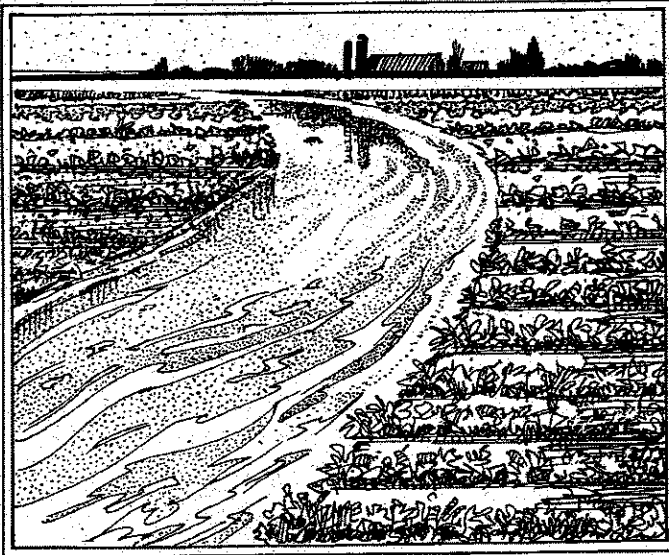


KANSAS PITCHING A FIT / DEMANDS ARE EXCESSIVE, UNREASONABLE

Back in December, the new Kansas water czar, by letter, notified our state DNR that they, Kansas, are effectively seeking to impose the death penalty on Nebraska Republican River Basin (RRB) communities. So much for the good neighbor policy.



Kansas is demanding the “shutdown of wells and groundwater irrigation in Nebraska within 2 1/2 miles of the Republican River and its tributaries, and shutdown of groundwater irrigation of acreage added after the year 2000 throughout the RRB in Nebraska.”

This amounts to about 515,000 irrigated acres being shut down. It seems that the new Kansas water czar and new Kansas attorney general are really feeling their oats. They must like their new jobs and new authority. They have laid out a timeline for their demands to be met on a “fast track” schedule. If their demands are not met by the end of 2008, Kansas will go back to the US Supreme Court. Sounds like a good old fashioned ransom demand, doesn't it? Are we going to act like a hostage in this melodrama? The answers to these questions lie in the hearts, minds and backbones of our governor and attorney general.

In a February 4, 2008 response to Kansas' demands, Nebraska DNR Director Ann Bleed rebutted much of Kansas' allegations and analyses. She says that, “Kansas' proposed remedy far exceeds what is necessary for compact compliance.” Now we need our governor and attorney general to support Director Bleed's position and stand firm in defense of Nebraska RRB communities against the shrill demands of Kansas.

It seems that the only way we can get in compliance is if Kansas says we are in compliance, because shutting down groundwater irrigation will in fact not achieve compliance, but it would likely give Kansas the “pounds of Nebraska flesh” it so desperately wants as a trophy of this fight. The irrefutable facts confirmed over the years by both state and federal government agencies are that groundwater irrigation impacts streamflow only marginally compared to the massive depletions to river flow cause first and foremost by conservation measures (terracing, e.g.) and next by riparian vegetation.

RRB natural resources districts have responded admirably in these tough times. They have developed integrated management plans and imposed pumping allocations. RRB groundwater irrigators have stepped up and actually pumped less water than their allocations allow. LB 701 (2007) resulted in a substantial new tax burden on RRB irrigators and landowners. Kansas' shameless use of the media to flaunt its pseudo machismo in such a serious matter affecting the livelihoods of thousands of hardworking Nebraskans and the economic viability of our RRB communities and schools is a travesty.

The Republican River valley belongs to the farmers and ranchers there who continue the heritage and stewardship of their forefathers who battled drought, floods and the winds of storm and winter to build a true American way of life based on hard work. This, in turn, produces food and dollars that sustain their local communities. Our government must not expect them to surrender all of this.

