

OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING  
MAY 17 2010  
GREELEY, COLORADO

TESTIMONY  
of  
WELD COUNTY  
COMMISSIONER  
DOUGLAS RADEMACHER

The subcommittee on water and power  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives

I would like to begin with thanking the Subcommittee in coming to Weld County for this hearing. We appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns on the subject of water.

As a fourth generation farmer/rancher I know the importance of how our natural resources play in our life. It has fueled the economic engine of this country since the industrial revolution. Weld County has many of these resources but it came to reality by men and women with vision, not what they saw, rather in what they dreamed it could become. Weld County is a desert by definition. It receives on average of 13 inches of precipitation per year. They also realized they needed water to survive in the desert.

Weld County has a rich agricultural history and water follows that history. Early settlers began to stake out farms and produce crops for themselves and their livestock. They knew the importance of acquiring and maintaining water, their most scarce and precious resource. Over time they turned a desert into an oasis.

The need to develop these resources became necessary. They again had vision of what could be done. They dug reservoirs, ditches and structures to harness the rivers and streams. They turned the desert green with the rich soil of the plains. Water rights were adjudicated and water projects were approved.

These new water projects made it possible for the rivers to run all year, before many ran dry during the summer months, when water was necessary to grow many crops. These water projects also assisted in many towns and cities the opportunity to grow and flourish. Many of these water diversions and structures are still in use today.

As the growth of Weld County, as well as the entire Front Range, the pressure for more water became necessary. New water projects were approved, many in the South Platte upper water sheds. One project which was built to benefit Agriculture in Northern Colorado was the Colorado Big Thompson water project which brought water from the Western slope to the eastern plains, for agricultural needs. But as more agriculture was displaced by urban development the water shifted to municipal use. Today only about 30% of the "Big T" water is owned by agricultural producers.

Weld County's agricultural history is well documented. Weld County has been in the top ten counties, nationwide, regarding total agricultural sales and was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> last year. Outside the citrus and nut producing counties in California we are rated as number one, in total sales. We produce slightly over 30% of the states total agricultural sales. Of the top ten counties in Colorado seven are in the South Platte Basin. This even when the growth in Weld County was number one in the country for several years in the 1990's and early 2000's. The South Platte river, I will challenge, is the most efficient river in the State as well as most likely in the country. The water in the South Platte is reused up to seven times before leaving the state to fulfill our compact agreements. This is with the growth of the entire Front Range, from Colorado Springs north to the Wyoming border. Weld County alone is nearly 4000 square miles, larger than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined.

There are several challenges facing the South Platte Basin. The most critical is the continued transfer of agricultural water to other uses. As a member of the South Platte Round Table these shortfalls have been identified. The studies have a projected short fall of over 250,000 acre feet to both Ag. and municipal use by 2050. It took the Big Thompson thirty years to be approved and built. The only water now available is from the Ag. sector, there is little to none left in the basin to develop. Conservation will help but cannot meet the demand. Also, when you conserve up stream it reduces the return flows which many Ag. producers rely on. As with any proposal there will be unintended consequences. Other programs which have worked in other parts of the country such as the fallowing of Ag. ground in dry years to divert to municipal use, again, this take ground out of production. In my opinion, the most efficient way to address the shortfall is to build more storage, to capture the water we are entitled to under the compact agreements.

There are several projects proposed that makes good since and will help the shortfall, but again, by itself will not address the complete shortfall. One such project is the Northern Integrated Water Supply, or NSIP. This is an off river storage which would build a reservoir capable of storing up to 170,000 acre feet of water. It could only divert water during the run off season when much of this water leaves the state, again, this is water Colorado is entitled to under the compact agreements. However, even when theses water project makes good common sense and does harm the river, they are opposed by special interest groups with their own agendas, which is the case now. Every year this project is delayed it costs the stockholders over 1.4 million dollars. All of this water will be going to municipal use, which will take some of the pressure off the Ag. sector. Without these water projects we will lose a projected 160,000 acres of productive farm ground by 2030 in Weld County alone.

There are several federal programs under the USDA to assist Ag. in managing this resource. However, as in most government programs the stipulations that are attached diminishes the participation of these programs. Also the limited amount of funds make them so competitive many producers don't apply. Many of these programs are meant to address best management practices, which all producers already strive to achieve to lower the cost of production. Weld County cannot be compared to other states which do not rely on irrigation. We cannot use no till technology, unless under a pivot sprinkler, which most irrigated ground is not. We do however use the latest techniques for other areas of our operation.

In summary, one of my duties as a County Commissioner is to keep agriculture a viable part of Weld County's future. Water is the most important factor of this expansion and must be protected and more storage made available. This country is on the verge of outsourcing our Ag. As we have our

energy and manufacturing. We now rely on 2% of our population to feed the other 98%, we must protect our food system. I'm proud to be a producer and proud of my County, which I represent.

Submitted: May 13, 2010

By: Weld County Commissioner  
Douglas Rademacher