It was a beautiful evening on Aug. 16 when the Board of Directors of the Republican River Water Conservation District held the dedication ceremony for the Compact Compliance Pipeline.

Board members, state officials and residents of the basin gathered on the bank of the North Fork of the Republican River east of Laird near the Colorado/Nebraska state line.

During the ceremony, several state officials spoke. While no one was celebrating the idea of delivering groundwater to the river, all of the speakers praised the RRWCD board for continuing to assist the state of Colorado in reaching compliance with the Republican River Compact.

Former RRWCD vice-president Kim Killin was emcee for the event. Congressman Cory Gardner, who grew up in Yuma, was the first speaker.

Gardner recognized the hard work of the RRWCD and congratulated the board “on doing what had to be done to keep agriculture in northeast Colorado vibrant. This is just one step. Regional leaders need to continue to work together in search of additional solutions to ensure the agricultural economy in Colorado will continue to flourish into the future.”

John Stulp, special policy advisor to the governor on water issues, grew up in Yuma County and spoke on behalf of Governor John Hickenlooper and the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

He congratulated the board on completing the pipeline project in a short period of time. Other water projects in the state have taken up to six decades to complete.

Stulp acknowledged irrigated agriculture is a major contributor to the economic stability of the State of Colorado. On behalf of Governor Hickenlooper, Stulp congratulated the citizens of the Republican River Basin on the construction of the pipeline. “It is a symbol of what cooperation and collaboration can do for communities and for the state”.

Mike King, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources ,thanked the board for allowing him to participate in the event. He reported the decision to drain Bonny was the hardest decision he has ever had to make since he took this office. “It was a brutal decision because of the trade-offs we had to make, but it had to be done. The vibrant agricultural economy is foremost in our minds. Governor Hickenlooper tells us repeatedly that ag is leading us out of this recession and we have to protect the ag-based economy and our rural communities.”

“In Colorado we identify problems and then work together to find solutions.” King praised the cooperation of several entities that joined resources together to complete this pipeline project.

Killin acknowledged the hard work of Colorado State Engineer Dick Wolfe. Wolfe was unable to attend the ceremony due to being called to testify at the Kansas vs. Nebraska Supreme Court hearing being held in Maine. “Dick Wolfe and his staff have been very accommodating and supportive to the RRWCD. We appreciate their efforts in making this project such a success.”

RRWCD board president Dennis Coryell was the final speaker of the evening. “We were given two tasks. One was to assist the state in reaching compact compliance. The other was to sustain the agricultural based economy in the basin. These are tough tasks and yet we have been able to come together to make this happen.”

He reported that through conservation programs, land owners have been compensated and have permanently retired over 30,000 irrigated acres. The RRWCD has purchased nearly 90 percent of the surface water rights within the Basin. “All of these efforts go to water conservation and help to move us closer to compact compliance, but more had to be done.”

“No one wants to pump our precious groundwater and send it down the river but we have no other choice.” Coryell stated, “With the completion of this pipeline, I want to inform Kansas chief water engineer David Barfield to get out of the way so that we can do what has to be done so that Colorado can be in compact compliance.

He listed past and present board members who “were in the trenches and have worked together

with several state and local entities to make this happen. The RRWCD board members represent the citizens throughout this basin. They made the tough decisions that had to be made to assist Colorado in reaching compliance with the Republican River Compact."

Coryell ended the ceremony by asking everyone to gather along the banks of the channel connecting the outfall structure with the river. On his cue, the RRWCD board joined together to tell pipeline manager Tracy Travis to "open the valve!" In less than a minute, water started to run into the channel, eventually passed over the measuring flume and flowed into the river.

As the sun set in the west, the main line valve of the pipeline was closed. The Sandhills Groundwater Management District has allowed the RRWCD to use 500 acre-feet of water this year to test the pipeline. It will not allow the export of water until Colorado and Kansas have agreed on the amount of credit Colorado will receive for the water delivered by the pipeline.

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