

Water Quality Update

Governor states opposition to \$300 million Red River Desalination

The planned desalination of the Red River has staunch proponents and opponents. The governors of the states primarily affected - Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas- have previously remained neutral. However, in November Oklahoma's leader came out in opposition to the project.

"After discussion with many groups, individuals, and state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Corps of Engineers, I continue to be concerned with the possible environmental and economic impacts to the State of Oklahoma. Further, I am very worried this huge investment of tax dollars far outweighs the perceived benefits to either Oklahoma, Texas or the nation. These factors, coupled with the fact that there is little, if any, Oklahoma support, leads me to oppose this project," Gov. Frank Keating said in a letter dated Nov. 6.

The letter was addressed to Kathleen McGinty, chairman of President Clinton's Council on

Environmental Quality, the group that has been charged with mediating this issue.

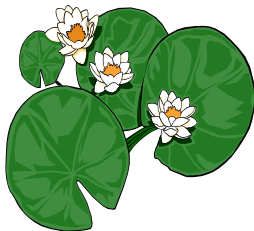
McGinty has received a petition signed by an estimated 40,000 opposed to the project. The letter writing campaign was initiated by Texas Black Bass Unlimited (TBBU) and other sportsmen's groups.

"Despite the fact that we think we might prevail, we need more signatures," said Charles Dukes, spokesman for TBBU.

Dukes says he opposes the project because the cost-benefit analysis done by the Corps doesn't reflect the environmental damage done by the project. "The project is a massive transfer of water from Oklahoma to Texas, from the Red River Basin to the Trinity River Basin. It's going to change the fresh water flow into bays and estuaries and have all kinds of downstream impacts. It will lower the flow to the Mississippi coast and further endangers wetlands in Louisiana and Mississippi. But no one is talking about that. It's a classic water project and damn the consequences."

-excerpted from *Texas & Southwest Environmental News*, Dec. 1996 Vol. 6(9)

Government to Tighten Wetlands Regulations



The Army Corps of Engineers is set to tighten regulations concerning wetlands beginning this year. The Corps will impose new restrictions on a class of general permits known as "nationwides."

Wetlands are regulated by the Army Corps of Engineers along with the EPA and the Department

of Agriculture. The Corps oversees dredging and filling activities in waterways. A permit from the Corps is usually required to do any work on a wetland.

Nationwide permits (NWP) allow landowners to drain small wetlands for specific purposes. One type of NWP, known as the Nationwide 26, allows land owners to bypass the usual review process and get instant approval for draining 1 to 10 acres of wetlands. Landowners are not required to tell anyone about plans for projects on less than one acre.

Beginning in January, the upper limit is reduced to 3 acres for instant approval under Nationwide 26.

The corps plan to drop Nationwide 26 completely after 18 to 24 months. Environmentalists say the move could help slow the depletion of the nation's wetlands. But developers say the more restrictive regulations will mean additional costs, red tape and delays in projects.

"People will be fuming," said Clark Wright, a lawyer from New Bern, North Carolina, who has represented developers on wetland issues. "This is a huge change to the status quo."

Environmentalists have been critical of the way the Corps has handled wetland regulation. EPA and the Department of Agriculture have been critical of the Nationwide permitting program.

"It is doubtful that any single action on the part of the Corps...has had a more widespread effect on the human and natural environment," said Warren M. Lee, Director of the Agriculture Department's Watersheds and Wetlands Division, in a September public hearing.

Environmental groups were pleased with the plan. "Nationwide 26 is plainly illegal, and the Corps had no choice but to eliminate it," said John Echeverria, a lawyer for the National Audubon Society.

But Wright feels the new restrictions will cause a "bureaucratic disaster." "The Corps' budget has been cut every year for the past several years. How do they intend to deal with the small flood of additional applications that will come once the nationwide permits are phased out?" he said.♦

-Adapted from *The Daily Regulatory Reporter*, Dec. 9, 1996

Citizens Up in Arms about Pollution from Missouri Poultry Plant

Citizens of Grove, Oklahoma and neighboring areas are concerned about the quality of water in Honey Creek and Cave Springs branches which flow into Grand Lake. Their concern centers around an illegal wastewater release from the Simmons poultry processing plant in Southwest City, Missouri in March, 1996. The plant discharges fewer than 100 yards from the Oklahoma border.

