

The Ditch Writer

Issue IV

Spring 2006

Highlights of "05"

"2005"

Irrigation season:

- Over 45,107 acre feet of water was used on farm.
- At shutoff, the reservoir had around 11,000 acre feet of water, as compared to last year when we were at 22,627.
- As of September 26 the dam was at 6.28%.
- Just under 50 percent of the water used was delivered in July.
- Over 35 percent of the water used was in August.
- On the bright side we still had over 357 million gallons of water left at shut-off.
- 3 acre-feet of water is about 1 million gallons.
- Hay prices are good.
- Cow prices are good.
- Life is still better out here than if we had to live in New York City.
- And last but not least no matter how dry it gets it is still better than a hurricane...

A friend here on the project pulled me aside a while back and told me, "I've never seen two irrigation seasons the same and I have been here a long time." Boy is that the truth, we finally dried up enough to turn the water on the 27th of June, and by the 4th of July everyone was so dry we couldn't get the water there quick enough.

Let's put the past be behind us and hope that next year is an easier year. This year wasn't as bad as it sounds though. The water season did start pretty tough, but it leveled out pretty well by August.

Looking on the bright side, the ditch riders didn't have to get started until the end of June, and some years they have had to start as early as April. Most people that I have talked to had a fairly normal year of production, it just took a little longer to get it. You really only had to irrigate hay twice and that tickled me because irrigating is hard work. The cow prices have stayed pretty good and for those of us with livestock that has been a very good thing.

The same friend that I mentioned at the start of this story gave me another valuable piece of advice. He said, "this country will make you pray for rain, beg for dryer weather, wish for warmer weather and hope for it to cool off a little. But, after all is said and done, I like where I live and I'll do just about anything to stay right here."

Current Staff... Well another water-run has come and gone and here are the great guys and gals that made it happen.

Office Staff:

Clint Pitts *Project Manager*
 Charlotte Bethea *Treasurer*
 Sherry Morovits *Secretary*
 Dick Keil *General Foreman*
 Bill Anderson *Watermaster*

Ditch Riders:

Les Justice Ride 1
 Doug Eichler Ride 2
 Sandy Olson Ride 4
 Leroy Kindler Ride 5
 Gary Donahey Ride 6
 Steve Timm Ride 7
 Shane Mailloux Ride 8
 Jerry Knutson Ride 10

Operators:

Darin Schuelke
 Gary Sprague
 Jim Mickelson Jr.

Mechanic:

Gary Timm

Sprayer/ GPS:

George Gerig
 Rex Wulf

Current Directors

In October, three directorships were up for re-election. Harlan Palo—District 5 Darrel Cox—District 6 Steve Gatzke—District 7.

New directors take office the last Tuesday of November. Each director takes an oath of office when they assume their duties.

The board is comprised of seven Directors each with a three year term. Districts 3 and 4 (John Heisler and Robert Ruff) will expire in 2006.

This year the turnout for Districts 5 and 6 were pretty good. In District

5 (Milberg) 59 out of 82 possible, voted. In District 6 (Empire) 39 of 55 possible, voted. In District 7 (Newell) Steve Gatzke ran unopposed.

In Districts 5 and 6 the incumbents were re-elected.

Current Directors are:

District 1: Dave Rathbun

District 2: Dwight Kitzan

District 3: John Heisler

District 4: Robert Ruff

District 5: Harlan Palo

District 6: Darrel Cox

District 7: Steve Gatzke

Here is an

interesting fact:

450 gallons per

minute equals

about 1 cubic foot

per second or 2

acre feet in a 24

hour period.

New District Equipment

This year brought some different equipment to the district. The first outfits were a 1993 GMC Sonoma and a 1994 Dodge Dakota. The Dodge is being used as the Foreman vehicle and the Sonoma went to be a ditch rider pick-up.

The next rig acquired was a tandem dual dump-truck from the Butte County Highway Department. It is a 1982 Ford

with fairly low miles for its age.

