

Responses to the North Dakota Department of Agriculture

Comments on the Draft Report on the Red River Valley Water Supply Project Needs and Options



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Dennis Breitzman, Area Manager
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PO Box 1072
Bismarck, ND 58502-1017

Dear Mr. Breitzman:

I have re-reviewed the Needs and Option Report and the impacts to agriculture is greatly dependant on the plan that is accepted. The less impact to eastern ND agriculture would be the Minnesota option but I understand that one is a very long shot to get approved because of the politics of working with another state. The other ground water options would impact areas that presently have irrigation approved.

Under the SWC list of priorities, irrigation is next to last along with manufacturing. In times of severe drought the irrigation and manufacturing processes will be the first to shut down to ensure residential water usage. This will limit agriculture production to dry land yields. In times of severe drought, I am afraid that agriculture production would be limited by the amount of precipitation and the commodities would not be available for processing. The Missouri River option would be the more favorable North Dakota option to irrigators and manufacturing because there would have less direct impacts to ground water irrigation sources. Because the major source of water recharge in the Missouri River is located hundreds of miles away, there may be fewer impacts to water quantity.

The issue of increased water demands for eastern ND (not under drought conditions) would be rather similar. Drawing aquifer demands for increased residential and non-agriculture usage will have an impact on agriculture as the increased demand will draw the aquifers down to a point the irrigation systems would be useless or shut down because of the priority listing. Again, this would leave the Missouri River option the preferred ND option for irrigation purposes. Under this scenario, ND agriculture production could increase because of the lack of limitations. This would increase the demand for increased water needed for agriculture processing plants which

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Response to Comment 1

The purpose of the Needs and Option Report is to quantify the water needs (water demand) of the Red River Valley and to identify options that would meet those needs. Impacts to agriculture and other resources are disclosed in the DEIS (draft environmental impact statement).

Response to Comment 2

The Missouri River to Red River Valley Import Alternative referenced in your letter is not limited to importing treated Missouri River water to the Red River Valley. It also proposes to convert Elk Valley Aquifer water permits from irrigation use to municipal use, expand use of the Buffalo Aquifer in Minnesota, develop groundwater in southeastern North Dakota, and develop aquifer storage and recovery features in the West Fargo North, Water Fargo South, and Moorhead Aquifers.

Impacts to groundwater resources are disclosed in the DEIS. While there would be fewer impacts to water quantity in the Red River Valley from this alternative as compared to in-basin options, there would be impacts to water quantity in the Missouri River Valley. These impacts are also quantified in the DEIS.

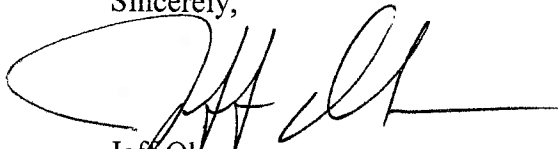
Response to Comment 3

Reclamation included the conversion of irrigation water rights to MR&I use (Elk Valley Aquifer feature) in some of the options. The negative economic consequences of this type of conversion are discussed in the DEIS. No other conversions are considered due to the distance of the groundwater sources from water demand locations. The effects of the options (alternatives) on aquifer water quantity and quality are summarized in DEIS, chapter four, table 39 and are discussed on pages 170 – 180. However water for industrial development in the Red River Valley, including agriculture processing plants, would be delivered by all of the options.

would compete with irrigation under the ground water options. In ND the growth of agriculture production is directly tied to the amount and timing of precipitation or the availability of water and agriculture processing is directly related to the amount of agriculture production.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Needs and Option Report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Olson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeff Olson
Program Manager