



NORTH PLATTE Natural Resources District

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Press Release

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NPNRD cites new regulations as step in right direction

Pumpkin Creek issues has shifted focus from initial CNPPID talks

Despite initiating and willingly participating in seven months of talks with the state's irrigation and hydro-electric giant, the North Platte Natural Resources District says it has been left with a black eye and the threat of a lawsuit.

"We asked them to come to the table because we wanted to try to work with and develop a drought management plan we all could live with," said longtime North Platte NRD director Gerald Dillman of Mitchell, explaining the series of closed door meetings that began Sept. 1, 2006 between North Platte NRD and Central Public Power and Irrigation District of Holdrege.

"We went down there in good faith. We listened to their demands and requests for equity and yet they put nothing on the table to give. We have put additional regulations on our well users," Dillman said. "What more do they want? They want water."

Central and the state have criticized the North Platte NRD for being soft on regulations and not taking measures to send more water downriver to fill Lake McConaughy.

But NPNRD officials point to a series of regulations and efforts taken since 1999--long before the state allowed or required such regulations, and six years before Central imposed their first water allocation in 2005.

In late 1999, the onset of what has become the most prolonged drought in the state's history, the North Platte NRD heeded the Bureau of Reclamation's warnings that mountain snow pack and consequentially storage levels in Wyoming's reservoirs upstream were rapidly declining. The district began developing a joint action plan that was the early beginnings of the integrated management planning process required by the state in 2004.

Other regulations include moratoriums on new well development, first in Pumpkin Creek and later district wide. It was the first such efforts by a NRD to regulate pumping in the

state. In the past nine months the NPNRD has required the certification of all groundwater uses in the the district and the metering of groundwater in the overappropriated areas of the district. District-wide allocations, some board members say, could be in the future.

The North Platte NRD has urged fellow NRDs to take the lead in putting a stop or at least slowing new well development. During the NRDs state Legislative Conference held in January, the North Platte NRD supported proposed legislation for a temporary well drilling moratorium statewide.

“We’re probably one of the most regulated districts in the state,” Dillman said.

One regulation that has not set well with Central is the NRD’s 14-inch allocation on Pumpkin Creek irrigators.

“We feel it is too high and it is not fair to our irrigators who are only getting 6.7 inches this year,” said CNPPID director Robert Garrett of Minden.

“They need to compare oranges to oranges here,” said Dillman, explaining that Central customers are receiving that 6.7 inch surface allocation in addition to an average of 24 inches of rainfall and unregulated and unrestricted pumping capabilities.

The talks with Central were to continue with a February 22 meeting held in Ogallala, initially scheduled to bring neighboring Twin Platte NRD of North Platte to the shared table in hopes of laying groundwork for a drought management plan. After Twin Platte was unable to participate, Central shifted its focus on Pumpkin Creek.

“We’ve been blind-sided,” Dillman said.

North Platte NRD representatives point out that Pumpkin Creek, as a tributary to the North Platte River, feeds 20,000 acre-feet or about two percent of Lake McConaughy’s total annual inflows. Pumpkin Creek, and the lawsuits associated with it, have held media attention for years.

NPNRD officials had hoped for Central’s cooperation on two options of a drought-management plan. The first was trigger points on the North Platte River at the Guernsey Dam and Lewellen guage going into Lake McConaughy. These triggers would serve as indicator to Central of any shortened inflows from the upper system.

The other option is working jointly to remove invasive species along the North Platte River and its tributaries. It is estimated that 25,000 acre-feet of water could be saved annually with the removal of saltcedar and Russian olive trees. NRD officials have asked what amount of water saved could get past the mouth of Lake McConaughy, which is now choked with invasives.

“We’ve mentioned their invasive problems several times,” said NRD director Pete Lapaseotes, Jr. of Bridgeport. “They turn away from the issue and go back to the creek.”

One fear that Lapaseotes and other NRD officials have recognized is that a pending lawsuit against the North Platte NRD could be damaging to the entire NRD system. The money and efforts spent on litigation, says Lapaseotes, could be better spent on developing a joint drought management plan for all water users in the state.

Still, North Platte NRD officials say they will return to Central’s table one more time on March 20.

“Our goal from the start has been to work with Central, Twin Platte NRD and Tri-Basin NRD, and the state to find answers to our shared water issues,” NPNRD general manager Ron Cacek said. “We want to focus on solutions, not blame and litigation.”

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