

State of the Basin Symposium Wrap-Up

Submitted by Deb Daniel, RRWCD General Manager

The aquifer is depleting rapidly...should we be concerned? Maybe the Ogallala Aquifer in your area is stable, but according to the annual measurement of wells throughout the area, the water table under a vast majority of the Northern High Plains Basin has dropped consistently for decades.

The Republican River Water Conservation District, together with numerous businesses throughout the Basin, co-sponsored The State of the Basin symposium to address questions and concerns surrounding the water tables in northeastern Colorado.

Justice Greg Hobbs started the day giving an informative synopsis of the history of water law in Colorado. Justice Hobbs is one of seven individuals on the Colorado Supreme Court. He gave a very informative historical perspective of the Republican River Compact and the reasoning why it was written.

Premier Farm Credit and CoBank provided copies of the Citizen's Guide to Colorado's Interstate Compacts to all who attended the symposium. Justice Hobbs referenced this booklet several times in his presentation.

Dick Wolfe, Colorado State Engineer and Scott Steinbrecher, Assistant Attorney General reported on the Republican River Compact Administration and the negotiations with Kansas and Nebraska regarding the compact compliance pipeline and Bonny.

Tim Pautler, chairman of the Pipeline Technical Advisory Committee, reported on the operations of the pipeline which delivered water to the river to assist Colorado in being in compliance with the Compact for 2014.

Jim Slattery, of Slattery and Hendrix Engineering, gave a presentation on groundwater levels. Jim displayed multiple graphs showing depletions in the Basin and the difficulty Colorado has in reaching compliance with the Compact. He concluded his presentation with charts reporting on the depletions in each groundwater management district.

Lunch was provided by Tri-State G&T, Highline Electric Association and YW Electric Association. A half-full bottle of water with a label reading, "The aquifer is depleting rapidly... should we be concerned?" was served with each meal.

Wil Bledsoe, Board member of the RRWCD, gave a rousing introduction of Congressman Cory Gardner to start the afternoon session. Congressman Gardner reminded everyone of the importance of working together to find solutions to this difficult issue.

MaryLou Smith, Facilitator and Coordinator from CSU, reported on the newly formed Water Preservation Partnership. This organization consists of members representing each groundwater management district in the Northern High Plains Basin along with a member each from the RRWCD and CAPA (Colorado Agriculture Preservation Association).

CSU Professor Chris Goemans reported on the economic affect of irrigation in northeastern Colorado and the possible impact to the rural economy without irrigated agriculture.

Katherine Wilkins-Wells, General Manager of Groundwater Management District 4, from Colby, Kansas, reported on the LEMA (Local Enhanced Management Area) program which addresses water conservation practices in NW Kansas.

Brad Edgerton, General Manager of the Frenchman Cambridge Irrigation District, reported on how Nebraska has placed limits on the amount of irrigation which can be applied in 2014. Due to the dry weather conditions, some irrigators in Nebraska may not be allowed to use any water for irrigation this year.

I, Deb Daniel, gave a short report on the Colorado Water Plan. During my presentation I reminded everyone that the decisions made regarding water conservation will forever impact the future

of the young people living in northeastern Colorado. I encouraged everyone to stay involved and be informed about water issues.

Rod Lenz, RRWCD Board member summarized the discussions of the day. Rod reminded the crowd that everyone has a different viewpoint, wears a different hat, when it comes to water conservation in the Basin and that every voice is important.

The day ended with a panel of the speakers answering questions from the public. Jim Lenz from Wray, CO asked what was going to happen next concerning water conservation in the Basin. Tim Pautler stated that the RRWCD has no jurisdictional power but the groundwater management districts have that authority. Tim reported the Water Preservation Partnership is looking at the possibility of each groundwater management district having town meetings to discuss water conservation in each area.

Kevin Penny, from Burlington, CO, pointed out his concerns regarding the Water Use Fee. "Now that we have totalizing meters and PCC tests on the irrigation wells which show how much water each well is pumping, is the RRWCD going to change the water use fee to be more equitable to the smaller producing well?" RRWCD Board members Tim Pautler and Dennis Coryell reported the RRWCD has considered modifying the fee.

Jeremy Weathers, owner of Stormy Productions videotaped the symposium throughout the day. Dawn Webster, RRWCD Administrative Assistant has loaded the presentations onto the RRWCD website at www.republicanriver.com.

The aquifer is depleting rapidly. If the water table in your area is not dropping, then you are extremely fortunate. But for a vast majority of water users, the time has come to be concerned. Everyone has a voice in this issue. We may not all agree, but we all need to be informed and involved in decisions which impact this limited resource.

For more information about the symposium contact the RRWCD office at (970) 332-3552.