Residents voiced their alarm over degrading water quality at several public meetings sponsored by the Concerned Citizens for Green Country

Conservation, Inc., (CCGCC). CCGCC has been very active and outspoken, drawing crowds of up to two hundred at their meetings.

CCGG requested well testing along Honey Creek and Cave Springs branches for signs of contamination. In early September, DEQ inspected and sampled nearly 60 wells within a half mile on either side of Honey Creek or Cave Springs Branch up to the Oklahoma-Missouri border. Because prior private wells are not regulated, DEQ had no record of water quality for comparison. Samples were analyzed for total coliform, fecal coliform, fecal streptococcus, nitrates, and arsenic.

Results demonstrated a "higher than normal occurrence of coliform...in the locations tested." However, twenty-eight of the thirty positive tests were attributed to improper well construction or, for springs, poor filtration and disinfection systems. Five wells tested positive for fecal coliform, indicating contamination from animal or human waste material. DEQ recommended those citizens seek an alternate water supply until the condition could be corrected.

Citizens were also troubled by the lack of notification of the spill event. Officials explained in their prepared statements that the state is not required to notify citizens in such an event. The law only requires permittees to notify the state, which in this case was Missouri. DEQ has stated that they are committed to develop methods to disseminate this kind of information. "In the future news releases will be prepared through the Department's Public Information and Education Division and provided to the news media that services the area where the incident occurs." ♦

Patented Process Utilizes Bacteria to Remove Nitrates



Finding a cost-effective way to remove nitrates from small rural water systems – systems often plagued with high concentrations of nitrates – has long been a problem.

John Copeland, Greg Mann, and Bob Barcel, partners in a start-up firm called Nitrate Removal Technologies, LLC., believe they have a solution for hundreds of small communities across the U.S. where nitrate contamination threatens the safety of drinking water. Using technology that was licensed by the University of Colorado in Boulder, the

company will soon offer a solution for the little communities that need it most.

After four-and-a-half years of research and development, which included testing at a demonstration plant, the company is just reaching the pre-marketing stage, said Copeland. It is now embarking on its first community-based project in a small farming community outside of Denver. The test will generate cost-efficiency and reliability data required by permitting authorities before the system can be sold.



The technology was developed by JoAnn Silverstein, a professor of civil, environmental, and architectural engineering at the University of Colorado. The university will hold nearly all of the patents once they are approved and expect to reap profits from the licensing agreement.

The process Silverstein developed uses non-pathogenic bacteria which inhale nitrates and exhale inert carbon dioxide and nitrogen gases. The bacteria feed off food-grade vinegar, which is added to the water before it enters the treatment reactor. Once the bacteria consume the nitrates and vinegar, the water is pumped through filters to remove the bacteria. Most of the waste by-products can be safely flushed into any municipal sewer system.



Currently most water systems solve their nitrate problems by blending water from another supplier, or by providing bottled water to their customers at risk. The community based project is designed to handle a maximum of 40 gallons/minute, or 60,000 gallons of water a day.

Copeland said the first six commercial projects will be a slightly higher scale, but will probably stay within a 250,000 gallon/day limit. In regards to cost, Copeland notes “the least expensive unit we anticipate producing will cost about \$60,000.” ♦

-adapted from *U.S. Water News*,
Jan. 1996, Vol. 14 (1)

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Best Management Practices for Wheat

*A Guide to Profitable and
Environmentally Sound Production*

This 119 page guide, produced jointly by the National Wheat Growers Foundation and the Cooperative Extension System is targeted towards wheat growers who are interested in learning about and employing Best Management Practices (BMPs).

The foreword notes that the authors of the book “have organized the information in a way that made sense to producers.”

The book is divided into two sections. The first part of the book is devoted to outlining the basic principles of soil erosion and water quality protection. Practical applications of these techniques are highlighted in part two, which is filled with brief case studies from farms around the country.

To obtain your own copy contact:

NAWG Foundation
415 Second Street, N.E., Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20002-4993
(202) 547-7800

Cost for the manual is \$5.00 plus \$2.62 for postage and handling.

To check out this book from our Resource Collection, please contact Hannah Barbara Fulton at (405) 744-5653. ♦

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