

October 11, 2004

Middle Republican Natural Resource District
220 Center Avenue
Curtis, Nebraska 69025

Middle Republican NRD Board Members:

We, Scott and Deborah Harris, would like to submit this as our written testimony in opposition to the proposed 13 inches of irrigation water allocation per irrigated acre. This proposal, if implemented would have a devastating economic impact on our farming-ranching operation and our family. The first of our four children will begin college next year at the same time this allocation is to be implemented. This is a time when our family needs to maintain or increase farm income rather than have a huge reduction or more likely a complete loss of ability to earn income due to this reduction of water use. Also, if this plan is implemented, it becomes more unlikely for the next generation of our family to operate our farm. In fact we will probably not be able to survive here ourselves.

We farm in the Dickens area on Valentine soils. These soils are capable of producing 200+ bushel per acre corn yields if managed to a high level. For instance, our 2003 irrigated corn yields ranged from 205 to 247, and the 2004 crop at this point in time ahead of harvest also looks very promising. A big part of that management is to properly irrigate the crop with the right amount of water distributed at the right times throughout the growing season in supplement to rainfall. The largest factor in timing of this irrigation water relates to our Valentines soils low water holding capacity. Our soils only have the ability to store .7 to 1.0 inches of crop available water per foot of depth or 2.1 to 3.0 inches in the root zone. This requires frequent applications of irrigation water in amounts that these soils can hold against gravity. Heavy rainfall and snowfall as well as over irrigating does very little good due to this low water holding capacity and in fact can do a great deal of harm by leaching fertilizer out of the root zone. These sandy soils as a result contribute more water to recharging the water table than finer textured soils during periods of excess moisture.

During a normal growing season with normal rainfall we need an additional 16-18 inches of irrigation water to grow a 200+ bushel per acre corn crop and even more to grow alfalfa. If irrigation water is allocated down to 13 inches per acre corn yields in this sandy soil will fall to 130 - 150 bushels per acre for corn and alfalfa isn't even a possibility. We base this estimation on 30 years of irrigated farming experience in this area as well as the 7 year long irrigation research project we participated in with the University of Nebraska and funded by the Bureau of Reclamation on our farm. The results of this research project should be available for your examination and though we haven't seen the printed results for ourselves, we assume they have been recorded accurately.

We estimate that total revenue per corn acre would be reduced by as much as \$200 even at today's low commodity prices and by an even greater amount when commodity prices are higher with: 1) increases in weed control costs due to a less dense crop canopy and more sunlight reaching the ground, 2) only a minimal reduction in other input costs, and 3) steady fixed costs (i.e. land, machinery and real estate tax costs). We also know it would be nearly impossible to produce winter feed for our cattle since alfalfa requires far more than 13 inches of irrigation water per season and corn will produce far less crop residue when produced under these stressful conditions. It will be necessary to leave nearly all of the crop residues unused to maintain ground cover and prevent soil erosion. In fact with 13 inches of water it will probably be impossible to produce enough crop residue to prevent sandy hilltops from turning into blowouts.

We think the State of Nebraska has made a very bad settlement in the battle for Republican River water with Kansas. This settlement places an unbearable burden on three Natural Resource Districts in southwest Nebraska. If the entire burden of this settlement is placed on the residents of this area the impact will be economically devastating. We don't think it would be wise to send 1/5 of the State into financial ruin. If there is a financial burden to be carried it needs to be spread over a broader base. This is a problem for the entire State of Nebraska.

We contend that if wells were completely idled in this area that it would be impossible to account for a single gallon of additional water that would end up in the Republican River as a result. There are other things the State could do that would be far more effective at increasing river flows into Kansas rather than shutting down irrigation wells that are 50 to 60 miles away. One result of our ability to fight range fires is that we have upset nature's method for preventing an overgrowth of non-productive trees. The State needs to look at ways to thin and manage the trees that have become major water wasting unnatural "weeds" along the river.

We have heard the argument that if the NRD Board doesn't take action that the State of Nebraska will take over and implement it's own plan. We contend that if the MRNRD Board implements this plan it will have allowed the State to take control. This proposal is exactly what the State wants and best of all for the State is the fact that the local MRNRD Board is front and center to take the blame for all of the economic consequences. We think that if the State of Nebraska is determined to implement this devastating plan that the blame for all consequences should end up in Lincoln where the terms of this plan have indeed originated.

This proposal doesn't represent the best interests of the people of the District this Board represents. It instead supposedly represents the best interests of the State of Kansas. Or does it even do that? We think the lawyers and the court system have failed the residents of Southwest Nebraska and we don't want to see our local MRNRD Board become a part of that failure.

We believe that irrigation water allocations should not be set any lower than 17 inches in sandy soils of low water holding capacity and no lower than 14.5 inches in finer textured

soils of higher water holding capacity. If the State wants less then let the State do its own "dirty work". Our future and that of everyone who lives in this corner of the State is directly tied to your decision.

Sincerely,

Scott Harris
Deborah Harris

Scott Harris
Deborah Harris