

Monthly Briefing

A Summary of the Alliance's Recent and Upcoming Activities and Important Water News

Ag Support

Colorado Study Finds Strong Public Backing For Farming, Irrigation

A study released earlier this year by Colorado State University shows strong public support for agriculture and continued use of water for irrigation in Colorado.

In the spring of 2006, a study was conducted by the Colorado Department of Agriculture and the Human Dimensions in Natural Resources Unit of the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University.

Replicating similar studies done in 1996 and 2001, the purpose of the 2006 study was to understand how Coloradans currently perceive agriculture and whether those perceptions have changed over the past 10 years.

THE RESULTS are remarkable for the strong support shown for agriculture by average citizens, particularly since Colorado has experienced a large influx of new residents moving into Front Range communities between Fort Collins and Colorado Springs.

(Continued on Page 4)

Senate Confirms Johnson, Three Interior Leaders

The U.S. Senate in late September confirmed the nomination of Robert W. Johnson to be Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation.



Robert Johnson
– New Commissioner

At the same time, the Senate confirmed the nominations of Mary A. Bomar to be Director of the National Park Service, David Longly Bernhardt to be Interior Solicitor, and C. Stephen Allred to be Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals.

“These confirmations come at a crucial time for the Department of Interior,” said Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (NEW

MEXICO). “Secretary Kempthorne is steering a new course
(Continued on Page 2)

WASHINGTON UPDATE

Congress In Campaign Recess, Plans Lame-Duck Session

With polls showing a tight race for control of the House, and possibly the Senate, Congress adjourned on September 29 to give Members as much time as possible to campaign before the November elections.

The House and Senate are scheduled to reconvene on November 13 for a post-election – lame duck – session to finish work on the appropriations bills that are necessary to fund the government in

Fiscal Year 2007, which began on October 1.

In the meantime, Congress has passed a temporary funding measure, called a continuing resolution, which will keep the government running until November 17. A number of Western water bills remain on the agenda for possible action in the lame duck, but other important resources legislation, such as Endangered Species Act reform, appear dead for the year.

WATER APPROPRIATIONS

Among the appropriations bills that Congress will have to address when it returns in November is the Energy and Water Development bill, which funds the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers water project program. The House passed its version of the Energy and Water measure (H.R. 5427) in May. It provides \$761 million for the Bureau's Water and Related

(Continued on Page 3)

WESTERN WATER VIEWPOINT

Farms, Forests And Fish



By KARL SCRONCE

National Association of Wheat Growers

In April of this year, I represented farmers and ranchers at a meeting of the Klamath County Natural Resource Advisory Council. That night we had some special guests, commercial fishermen from the Oregon Coast, and the presentation and discussion focused on the 2006 shutdown of commercial salmon fishing from San Francisco to Northern Oregon, approximately 750 miles.

The shutdown was due to poor spawning adult returns to the Klamath River located in Northern California. We were told that the river system that has the poorest spawning fish returns sets the fishing season and catch limits for the entire coast.

This decision put hundreds of people who fish salmon for a living in the ranks of the unemployed. The fish in question are of such concern because they are considered “endangered” and are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

You may be asking, what does this have to do with a farmer who lives and works in the Klamath Basin growing wheat?

In 2001, the United States Bureau of Reclamation was forced to deny irrigation water to the Klamath Project along the Southern Oregon/Northern California border. This irrigated agricultural area and several National Wildlife Refuges were left dry due to the same poor returns of salmon on the Klamath River and die-offs of sucker fish in Upper Klamath Lake. Then, farmers, not unlike the fishermen visiting that night, saw their jobs and businesses at risk.

The effects of the Endangered Species Act reach far and

wide, often adversely affecting the farming, fishing and timber industries – industries that seemingly have nothing to do with endangered species and industries that are often populated with producers in whose interest it is to protect the land and wildlife.

Oversight under ESA often starts with a lawsuit and ends up with cookie-cutter regulation that, intentionally or not, does not take into consideration the needs of those who use the land.

