

NEVADA BOARD OF AGRICULTURE WATER POLICY STATEMENT

The Nevada Department of Agriculture was created in 1915 by legislative action. One of the primary charges, as established by that legislative activity, was the Department must ***“Protect Agriculture”***.

There currently are 3,000 farms and ranches in Nevada. These farms and ranches average 2,100 deeded acres each, for a total private land mass of 6.3 million acres. The latest economic data available (2006) indicate that Nevada farms and ranches produced some \$444.6 million of products. Conservative estimates of indirect value added to Nevada’s economy would at least double that value. Thus, in 2006, the economic impact of Nevada agriculture to the economy of Nevada would approach one billion dollars. Considering the changes that have occurred since 2006, that same economic annual impact to Nevada would be far in excess of one billion dollars in 2008.

Nevada’s agriculture production occurs from two basic sources; irrigated agriculture and the conversion of range resources into red meat. Commodities produced as a direct result of irrigated agriculture, including row crops, grains, hay, hogs, milk, etc., generated a gross income of \$299 million in 2006. Cattle and sheep sales produced \$198 million in 2006. Approximately \$49 million of irrigated crops were consumed by livestock in 2006. Thus, it is save to assume, that the total value of irrigated crop production in 2006, the latest data available, amounted to \$348 million, or 78% of total agriculture gross sales.

If the legislative mandate for the Department of Agriculture is indeed to ***“Protect Agriculture”***, then it goes without saying that the Department must also protect the waters that result in nearly 80% of today’s agriculture production, production that results in as much as ***one to two billion dollars annually that is critical to the continued survival of rural Nevada.***

The waters of rural Nevada, both surface and subsurface are under constant attack for assumed higher and better uses, including both quasi-municipal purposes and environmental issues. Often, proposed change of use of these waters is strictly evaluated based on economic considerations. A brief review of history would suggest that many other factors associated with agricultural use of Nevada’s water should unquestionably be considered.

The early Spanish population of the southwestern part of what was to become the United States of America referred to the Great Basin as the “northern mystery”, and wanted nothing to do with it. The earliest of explorers, trappers and migrants had a most difficult time in traversing what was to become Nevada. Early Nevada could not be considered a land of plenty. Yet today, elk, mule deer, antelope, sheep, upland birds, fish, to name but a few are in abundance. The beautiful and productive landscape of rural Nevada, which has become such an important playground for Nevada’s urbanites is a product of Nevada’s agriculture heritage, and can only be protected by the continuation of Nevada’s agriculture. The loss of Nevada’s agriculture water to any other use than agriculture will place in jeopardy the rural aspects Nevadans have long since come to cherish.

The Nevada Department of Agriculture has a legislative mandate, and that is to **“Protect Agriculture”**. Based on that mandate, then this Department must become proactive to protect Nevada’s waters so that agriculture can survive. Doing anything less would be irresponsible to the welfare of rural Nevada, the all important ecology of rural Nevada as it is known and enjoyed by Nevada’s population, and the 1915 legislative mandate.

Therefore, the Nevada Board of Agriculture is establishing the following policy for the Department of Agriculture to follow in regard to protecting all aspects of water that is used either directly, or indirectly, for agriculture production.

1. Monitor and report to the Board in a time fashion any and all proposed reallocation of any Nevada water for any use other than for its historic application to agriculture production.
2. Develop suitable economic models to predict the economic and environmental effect of any proposed reallocation of agriculture water to the rural economy.
3. Prepare suitable position statements to be used at appropriate State water hearings, State legislative activities, Federal bureaucratic actions, Congressional actions or any other governmental action, proposed or otherwise, that could or would impact Nevada’s agricultural waters.
4. Prepare an annual report for the Board summarizing the State of Nevada’s agriculture waters.
5. Take appropriate steps to insure all agriculture producers that may potentially be impacted by any water transfers, that statistically defensible ground water monitoring be established. Such monitoring procedures must also be established if deep water removal is proposed for such aquifers as the carbonaceous aquifer, or any similar aquifer.

The Board places this Water Policy as the highest possible priority. It directs the Department of Agriculture to create the position of Agriculture Water Analyst, determine how the position is to be funded, then determine the appropriate legislative pathway to secure the position.

Posted 6/19/2009