



EXPLORER

SENATE MOVES THE LEWIS & CLARK PROJECT FORWARD

This past holiday season, the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System received a Christmas present from the U.S. Senate. In the last minutes of the 1999 session, the Senate approved legislation that included the Lewis & Clark project. The next step is for the U.S. House to take up the bill in the spring.

"It's not going to be easy, but we're going to give it everything we can," said Rep. John Thune of South Dakota. The legislation to authorize Lewis & Clark must pass the Water and Power Subcommittee of the House Resources Committee. Then it must garner funding from Congress every year for the next 10 years – the time needed to build the 406 mile pipeline.

Back at home the Senate's approval of the project was received with much excitement.

"This is a huge victory for Sioux Falls and southeastern South Dakota, as well as portions of northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota," said Sen. Tim Johnson of South Dakota. "Now we have some momentum going into the House of Representatives."

Pamela Bonrud, Executive Director of LCRWS, also expressed her optimism.

– Continued on page 2



Sen. Tom Daschle shakes hands with a community member during his recent visit to Tea, SD concerning the Lewis & Clark project.

DASCHLE VISITS TEA TO HEAR FIRST-HAND STORIES OF WATER NEED

In spite of the recent victory in the Senate, the Lewis & Clark Rural Water Project has several obstacles to overcome before it is approved in the House of Representatives this spring. Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota recently met with members of the communities involved with LCRWS in order to get enough information to keep the story "fresh" before Congress.

The purpose of Daschle's visit to Tea, SD was to hear firsthand the current water situation. Daschle said he wants to be able to relate personal stories to Congress regarding what this project means to the individual communities, especially when they already have to rely on outside sources for water.

Daschle, along with Pamela Bonrud, Executive Director of LCRWS, and Mayor Herman Otten of Tea, toured a new housing development in the town, then met with approximately 30 officials from the 22 communities involved with the project.

In his opening remarks, Daschle gave praise to both Sen. Tim Johnson and Rep. John Thune for their work on getting LCRWS passed through the Senate this last November.

"The nice thing about South Dakota is whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, you pull together until you get things done. We'll do that with Lewis & Clark."

Many of the attendees voiced their appreciation to Daschle for his work on the Senate approval of the bill. They also described similar circumstances regarding their need -- sometimes urgent -- for the water project. Shallow wells, poor water quality and the

– Continued on page 4



– Continued from page 1

“History has shown me that when Congress authorizes a project like Lewis and Clark, they follow through with funding.”

A breakthrough for the project came last spring when the Clinton administration granted its support. That support was somewhat reluctant, however, since the administration has voiced concern over the proposed funding for the project.

The legislation currently before Congress calls for federal grants to pay 80 percent of the project’s cost. The state and local town governments would pay for 20 percent, except in Sioux Falls where costs would be split 50-50. The Clinton administration prefers a plan where communities supplied with water by the Lewis & Clark project would repay the government a much larger share of the cost.

Concern over the proposed funding plan is also an obstacle LCRWS must overcome in the House. Rep. John Doolittle –CA, chairman of the Water and Power Subcommittee, wants the communities involved to repay the entire cost of the project to the government.

However, Bonrud said the local communities can’t afford more than the 10 percent proposed in the current plan, and that 80 percent is a fair portion for the federal government to pay.

“The most basic cornerstone of any area’s ability to grow and compete is water. The federal government will always have a role in maintaining the nation’s infrastructure.”

This year is a critical time for LCRWS, which was organized in 1989 and first introduced to Congress in 1994. Many communities, such as Sioux Falls, will need to look elsewhere if the Lewis & Clark project doesn’t get approval this year. If that happens, said Sioux Falls Mayor Gary Hanson, the city will begin researching other options to get more water.

“We can’t wait past 2002,” Hanson said. “We’re at the eleventh hour now.”

If Doolittle is not persuaded to support the project, there is another option. House rules allow legislation passed by the Senate to be approved by the House without committee approval, but that requires the support of party leaders.

“The best-case scenario is to move it through the House in regular order, with Doolittle’s cooperation,” said Thune. “But we have to be prepared to get the job done in whatever manner we can.”

Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota played a key role in the passage of LCRWS before the Senate. According to his spokeswoman Stephanie Bluma, he considers the project a top priority and will try to help Thune push it through the House.

The successful passage in the Senate was a cooperative effort among congressional delegation of three states, including Sen. Daschle, Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa and Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa.



CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

Here we sit on the doorstep of a brand new year and century. It is a time to reflect about where we’ve been and what the future holds.

When we first organized in 1989, it was difficult to imagine what was in store for us. We could not have known that over the next decade, Lewis and Clark would develop into a drinking water supply system for twenty-two communities and rural water systems in a tri-state area. We could also not have known that our federal authorization journey would continue over six of those ten years. But one thing has remained constant, reaching our ultimate goal of federal authorization.

During the early evening hours of November 19, 1999, a huge step forward was taken in realizing our goal of federal authorization when the U.S. Senate gave its unanimous approval to Lewis and Clark. It is difficult to describe the range of emotions that were felt when news arrived that the U.S. Senate passed Lewis and Clark. We thank each of our senators for their persistence in working with the committee and their peers in moving our legislation forward.

