

An ongoing task

Written by Deb Daniel, general manager, RRWCD

Recently letters have been submitted to the editor of this newspaper questioning decisions made by the Republican River Water Conservation District. Like political attack ads, these letters do not tell the whole story.

This is nothing new to the district. It has been an ongoing task to inform the public and to try to continue to re-educate some individuals about the decisions made by the directors. The district board understands that not every member of the public will always agree with its decisions.

Find a solution or...

From the moment Congress approved the Republican River Compact in 1943, it became operative and binding federal law. In 1999 Kansas filed a lawsuit in the U.S. Supreme Court against Nebraska to enforce the terms of the compact. Colorado was brought into the lawsuit as a defendant.

In 2003 the lawsuit was settled based on a "Final Settlement Stipulation." To insure compliance with the compact, the stipulation imposed limits on the use of water in the basin. Each of the three states had to comply with the compact and the Final Settlement Stipulation.

In Colorado, well owners were facing the prospect of curtailment (shut off) of large-capacity wells for many years, possibly decades. Curtailment was not a path anyone wanted, but it appeared to be reality. Alternatives had to be considered.

In December 2004, the state legislature created the district to assist the state in complying with the compact and the Final Settlement Stipulation. The RRWCD board of directors rolled up their sleeves, made difficult decisions, and in less than a decade has put Colorado in a position where it can be in compliance.

RRWCD is represented by your friends and neighbors

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The 15 members of the district board are chosen to represent each of the seven groundwater management districts, each of the seven counties in the basin, and the Colorado Groundwater Commission.

Some board members farm mostly dryland, while others own or rent predominately irrigated acres. Currently, three members are young and just getting started farming, some have been farming for years, while others are retired. One director is a former brand inspector, and another is a county commissioner.

Members of this board are your friends and neighbors. They understand the importance of irrigated agriculture to the economy of the basin, and they do not take their responsibilities lightly.

Decisions are researched extensively

Contrary to what some people seem to think, decisions made by the district board are researched carefully. Projects and proposals are investigated, expert opinions and public comments are considered, and numerous discussions are held before decisions are made.

The steps Colorado and the RRWCD must take to achieve compact compliance are complicated. Decisions made by the district board that may appear to be simple on the surface are, in fact, quite complex. As with most businesses, board decisions often involve confidential negotiation and compromise.

Once an agreement is signed, the district will not consider breaking a contract on a whim or simply because someone disagrees with the board's decision.

It is easy to ignore the reasons why decisions have been made and to make criticisms based solely on hindsight. The current comments about the district's lease of water rights acquired for the Compact Compliance Pipeline is just such an exercise.

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The board is confident that most residents in the basin won't be influenced by criticisms leveled several years after a complicated public decision was made by a unanimous board.

Compact Compliance Pipeline update

Construction of the Compact Compliance Pipeline is completed. Currently the SCADA control system is being tested and the final punch list items are being finalized.

The pipeline is capable of delivering water to the North Fork of the Republican River approximately one-half mile upstream of the measurement station. This gaging station is maintained in cooperation with the Republican River Compact Administration and is measured every two weeks for accuracy by Colorado Division of Water Resources and/or United States Geological Service.

Colorado is pursuing 100 percent credit for the water delivered by the Pipeline. Nebraska has already approved Colorado's resolution for 100 percent credit. Currently, Colorado and Kansas are negotiating the amount of credit Colorado will receive for the water delivered by the pipeline.

The Sandhills Ground Water Management District has also approved the export of water from the SGWMD if Colorado receives 100 percent credit for the pipeline deliveries. Until Kansas has agreed to 100 percent credit for pipeline deliveries, the district cannot begin pipeline deliveries due to the Sandhill District's order.

Everyone knows that...

Irrigation has enabled small ag-based communities in the tri-state region to grow and prosper. The Colorado Legislature created the district so the local communities in the basin would have a say in how Colorado would achieve compact compliance, and the RRWCD continues to work toward that goal.

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By making decisions on your behalf, the district board has tried to ensure that Colorado residents and businesses throughout the basin will continue to benefit from the financial gain to the region from irrigated agriculture.

Looking into the future...

The RRWCD is considering its role in the conservation of the Ogallala Aquifer. In recent years, compliance with the Republican River Compact has been the principal focus of the RRWCD. During upcoming board meetings, the district will be deciding what actions to take to assist in the management and conservation of our most precious commodity—water.

The RRWCD board meetings are open to the public. Quarterly meetings are held throughout the basin so interested citizens may observe and comment on matters that come before the board. Minutes of board meetings are available on the district website: www.republicanriver.com

Anyone having questions or concerns is welcome to contact the RRWCD at 970-332-3552 or email deb.daniel@rrwcd.com.

Holyoke Enterprise November 15, 2012