



# EXPLORER

## A SUMMER OF EVENTS MOVE LEWIS & CLARK CLOSER



Members gather to hear project updates during the LCRWS annual meeting.

The Lewis & Clark Rural Water System has been active since 1990. Throughout the years, the board and participating communities have been optimistic about building a water system that brings water from the Missouri River. At this writing all those years of waiting may be coming to an end. In May, the Senate Water & Power Subcommittee held a hearing the same day of the Lewis & Clark annual meeting. Word came during the meeting of the success of the hearing and the new optimism that was beginning to sound like real progress.

During the Senate hearing in May, the Clinton administration acknowledged their support for the project. The

change in position by the administration will allow for a clearing of hurdles through several of the agencies overseeing the project. In addition to the administration support, the National Audubon Society provided a letter support of the project. After review by their national office, the non-profit, wildlife conservation organization determined that Lewis & Clark would have minimal affect on the environment and wildlife.

And perhaps the best news we could report about progress is the Senate markup that passed unanimously just days before this newsletter went to press. The news has again generated a

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## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GAO REPORT

The report from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) has brought up several questions about the project both for consideration by the policymakers who use the GAO report in their final decision and for the constituents who make up the membership in the 22 water systems seeking the water project.

The GAO report looks at the economic impact and ultimate cost of a project and weighs those factors with the cost/benefit that will be derived both on a regional and national scale. Lewis & Clark officials provided testimony for consideration in the final report by the GAO. We will focus this article on how the GAO values the benefits of a project to the water project constituency and the nation.

*The following text is taken from the May, 1999 GAO report to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Water and Power, Committee on Resources, House of Representatives.*

The societal benefits, such as meeting federal drinking water standards, improvements in health and lifestyle, and investing in the development of the infrastructure of rural America, cannot be measured monetarily with reasonable accuracy. For example, water experts we

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

By Charlie Kuehl, Chairman LCRWS

Our Ninth Annual Membership meeting held on May 27th proved to be another memorable event. With our largest attendance yet, we heard about the successful Senate subcommittee hearing held earlier that afternoon. News of the administration's support for Lewis and Clark gave us good reason to celebrate!

I also had the opportunity to present the Lyle Trautman Memorial Award to two individuals who made tremendous contributions to Lewis and Clark. Assad Barari retired earlier this year from the South Dakota Geological Survey. Assad was responsible for producing a report that put the wheels in motion for development of Lewis and Clark. He investigated the available drinking water supply resources in southeastern South Dakota and concluded that these supplies were inadequate for future needs. In his report, Assad determined that the most reliable source left for development was the Missouri River.

The second award was designated to Bill Davelaar, retiring Lewis and Clark board member. Bill represented Rural Water Number 1 from Hospers, IA and was one of our earliest board members. Due to term limitations applied to the Rural Water Number 1 system, Bill's term was complete. Bill served tirelessly on Lewis and Clark's board and was always ready to take on any challenge. He could be counted on to spring into action whenever the call was made. We will miss Bill's presence and good humor. We wish him well in his new endeavors.

Our sincere thanks to each of these gentlemen for their contributions to Lewis and Clark.

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interviewed stated that improved public health is a major benefit, but the benefit is difficult to measure. Improvements in health were also cited by district representatives as a major benefit of the Lewis and Clark project. However, neither the reduction in illnesses nor the subsequent reduction in health care costs that might be attributable to better quality water can be valued with precision.

Similarly, it is not possible to accurately assign a monetary value to an improved lifestyle attributed to better quality water. However, the Congress has recognized the long-standing need to improve the quality of water in rural America. For example, the Rural Utility Service, through its water and wastewater loan and grant program, has helped fund almost 17,000 water and sewer projects serving more than 12,500 rural communities in the last 30 years. Also, the objective of the Environmental Protection Agency's Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund program is to ensure that the nation's drinking water supplies remain safe and affordable.

The economic benefits of water projects such as the Lewis and Clark project are, for the most part, difficult to quantify because of the difficulty in attributing with any precision an increase in economic activity directly to an increase in water. Water is rarely the sole factor responsible for economic change, but water can facilitate economic expansion. For example, hog farmers are unlikely to decide to raise more hogs based solely on the availability of better quality water. Instead, they are also likely to consider the cost of feed, the amount of available space in their sheds, and the market demand as reflected in the price paid for their product by slaughterhouses.

Despite the difficulty of measuring the economic benefits, increases in the value of the output of goods and services resulting from the Lewis and Clark project can be viewed from either the national or regional perspective.

Although both perspectives are measures of changes in the value of goods and services produced, the regional benefits could be significantly different from the national benefits because regional benefits capture the transfer of economic activity into the project's service area from outside the region. Regional transfers will result in no net national benefits. *(The end of GAO report text)*

The depth at which the GAO looks at projects and determines their value is important to the national interest. By reviewing just this small portion of the GAO report, one can see how information written by one governmental agency for the legislative branch can inherently be subjective. It is important for all to understand that the "process" in which a decision is made will be subjective at times. However, the reader should think about the regional vs. national benefit reference in the context of health and welfare to one region of the country and how that does affect the country as whole. If the United States is truly a sum of its parts (i.e. States, counties and cities) then isn't the real economic benefit ultimately shared by all if infrastructure is built and maintained, regardless of where it is located?

## MOVIN' ON

The staff at Lewis & Clark would like to extend best wishes to John Weaver with Rep. John Thune's office. John Weaver has been very diligent in responding to the requests of Lewis & Clark and made us feel welcome when visiting the office in Washington.