Now our attention turns to the future and what is in store for Lewis and Clark in 2000. Many challenges remain for Lewis and Clark as we look forward to working with the U.S. House of Representatives. We know that with the strong support of our congressmen, success will once more come our way. I look forward to sharing our progress with you in future newsletters.

FEATURE SYSTEM

CLAY COUNTY, IOWA



Clay Regional Water employees accept federal funds for the improvement of water quality at a check awarding ceremony last July.

Clay County, Iowa is known for its county fair (the largest in the world), its farms and its friendly people. Home to 12 communities, the county has a need to supply good quality water to its many residents. Clay Regional Water was formed in 1981 with a membership of 925, and now serves almost 2000 members from seven different towns. As with most of the communities involved with the Lewis and Clark Rural Water System, Clay Regional Water needs a new water source to meet quality and quantity problems.

LCRWS provides a solution to the problems facing Clay County. The project would allow Clay Regional Water to use up to one million gallons of water to serve current customers and allow for continued expansion of the system.

But until the project is implemented, Clay Regional Water is taking other steps to improve the quality of their water. Last August, they held a groundbreaking ceremony for an expansion of their water treatment plant. They have received funding for this project through USDA Rural Development by means of a \$1.8 million dollar loan and a \$600,000 grant. The funding will allow the plant to add a lime softening process, which will result in more efficient and consistent removal of iron and manganese, and provide a significant improvement in the water quality.

Clay Regional Water is also receiving \$2,050,000 as part of President Clinton's Water 2000 initiative. The state of Iowa as a whole will receive \$4,249,000 in grants and loans to improve the water quality in rural areas.

With these funds, Clay Regional Water plans to purchase water from the city of Estherville to supply reliable quantities of safe quality water to the rural Superior area. The project would consist of a transmission line from Estherville to a 150,000 gallon elevated tank located near Superior and service lines to serve 283 rural users.

A check awarding ceremony was held last July. Attendees were USDA officials, Superior City Council, Emmet & Dickinson County Board of Supervisors, the Clay Regional Water staff and Superior area steering committee.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Last year ended with a big bang for Lewis and Clark when the U.S. Senate gave its unanimous approval to our federal authorization. We are looking forward to the same response from the U.S. House of Representatives in 2000!

As for other issues on our plate, we are once more working on our state legislative agendas. Requests for continued state grant funding from Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota have been made. We will be working with our state legislative leaders in explaining our financial needs for 2000 and how state grant funds will be used to assist Lewis and Clark.

Lewis and Clark is also considering its fiscal year 2000 budget. Final board discussion occurred on January 27, 2000 at its regularly scheduled monthly meeting. A significant increase in our budget was approved due to our progress in Congress. We are making plans for project construction activities that will be initiated once our federal authorization becomes law. Lewis and Clark will undertake tasks related to final engineering and design work and completing our environmental assessment activities in 2000. Related issues will include nailing down capacity demands from our membership, potential new memberships, acquiring land for our treatment plant and well site, and easements for the pipeline route. The next year looks to be an exciting and rewarding experience for Lewis and Clark.

We also moved to a new office site. Our new address is: 2220 E. 54th Street North, Sioux Falls, SD, 57104. The phone and fax numbers remain the same.

*** Please Recycle This Newsletter!**
Pass it on to a Colleague.



Printed on recycled paper with
Soy Ink.

– Continued from page 1

need for a reliable water supply to further economic growth were common themes.

Mayor Otten said that building permits in his town have steadily increased over the last 10 years, with a high of 40 permits granted this year. Otten doesn't see this growth stopping unless they no longer have enough water to service the town. "It's important we continue to press this issue and see Lewis & Clark come through," Otten said.

Red Arndt from Luverne, MN said right now their community pumps 17 wells, which are all very shallow. The city is digging two additional wells and will soon need to replace two more. And to make things more urgent, he said, the current dry conditions have caused their water table to drop 2 to 3 feet from last summer. If the dry conditions continue, the community of Luverne will most likely have to impose water restrictions at the beginning of the summer.

"We needed this water project 10 years ago when it all started," Arndt said.

Mayor Dennis Weeldreyer of Lennox also echoed the concerns of several communities

that a water shortage would affect future growth. "The industry in Lincoln County will suffer if we don't get it (LCRWS)," he said.

Another official from Lincoln County voiced frustration at having the infrastructure and other elements required for the growth of commercialization, but lacking the needed water.

Daschle said he felt LCRWS had two main hurdles left to overcome. The first is finishing the authorization process and getting over the opposition of Rep. John Doolittle –CA, chairman of the Water and Power Subcommittee.

"If we can do that," Daschle said, "I don't see any opposition left."

The second hurdle facing LCRWS is getting the money appropriated for the project once it is approved. The first few years of appropriation are the hardest, Daschle said, but "once you get it going, the rest just comes."

Rep. Thune will be leading the charge to get LCRWS approved by the House this spring.

**CALL YOUR LOCAL
REPRESENTATIVE TO
HELP GET THE LEWIS &
CLARK RURAL WATER
SYSTEM PROJECT
THROUGH CONGRESS!**

**CONTACT INFORMATION
IS AVAILABLE AT
OUR WEB SITE.**

WWW.LCRWS.ORG