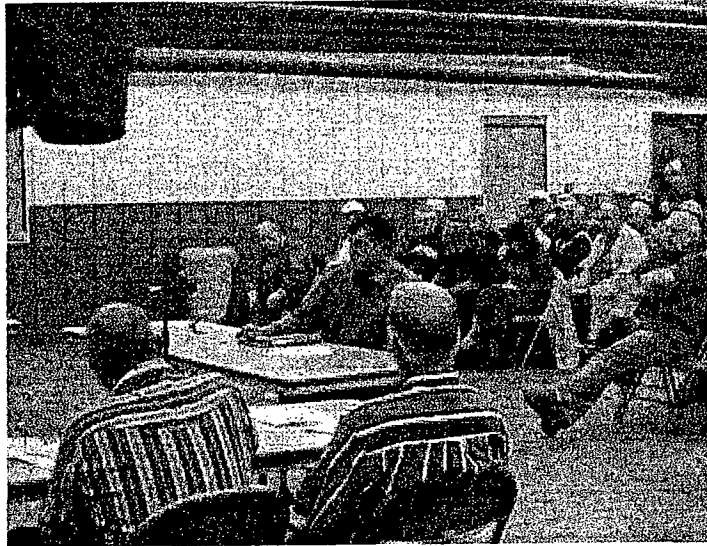


*Seppala Report*

## Speakers oppose NRD water plan

Thursday, October 07, 2004  
Gloria Masoner



Kurt Bieber of North Platte testifies before the Middle Republican Natural Resources District during a public hearing Wednesday night. (Gloria Masoner/McCook Daily Gazette)

The Middle Republican Natural Resources District Board of Directors may be facing a revolt if it continues with its plans to approve its Ground Water Management Area and Integrated Management Plan.

About 150 irrigators and other concerned citizens showed up at a public hearing to voice concerns about the proposed water management plan presented by the Middle Republican NRD.

A Hayes Center farmer told the board they should consider their decisions carefully. "If you continue to represent the Department of Natural Resources and not your constituents we will work to change the composition of this board and the management of the MRNRD," he said.

His comments were greeted with a round of applause from the audience.

"We are witnessing the demise of local control," said another. "The Department of Natural Resources is the master and the MRNRD board is the faithful servant."

"You will go home tonight and leave these issues behind you. We will go home and ponder our future," he continued.

The majority of the group presented a united front against the proposal, telling the Board of Directors to slow down and take their time in making any changes in the allocation of water.

"The law allows the NRD three years to design a plan," Steve Smith of WaterClaim, an Imperial organization that represents ground water users, said.

"There is no need to rush into a plan that will have such a major impact on the region." Smith said that a report by Ray Supalla of the University of Nebraska shows the community that will be hardest hit by the new rules would be McCook. "Those most affected will be the tenant farmers and the farm supply companies. Next will be the banks and schools," he said.

Overall, the estimated economic impact of the plan will be a loss of about \$35 million a year, according to Supalla's report.

The proposal calls for 13 inches per year with a maximum of 39 inches every three years to be delivered to irrigators. However if the MRNRD determines a "water short year," they can cut that allocation back by at least 10 percent, with no limit on the cut. That gives farmers no way to plan, said one farmer. "We don't need the water when it's raining," said another irrigator. "We need it when it's not."

"If you're going to make a 39-inch plan, make it a 39 inch plan," another irrigator demanded.

Several of the producers asked the board to look at other ways of cutting back on water use. Most agreed that the water the state of Nebraska is to deliver to Kansas would be available if the trees along the Republican River were controlled. They also argued against the plan to retire irrigated land to grassland.

Mark Christianson, Imperial, told the board an acre of trees consumes about 48 acre inches of water. Grass consumes about 36 acre inches and corn 24.

"If you take out irrigated corn and convert it to grass and trees, you are only increasing your problem," he said.

"You guys can implement this plan as written today," Marty Schurr of Maywood told the board. "And 10 years from now you will have destroyed the economy in the Republican River Valley."