I, along with many other producers, feel this legislation is in desperate need of reform. In a bi-partisan fashion, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed an ESA reform bill, H.R. 3824, or the Endangered Species Recovery Act (TESRA), which could clear up some of these problems. Many of the provisions of this bill would involve farmers and other producers and ensure that recovery plans – and the regulations that emanate from them – are effective.

TESRA would require recovery plans within two years of listing and require regular review to make sure they are effective as possible. This legislation would introduce new conservation tools to promote conservation of species on private lands and to reduce hardship when the federal government restricts the use of private property for conservation purposes.

Importantly, this legislation would also eliminate the concept of “critical habitat,” which has done little to contribute to the recovery of species but has been a primary source of countless lawsuits restricting activities for years. And, this legislation includes provisions to foster collaborative efforts among many players, including affected farmers.

On that April night, when three commercial fishermen and their County Commissioner came to talk to us about the devastation thrown upon their industry and community, it was also a plea for help and a recognition that we are all in this together.

Working with all players to solve the issues presented by endangered species, as legislation like TESRA would require, would give everyone a voice in the process and avoid the kind of overbearing and unfair costs that fishermen and farmers in my area have had to endure.

Karl Scronce is a full-time farmer in Merrill and Klamath Falls, (Oregon). This article was reprinted with permission from the National Association of Wheat Growers. The Family Farm Alliance has worked closely with the fishermen noted in Scronce's column, and Executive Director Dan Keppen is the chairman of the Klamath County Natural Resources Advisory Council, upon which he and Scronce serve.

Johnson, New Commissioner Of Reclamation, Is Confirmed In Senate Vote

(Continued from Page 1)

for the agency, addressing internal challenges and setting ambitious goals for the management of our nation's resources. He needs his key people in place.”

JOHNSON replaces retired former Commissioner John W. Keys III.

He has been serving as Regional Director of the Bureau's Lower Colorado Region. Previously, he was Deputy Regional Director. Earlier in his career, he was awarded the President's Meritorious Executive Award for superior accomplishment and management of federal programs.

THE FAMILY Farm Alliance supported Johnson's confirmation.

Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen, in a letter to Senator Domenici, noted, “Bob Johnson's fingerprints are all over ...success stories” in his work in administering the lower Colorado River.

Washington Update:

Lame Duck Session And Water Measures

(Continued from Page 1)

Account, which funds all of the Bureau's essential functions.

The House's proposed FY 07 appropriation for Water and Related Resources is \$15.7 million more than requested by the President, but \$25.5 million less than Congress appropriated last year, marking a possible sharp decline in the Bureau's budget after several years of increases.

The Senate has not passed a FY 07 appropriations bill for Reclamation, but the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the measure in June.

It provides \$889 million for Water and Related Resources, an increase of \$14 million over FY 06.

The Energy and Water Appropriations bill may end up in an omnibus appropriations measure that will fund most of the federal government.

"Congressional leaders dislike using that approach, but it may be the quickest way to get federal funding in place during the lame duck session, which is expected to last only about a month," said Joe Raeder, the Family Farm Alliance's Washington (D.C.) representative.

Until Congress gives final approval to the FY 07 appropriations bills, either separately or in an omnibus measure, the federal government will be funded by the temporary continuing resolution.

Under the resolution, the Bureau will be funded for the next few weeks at the level in the House-passed version of the Energy and Water Appropriations bill.

OMNIBUS WATER LEGISLATION?

As the end of the 109th Congress approaches, the House Resources and Senate Energy committees are working

to line up a number of Western water and natural resources measures for final passage. These include West-wide policy measures as well as bills that affect only single Reclamation projects.

"Often, at the end of a Congress, the committees package water bills together into a single measure, which may happen this year," said Raeder.

RURAL WATER BILL

A bill that is likely to move forward on its own or as part of a package is S. 895, the Rural Water Supply Act. Sponsored by Senate Energy Committee Chairman Domenici, the bill passed the Senate last November.

It would authorize the Bureau to build rural domestic water supply projects that meet certain engineering and feasibility criteria.

The Bush Administration strongly supports the bill because it believes the measure would help the Bureau keep resources focused on its core missions. Currently, Congress authorizes rural water supply projects on an ad-hoc basis, adding large construction obligations to the Bureau's already strained budget.