As the year proceeded another ditch rider pick-up went down and was pulled to the side to be used for parts. We still were able to finish the water run with the pickups we had but we knew that come fall we would need to do some more replacing.

During the month of November a trip was made to the federal surplus to finish

catching up on replacements and updating. From that stop we obtained a 1991 4-wheel drive half ton pickup, that will be used by the water master. A 1994 half ton pick-up that will be used by a ditch rider. And last but not least a 1989 Dodge service truck with a utility box. Hopefully, this will catch us up for a little while.

Staff changes

2005 added some more changes to the BFID, we ended up having two new ditch-riders. Shane Mailloux on ride 8 and Sandy Olson on ride 4. Leroy Kindler moved from ride 4 to ride 5. We also said good-bye to Jerry Knutson on ride 10 and will try to find a replacement by spring of '06'. Rex Wulf started in late spring as a sprayer and mower and then finished the water-run for Jerry on ride 10 for the last couple weeks of the water-run.

The new year is just around the bend and will probably bring more changes but we'll cross that bridge when we get to it.

2005 Assessments

The budget for 2006 income is to raise the annual assessments. The assessment for 2006 will regrettably have to be raised 65 cents across the board. I don't see this having a huge impact on anyone but it is an additional burden to bear when it seems that everything else is going up in leaps and bounds. This assessment increase will basically be 65 dollars for every 100 irrigated acres.

was as tough to decide on as ever. With the highly fluctuating prices on such things as fuel, plastic pipe, and steel it is really hard to guess exactly where to set the dollar amounts. One thing that was a given, was that the budget was going to be more for 2006 than 2005 for less return. This raises the issue of needing more money and the only way for the District to gain

FOR THOSE WHO DIDN'T GET CAUGHT

Water Theft ~ Water Theft will be looked at very seriously and tampering with any delivery or measuring devices is considered theft. Consequences could include law enforcement for additional support.

1st Offense ~ Immediate shutoff of water, locking of head gate, and continue to be charged for 3 days and \$ 150.00 fine to remove the lock from the head gate.

2nd Offence ~ Immediate shut off for remainder of season.

Water Turn On & Turn Off Requirements~ Water orders to the ditch rider are required at least 48 hours in advance of delivery and up to 72 hours may be required under some circumstances. The irrigator must notify the ditch rider 24 hours in advance of shut off. If water is shut off without notification, the landowner will be charged for a 24-hour period.

Land Inclusion

One such policy change came from

the Bureau of Reclamation. Prior to this year, anyone who wanted to have land either included or excluded would fill out their petition and the Board of Directors would discuss it, but it was finalized by the Bureau of Reclamation. Now the Bureau has given back the responsibility to the District's Board of Directors. The following policy is in regards to land inclusion of unclassified ground and Class 6. (1) All Class 6 & unclassified ground will be brought in as Class 1 U until it gets reclassified. If the land owner has it reclassified and it classifies as Class 6 there are 2 options: (1) Pay class 1U assessment or (2) take the land out. An agreement will be signed stating that the landowner agrees to pay the Class 1 U price. There is also an administrative fee. The minimum fee is \$ 250.00 (small acreage) up to the current O & M price which is \$ 15.58 (Example – 100 acres X 15.58 = 1558.00) and finally (3) when the

District reaches capacity (57,183) and you want to bring land in, you must find someone who wants to take land out.

High ground pumping ~ All responsibility from the District ends at the canal level. The District will provide a delivery point at the landowners cost. In the case of the lateral or canal running at capacity, the high ground landowner will assume secondary priority to the lands below the ditch.

Right-of-ways ~ Landowners shall not obstruct right of ways so that the ditch rider has access to all ditches and features. O & M roads are not public roads and any unauthorized persons using these roads travel them at their own risk.

Special Use Permit ~ Every time a shovel full of dirt is turned a NEPA process through the Bureau of Reclamation is required. This process takes upward of 90+ days.

