests were for one year's allocation. The board approved all transfers as presented. Smith and Assistant Manager Bob Merrigan discussed measures district staff has taken to verify that ground is not being irrigated after the water is transferred.

Doug Whisenhunt, District Conservationist, presented the board with an update on NRCS activities, indicating 150 CREP applications and 125 CRP contracts have been approved in the District. EQIP had 190 applications and approximately 90 will be funded at a level of \$1,135,000. These figures do not include the south portion of Lincoln County. Whisenhunt reviewed the number of applications approved for each county.

Smith added that any CREP application that involves surface water is being considered a transfer of water to the reservoir. This requires DNR holding a public hearing. Therefore, any application with surface water is delayed until a hearing can be held. It could be November before these applications are approved. The District staff has fielded a number of questions concerning the requirement that no more than 115% of one-year's allocation be pumped in order for ground to be eligible for CREP. Smith said, "If any irrigator who has signed up for CREP puts more than 14.95" of ground water on his enrolled field in 2005, he could be disqualified from the program."

Information and Education Coordinator Kara Gall presented the board with a proposal for language changes for the scholarship guidelines. Gall proposed that post-high scholarship applications be required to be a district resident and receive preference if they are attending NCTA or Mid-Plains in McCook. Currently the guidelines state that a student is required to attend NCTA or Mid-Plains in McCook, with preference being given to district residents. The board voted to approve the requirements as presented.

Gall also reviewed her progress in completing a grant application to the Nebraska Environmental Trust for an irrigation pocket guide. Gall reviewed the application, which had been mailed to directors. Partners in the grant include the four Republican NRDs, NRCS and University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. Gall is requesting that each NRD's board of directors submit a letter of support. Gall is requesting each district agree to pay for the postage to mail the guides to

irrigators and \$1600 of in-kind support. The board voted to approve the program at the level of \$2000 for the postage and the \$1600 in-kind support.

Smith reported that he and Merrigan attended a Republican River Basin Compact meeting in Burlington, Colorado. Smith indicated that he thought the meeting went well and felt that Kansas recognized the effort Nebraska has put forward to come into compliance. Nebraska is 62,000 acre feet over their allocated usage.

The next regular meeting will be on September 13 in McCook at the Community Building at 7:30 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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