S. 895 also would authorize a new federal loan guarantee program to help irrigation districts finance major operation and maintenance costs.

The Alliance gave qualified support to S. 895 during a hearing before the House Resources Committee in July, and it has been actively involved in negotiations with House and Senate committees to expand the bill's benefits for irrigation districts.

The Alliance's amendments may be considered by the House Committee as the bill works its way forward, or some of them could be included in a new House rural water supply bill.

SITE SECURITY LEGISLATION

Another measure that may see enactment this year is a bill (H.R. 6029) to codify the federal and non-federal shares of the costs of post 9/11 security upgrades at Reclamation facilities.

Western water and power program testified at a House hearing in June that the Bureau's current policies on the reimbursability of site security costs is not reliable and that the agency does not give water and power contractors enough information about site security projects and their costs. Currently, the costs of "hardening" projects, such as barriers and fences, are non-reimbursable, but the operation and maintenance (O&M) for those projects is reimbursable, as is the cost of guards.

The hearing led to the introduction of H.R. 6029 by Water and Power Subcommittee Chairman George Radanovich (CALIFORNIA) and Grace Napolitano (CALIFORNIA), the subcommittee's senior Democrat. The legislation was drafted with the assistance of a coalition of Western water and power groups, including the Family Farm Alliance and California's Central Valley Project Water Association.

The bill makes Reclamation's site security activities part of the existing Safety of Dam program, and brings site security construction, guards and O&M under the 15% non-federal, 85% federal cost-sharing formula applied to dam safety projects.

The measure also puts the site security program under existing Safety of Dams Act provisions, requiring the Bureau to consult with project beneficiaries on costs and management of projects. H.R. 6029 may be brought up for a House vote in November. A Senate version has not been introduced.

Colorado Study Finds Public Support For Agriculture

(Continued from Page 1)

For example, agriculture was seen as the most important economic sector in Colorado, beating out tourism & recreation, high tech industries, and mining and petroleum.

Nearly all respondents (96.8%) felt that maintaining agricultural land and water in agricultural production was very or moderately important. And, notably, nearly three of four respondents indicated that agriculture should be the top priority for water allocation in dry years, as compared to one in five respondents who said in-stream flow levels should be top priority.

Rafting and fishing were seen as low priorities.

THE COLORADO study had the following objectives:

- To determine the public's attitudes towards such issues as food prices, food safety, pesticide use, environmental practices, wildlife and agriculture, animal welfare, land use, population growth and agricultural land preservation, among others.
- To explore differences in perceptions among Coloradans that may be based on geographic location, length of residence, or other characteristics.
- Compare current attitudes towards the above mentioned issues with past surveys.

THE LATEST SURVEY results show that there continues to be significant support for agriculture in Colorado.

This is supported by perceptions that agriculture is important to the quality of life in Colorado; Colorado food is provided at a reasonable price; and that if available, Coloradans would buy more Colorado produced products. These positive perceptions have been fairly constant over the past 10 years.

Coloradans view agriculture as a particularly important economic sector and support initiatives such as maintaining land and water in

agricultural production, purchasing development rights to prevent the loss of agricultural land, and using a portion of funds from open space programs to minimize farm and ranch losses.

Most Coloradans also believe that agricultural techniques are conducted effectively and that agricultural practices effectively conserve water and soil.

Colorado is facing a multitude of water resources challenges and controversies that concern the state's Commissioner of Agriculture, Don Ament, whose department asked for the CSU study.

IN A MEETING with Family Farm Alliance representatives earlier this year, Ament expressed concern that the seriousness of challenges facing agriculture is not fully appreciated by the public and mainstream media.

As more and more farmers pay more legal expenses to protect their water, the attrition rate may go up as farmers get out of the business.

Ament is concerned not just about the loss of food production associated with this attrition; he is equally concerned about impacts to our value system and our heritage.

"We are moving into such a litigious way of doing business," Ament told the

Alliance representatives. "I'm not sure how some of these guys are going to survive."

He pointed to recent developments in the Colorado General Assembly, where water lobbyists killed a bill that would have helped farmers and ranchers, despite the CSU poll showing Coloradans believe that agriculture is seen as the most important economic sector to the future of the state.



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