RRA UPDATES

Belle Fourche Irrigation tried a new means of gathering RRA forms in 2005. Appointments were made with farmers and RRA forms were filled out on the internet or sent home at the time of the appointment. This has worked so well that the District plans on doing the same thing in 2006. Appointment letters will be sent starting in February. Please call or stop in if your appointment time is not convenient.

Some of the criteria for RRA forms is: Individual farmers must own or lease (written only) 240 or more irrigated acres. If your irrigated acres are in a Trust or Estate and the Trust or Estate owns 40 or more irrigated acres we must have an RRA form. Rapid City Field Office of the Bureau of Reclamation will no longer conduct audits of RRA forms. Our audit will now be held by the Regional Bureau Office in

Billings. We cannot stress enough the importance of correct and thorough completion of your forms. Stiff fines can be levied on the District if any violation of RRA rules and regulations are found. Another important thing to remember is : No water will be delivered until the RRA Form requirements have been completed.

AUTOMATED CHECKING...

It's not just for banks, anymore

As told by
Bill Anderson, Watermaster

Maintaining a consistent water level in the canal is essential for steady, reliable deliveries. Obviously low water levels will short the farmer, but this can also result in the ditch rider over-adjusting the check to recover head pressure, eventuating in downstream shortages that tend to escalate. When the canal is too high, seepage increases significantly but the added head pressure increases flow at the turnouts which will, again, short the downstream users.

While manual check adjustment can be difficult and time consuming at best, perfection would require 24-hr. manipulation. This is

only possible with mechanization of all checks. Presently we have automated 16 checks at strategic locations that should improve efficiency immensely.

During the water run, the Water master's first chore of the day is to measure flow at the canal flumes. The problem is that you don't know if the water is increasing or decreasing or does it change the moment you drive away. This will be overcome by use of 9 real-time flow monitors that can be observed remotely many times a day, enabling problems to be identified more promptly. Time is an important

factor as the problems escalate while the remedy can literally take days to effect.

These and other even more high tech devices will improve service even with the increasing demands and complications in our industry.

Belle Fourche Irrigation District

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EVER HEARD OF SALT CEDAR?

2005 Proposed Belle Fourche Weed Management Area Group Efforts

In our part of the country, water is a precious commodity. Landowners and managers are in a constant struggle against weather that's often too dry, too hot, too cold or too windy...rarely is it too wet. Another threat to land managers is that of noxious weeds that can quickly invade and diminish a land's yield capacity. Both noxious weeds and drought can reduce productivity of land, while increasing input costs. Salt cedar—a weed that has commanded attention—provides a double-whammy in that it severely depletes lands' capacity by increasing soil salinity, while using any available

sub-soil moisture.

The formation of an alliance of public agencies and private landowners was the first step in reducing the threat in the Belle Fourche Watershed. The proposed Belle Fourche Weed Management Area (BFWMA) was organized in late 2004 to increase public awareness and to begin addressing the Salt cedar concern known to exist in the region. The first formal actions of the group were two organized spray days at the Belle Fourche and Keyhole Reservoirs. Approximately 90 acres of Salt cedar was treated at those reservoirs under a combined public and private partnership. Other efforts have included educational talks and an information booth at the Belle Fourche Tri-State Expo.

Future plans of the BFWMA include more public informational meetings, a public Salt cedar tour, and continued mapping and spraying of Salt cedar and other noxious weeds within the Belle Fourche watershed. Anyone interested in attending a Salt cedar tour next Spring can contact either Crook County Weed & Pest Supervisor Dick Sackett at 1-307-283-2375 or Belle Fourche Irrigation District Manager Clint Pitts at 1-605-456-2541. The BFWMA participants would also like to encourage all owners or operators to inspect their stock dams for Salt cedar. Please contact your county weed & pest supervisor if you think you might have Salt cedar on your lands.