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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

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For Immediate Release

NRD Board Questions “Your Water”

(*Curtis, NE*) – Board members of the Middle Republican NRD expressed concerns over some of the information presented in the NET Television special titled "Your Water: A By The People Special," which aired Thursday, November 30. The concerns were voiced at the NRD’s December 12 board meeting in Curtis. “Your Water” was an hour-long program where citizens and Nebraska state senators gathered to talk about the state's future water policy.

The board called to attention a number of inaccuracies in the briefing materials presented to the panel. The program seemed to lead people to think that nothing proactive has ever happened in the basin. The panel believed that 800 new wells were drilled in the basin after the summer of 1998. This number reflects wells registered and does not reflect the fact that a significant number of these wells were replacement wells, and many were existing wells that simply had not been registered. In 1998 the official position of the state of Nebraska was that ground water did not apply to the compact and that Nebraska would win the lawsuit. Manager Dan Smith said, “We still struggle in trying to help others understand that we have been active in the basin and that given time our controls will have a positive benefit.”

The district 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. Ron Johnson, representative for PEI Lincoln

Ethanol, presented testimony. The request was for three well permits for three separate wells, south of the highway between Dickens and Wallace, north of Red Willow Creek. Observation wells in this area show 10 to 11 feet of decline since 1974.

PEI Lincoln Ethanol proposes to drill three 700 GPM wells to be used for the new ethanol plant. The three existing wells are currently being tested. At least one well will be capped and the other two may be used. No more than three wells will be used at a time; they will be rotated to keep them active. Current ownership of this property is Murray Farms and Hasenauer.

The board asked Johnson how much water is returned to the system. Johnson said, “Thirteen percent is sent back out. For 1,100 acre feet of use, two hundred of that is returned to the system.” In addition, over 400 acre-feet of existing uses will be retired.

The board approved three well permits, contingent upon change of ownership of the property and the decommissioning of existing wells as a condition of drilling the new wells. Additionally, the board agreed that monitoring for areas of sharp decline surrounding the plant might need to occur.

Baker Corp made a transfer request to the board. The transfer request had been previously considered by the board. This new transfer permit is being considered by DNR. Previous water reductions have not been credited to industrial use for Trenton Ethanol plant. The board acknowledged that the current use at the Trenton Ethanol plant is from a previous retirement of acres certified to Baker Corp. These previously certified acres may not be transferred or otherwise be used, other than the current industrial use, in the future.

During the Open Forum portion of the meeting, Chad Taylor, from Nebraska Game and Parks Commission out of Cambridge, expressed concern that some of the species being offered by the NRD’s tree program are contributing to the numbers of invasive species that landowners and producers are trying to control. He encouraged board members and

employees to reevaluate the trees offered through the tree program. Director Don Roberts (McCook) expressed concern about finding a species equally hearty and easy to establish in creating windbreaks. Roberts asked Taylor for an alternative to cedars in establishing windbreaks. Taylor offered to do the research on alternative species if the board and staff decide to readdress the tree list.

Mark Billinger, Department of Water Resources in Kansas, introduced himself to the board. He spent the week attending meetings in the Republican basin.

District Conservationist Doug Whisenhunt reported on NRCS activities. “The budget does not look very good for the NRCS.” Whisenhunt said there are currently two proposals being considered. The proposed budget from the House will cause NRCS to lose seventeen positions, with no money for operations. The version from the Senate will allow NRCS to keep those seventeen positions.

Whisenhunt reported that applications are currently being taken for 2007 EQIP. There is no matching incentive this year and the new ranking program does not allow for any extra conditions. “Invasive species removal is going to allow more range contracts and ranking is weighted so that all invasive removal applications will be funded,” said Whisenhunt. CRP has been seeded in and payments are being processed. Whisenhunt concluded his report by announcing burn schools scheduled for Spring 2007. One will be held in McCook in April. There may also be schools in Osceola and Chadron.

Kara Gall reviewed the Information and Education Report. Gall submitted a proposal to the board to purchase an educational tool with the funds given to the district by the Attorney General office. Each NRD throughout the state received \$3,000 to spend on environmental education efforts. Gall proposed the district purchase an Enviroscope Watershed/Nonpoint Source model, which teaches the watershed concept in addition to point and nonpoint source pollution. The model tracks pollution from nonpoint sources, including: residential areas, forestry areas, transportation, recreation, agriculture and construction, as well as from industry as a point source. Students learn about best

management practices by using felt buffer strips as vegetation, clay to create berms and other methods to show conservation and water pollution prevention measures at work. Director Joe Anderjaska (Hayes Center) asked Gall in which situations the model might be used. Gall said “We’ll use this for our annual 5th Conservation Craze as well as all our spring conservation programs. The model will be available for district teachers and students to check out, and classroom demonstrations will be possible.”

Assistant Manager Bob Merrigan reviewed the livestock waste control applications. An application was received from Nebraska Pork Partners for a farrowing facility in Frontier County, east of Stockville. They are looking to improve their existing operation, not add on to it. A motion was made by Peters and second by Fornoff to accept the livestock waste control application.

The board reviewed meter repairs, readings and inspections. Smith reviewed the meter report in the packets. Discussion was held on the number of wells per county. Questions on how the different programs will affect the numbers. Smith explained that CREP will not affect the number of active wells; only EQIP (retiring of irrigated acres) will make the well status inactive.

Assistant Manager Bob Merrigan reported that he was able to order a 2-year supply of mulch, at a ten percent discount.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, January 9, 2006 at 1:30 p.m. at the Community Building at the Red Willow Fairgrounds in McCook, Nebraska.

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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