

Monday, April 18, 2011

The Honorable John Barrasso, M.D. Vice Chairman

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
Washington, D.C. 20510-6450

RE: ISSUES PERTAINING TO WIND RIVER PROJECT

Mr. John Barrasso, M.D. Vice Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on issues pertaining to Operation and Maintenance of the Wind River Irrigation Project.

I am a water user under the Wind River Irrigation Project, as I am a member of the Glick family, who runs a small cattle ranch out side of Fort Washakie.

The **Management** of the Wind River Irrigation Project has a lack of adequate funding, and requires consistent appropriated funds for Administration (Engineers and Bill Collectors) to succeed and be efficient. If and when consistent appropriated funds are available to pay for Administration and Management, more Operation and Maintenance Assessed Funds can be directed towards **Deferred Maintenance**. Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Joint Tribes, Appointed Tribal Organizations, and a Proposed Water Users Group need to be included in the coordinating and consulting of setting the program's priorities, operation, and maintenance decisions, to allow for improved **Planning**. The Wind River Irrigation Project needs financial assistance through the Construction to Complete and Rehab of the System period, as to permit the ultimate development of a viable and sustainable irrigation project for our future generations.

The B.I.A. Irrigation Department's funding is derived from Operation and Maintenance charges per irrigatable acre. B.I.A. calculates irrigation assessment rates in accordance with *25 CFR 171.1(f) by estimating the cost of normal operation and maintenance at each irrigation project. The cost of normal operation and maintenance means the expenses they incur to provide direct support of benefit for and irrigation project's activities for administration, operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation.* The Administration payroll expenditures consume the majority of the Operation & Maintenance funds, and keep escalating with the Federal Cost of Living Increases, which are required for Federal Employees. I believe consistent appropriated funds for Administration (Engineers and Bill Collectors) and Management would benefit the district, whereas the overall Irrigation District's Budget would require less assessed charges per acre, and nonetheless will allow more funds to be directed towards high priority areas.

Deferred Maintenance has been hindered by Administration (Engineers and Bill Collectors) expenditures. Water Users and B.I.A. have reported that Operations and Maintenance Fees provide insufficient funding for project operations. I

believe Administration (Engineers and Bill Collectors) Costs should receive consistent appropriated funding, since the Irrigation Districts are considered to be B.I.A. Owned. Deferred Maintenance has turned the B.I.A. Irrigation Maintenance Crew into an Emergency Repair Crew. All of the major canals have been ignored for so long they can hardly convey water to the aging head gates.

When funds are available, I am very agreeable that Diversion Dams, Major Canals, and Head Gates are to be placed on top of the Wind River Irrigation Systems Priority List. At what time the Irrigation System receives more Maintenance and Rehabilitation; the system will become more efficient and conserve water, for other beneficial uses such as: fisheries, wildlife, pollution control, recreation, cultural, religious, hydropower, industrial, municipal, domestic use, and other users down the road.

Along the same lines as Deferred Maintenance, many of our U.S.G.S. Gauging Stations are no longer funded. In order to build a feasible Resource Management Plan for our water systems, it is imperative to be able to track our water. This would be beneficial to the B.I.A., Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes, State of Wyoming, Fremont County, our irrigation districts, and our local water ways.

Coordination between the B.I.A. Irrigation Department, B.I.A. Realty Department, Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Joint Tribes, Appointed Tribal Organizations all need to work together, on a government to government basis. Also, all of these entities need to include the Proposed Water Users Group as cooperators; this will enhance our planning to provide more educated decisions on actions necessary for the proper: operation, maintenance, and administration of our irrigation project and lands.

At one time Irrigation increased the value of our lands and cheapened the price of living in all our local towns within the Wind River Indian Reservation and the State of Wyoming. Without the Irrigation Projects and Agricultural Communities, many industries and towns could not flourish. Any thing which affects the success and many achievements of the Irrigation Projects and Agricultural Communities, not only concerns those engaged in the pursuit, but also the progress and welfare of the Wind River Reservation and the State of Wyoming. With the deterioration of our irrigation systems, the high cost of assessed charges, our lands has become a burden rather than an asset.

With the cattle prices at an all time high, it is an optimum time to sell. I am afraid many of the existing ranchers and farmers will sell out. It will then take a considerable amount of funding to rebuild the local Agricultural Community. Right now there is no feasible way for young families to embark into ranching and farming, due to the amount of seed monies required for startup, so we are left with a major dilemma. I feel strongly that our Irrigation Project should receive consistent appropriated funding for Administration (Engineers and Bill Collectors). This will allow us to salvage our situation, by allowing more funding to be directed toward high priorities, such as Key Maintenance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Clinton Glick – Water User