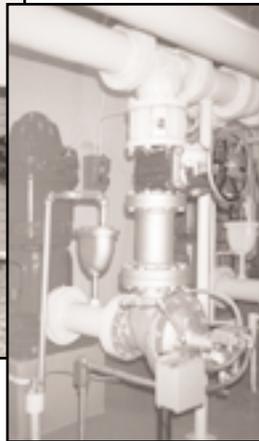
John will be leaving his current position to work for Rep. Walter Jones, Jr. of North Carolina and will be working on armed services issues. Best of luck to you, John and we wish you well in your new opportunity.

# FEATURE SYSTEM

## ROCK COUNTY RURAL WATER, MN



Rock County Rural Water District- Luverne, Minnesota



We've all heard about the farm economy and how it affects the family farm and the local communities. Throughout the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System, many of the people living in the affected area are hoping a decision will come soon for many reasons. The plans to build the new rural water system in their area has more than just a personal, physiological need, it's also about maintaining a farm economy.

Many of the people who live in small communities are directly connected to the success on the family farm. Even small communities surrounding larger cities like Sioux Falls are affected. The small towns of Magnolia, Hills, Steen and Kanaranzi make up part of the water customers in the Rock County Rural Water District. These communities are very much a part of the farm community and realize the importance of a dependable water system for their vitality, health and the success of the local farmers.

George Langford, Mayor of Hills, Minnesota was asked what impact Lewis & Clark would have on the small town of 610 people. "Our own aquifer tends to have nitrate levels that are getting too high," said Langford. "We can't really address the quality issue without a big investment. As for having an adequate water supply, we are getting by today

but we are growing and will have new housing developments that will put us beyond our current intake. We are totally dependent on the rural water district and our future is dependent on finding a new water source. The health of our families has to be taken into account and I hope the legislators realize that something has to be done."

According to early accounts of the actual building of the water system, the Rock River watershed was used as the water source. The challenge came after the wells were built as rock formations became obstacles to reaching all the designated locations. Currently, Rock County Rural Water provides drinking water to its customers from six groundwater wells in Clinton Township along the Rock River south of Luverne. These wells range in depth from 26 feet to 35 feet and draw water from the Quaternary Water Table aquifer. In 1999 three additional wells are being constructed across the river from the existing wells.

The Rock County Rural Water District serves approximately 530. A new phase of expansion is planned that could add another 50-100 water customers. The water system expects continued growth and is looking towards the day when Lewis & Clark will be the main water source for the district.



## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

By Pam Bonrud, Exec. Director, LCRWS

Lewis and Clark continues to gain momentum towards reaching its goal of federal authorization and construction. As you have read, Lewis and Clark had a very successful Senate subcommittee hearing in May. Thanks to our senators who jumped into action when news came of a possible softening in the administration's position towards federal authorization of regional drinking water supply projects. Working together, they were able to convince the administration that Lewis and Clark warranted that same consideration and support. It is difficult to put into words the relief I felt when Senator Daschle testified that the administration was supporting Lewis and Clark. Remaining seated in my chair was difficult at best!

I also thank Senators Johnson, Grassley and Grams and Representative Thune for their appearance before the subcommittee in support of Lewis and Clark. It was a clear demonstration to the subcommittee that Lewis and Clark has a dedicated tri-state congressional delegation and bipartisan support for its authorization. Each brought the message that the time was now for Lewis and Clark to gain congressional approval.

Now we can celebrate the committee's approval of the project and await action by the full Senate. Hopes remain high that Lewis and Clark will receive Senate approval this fall. Then we move onto the House of Representatives to gain their approval as well. Remember to check our web site ([www.lcrws.org](http://www.lcrws.org)) to get the latest news about Lewis and Clark in Congress.

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## **NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY ENDORSES LEWIS & CLARK WATER PROJECT**

The National Audubon Society is known internationally as a guardian of the environment and wildlife. The organization publicly announced their support of Lewis & Clark's efforts to provide reliable, high-quality water supplies to communities and farms throughout eastern South Dakota, southwest Minnesota, and northwest Iowa.

"We are encouraged that your legislation would provide this water in an environmentally acceptable manner, said Daniel P. Beard, Sr. Vice President of Public Policy. "In particular, I want to express our appreciation for your water conservation and wildlife mitigation provisions, and your insistence on making sure the project complies with all applicable environmental laws."

"Based on our review of the legislation, the National Audubon Society is pleased to support enactment of the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System legislation," added Beard.

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great deal of discussion throughout the membership in the three-state area. As Congress debates a tax cut and the size of a tax cut, reasonable discussion of supporting a new water project is approaching and is presumably in line to be passed through the Senate in early fall.

Several factors including those mentioned in this article have allowed the project to move forward. A shuffling of committee leadership has added a new perspective to the project and has provided Lewis & Clark a new opportunity to have their story told. Most recently, Senator Gordon Smith replaced Senator Kyl on Water & Power Subcommittee and has communicated to Senator Daschle that he would support moving the bill to the full Senate this year.

As the full Senate prepares to consider the project in the fall of this year, it is important to step back and look at the project for what it represents. Truly, this is about water and the ability for an area of this country to sustain itself and plan for growth. This project is also a fulfillment of a promise made years ago in the Pick-Sloan Act. The original intent of Pick-Sloan was, in part, to provide the development of water resources to the region. As Congress is debating the passage of Lewis & Clark, a closer look at how this natural resource was originally intended to be used should be considered.