

January 23, 2004

Mr. Roger Patterson, Director  
NE Dep't. of Natural Resources  
POB 94676  
Lincoln NE 68509-4676

Dear Roger:

The managers of the Republican Basin Natural Resources Districts met on January 14 in Curtis to discuss inter-district issues associated with Republican Basin Compact compliance. During our meeting, we came to the conclusion that we need to discuss some of these issues directly with you, so that we can have a clearer idea of the state's expectations of the NRDs. We also need a clearer idea of what we can expect in terms of technical assistance and support from DNR, as well as who within the department we should go to when we have questions or need assistance. As I understand it, your secretary Pam has scheduled a meeting between you and us on **February 9, 2004 at 10:30 AM CST**, at the Tri-Basin NRD office in Holdrege.

During this meeting, we would like to discuss the following issues with you:

1) In relation to the Republican Basin computer model that is being used for compact compliance:

A. What model outputs are we supposed to use as a basis for management planning? Against what standard will our management efforts be measured to determine whether we are achieving compact compliance? If we don't understand what the benchmarks for compliance are, we can't develop rules and regulations to bring our districts' management efforts in line with the state's expectations. This is a critical issue. If it is not resolved very soon, NRDs will be unable to effectively plan and regulate water use to achieve compact compliance by 2006.

B. NRD staff don't clearly understand the origin of statistical data that are used as inputs into the computer model (e.g, irrigated acres, "pumpage volume"). We believe that it is important for us to understand the model inputs and outputs. We also believe that opportunities exist for NRDs to provide more detailed and more accurate data for the model. We don't expect you to explain the model to us during this meeting. We just want to start a dialogue on this issue.

C. If we are to explain model results (once we understand them) to our constituents, we need to have graphs, maps and illustrations. Presentations like the one Ann Bleed gave at the NRRMDA meeting in Cambridge last week, which was composed of massive tables, are ineffective and confusing to the public.

2. In relation to technical support from the State of Nebraska to NRDs for compact compliance:

A. We need more and better technical support from DNR staff for our districts' efforts to collect data for compact compliance, correct inaccuracies in well registrations and map basic data that we need to present to our directors and the public for natural resources planning. It appears that DNR staff who are supposed to help us with these issues are being diverted to other projects. It also appears that the DNR administration's decision-making process is highly centralized. By this, I mean that DNR technical staff feel obligated to get approval from you or Ann before they commit to assisting us with anything that takes more than a few minutes of their time. Your staff (and NRD staff) need to clearly understand where Republican Basin issues rank in terms of the priority of their work tasks. We recognize that DNR is working with

Who do we  
call

Mike Han  
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inadequate numbers of staff. It is that much more important, therefore, for your staff to understand their work priorities.

B. We need to understand how decision-making authority is assigned within DNR in relation to Republican Basin Compact compliance decisions. Who is the authority on technical issues? Does anyone (other than yourself) have authority to speak to NRDs or the public about policy issues? We ask this question in relation to some apparent contradictions between you and Ann on the significance of numbers put out by the Rep. Basin computer model.

3. In relation to funding for NRD compact compliance activities:

A. Will DNR support requests by Republican Basin NRDs for additional funds for conducting compact compliance-related activities after FY 2004-05? If so, what do you think is an appropriate funding level to ask for? *Intention to submit budget that is similar to current*

4. Has the state researched the potential effectiveness of various strategies for reducing consumptive water use within the Republican Basin? Are there advantages or side-benefits to some strategies over others (water allocation vs. reducing acres)? If this research has not been done, when and how do we start?

Please understand that while we have questions and concerns, we believe that the issues we raise can be resolved without great difficulty. We have generally good relations with DNR staff and with you specifically. We are thankful for this friendly and mutually-beneficial relationship and we hope that it will continue. Thank you for all that you have done to assist NRDs generally and the Republican basin districts specifically.

Sincerely,

John Thorburn