

Statement of Dennis Breitzman
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Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
On Water Problems on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation

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My name is Dennis Breitzman and I am the Bureau of Reclamation's Area Manager for the Dakotas Area Office in Bismarck, North Dakota. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the recent water supply problems on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Reclamation has worked with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe on water supply projects for almost 20 years following the passage of the Garrison Diversion Unit Reformulation Act of 1986, as amended by the Dakota Water Resources Act of 2000 (DWRA). Under these authorities, we have worked with the Tribe on the development and operation of a rural water system to distribute drinking water to a design population of 16,500 residents throughout the Reservation. The Tribe has prepared a Final Engineering Report which presents the Tribe's plan for completing construction of the reservation-wide system (we note that this is the Tribe's plan, and has not been reviewed for compliance with standards applied to federal projects). We have also been helping the Tribe construct a water supply system to deliver Missouri River water for the irrigation of 2380 acres of crop land per section 5 of DWRA. These water projects are being designed, constructed, operated and maintained by the Tribe through Indian Self-Determination Act (P.L. 93-638) contracts with Reclamation.

Reclamation's participation over the past year on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation focuses on water supply intakes from the Missouri River. These include the Fort Yates intake, Wakpala intake, and the Cannonball irrigation intake. The Fort Yates and Cannonball intakes are located on the Missouri River at the upper end of Lake Oahe. The Wakpala intake is located in Lake Oahe near the mouth of the Grand River.

The Fort Yates raw water intake is an integral part of the Standing Rock rural water system. The intake transmits river water to the water treatment plant located in the community of Fort Yates. The intake provides the primary source of drinking water for a population of over 3400, including the communities of Fort Yates, Cannonball and Porcupine, as well as the Prairie Knights Casino and Lodge.

The Fort Yates intake failed on November 24, 2003 due to low water conditions and shifting river sediment. (Normally the intake is in a reservoir with 30-40 feet of water above it, but due to the drought in the Missouri River watershed, the intake is now in a river channel in the delta formed at the upper end of Lake Oahe). Without a water supply, the Tribe closed schools, hospitals, and tribal offices. The water supply was restored by the afternoon of November 26, 2003 by using temporary pumps and above ground piping assembled across the mud flats of the river channel. In consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, a precautionary "boil water" advisory was issued and remained in effect until December 2, 2003. This allowed for water quality sampling and flushing of the distribution system. Reclamation secured supplemental operation and maintenance funding from within the agency to cover the immediate costs of restoring the water supply.

In December of 2003, work focused on making the temporary pump system more reliable during the freezing weather conditions. This included construction of an access road and installation of a pipeline below the frost line. We appreciate the assistance we received from the Army Corps of Engineers through coordinated releases and operation of the reservoir to manage water levels and reduce ice formation during intake construction activities. By March 2004, a new interim intake sump structure and submersible pump assembly was operational.

Concerned about the continuously changing river conditions, the Tribe requested that Reclamation prepare backup water supply plans. Reclamation is working with the Standing Rock rural water office on finalizing emergency response plans to address potential problems caused by low water levels and provide a continuous water supply to the Standing Rock rural water system. If the intake fails, or the river channel shifts, and the water supply were cut off, a backup portable pumping plan has been developed. A recent field exercise demonstrated that capabilities now exist to restore water supply to the treatment plant in nine hours before all system storage is fully depleted. This emergency response plan should avoid future water service interruptions.

Reclamation and the Tribe are planning to construct a ground water well to provide a back-up water supply that will be independent of changing river conditions due to continuing drought. This groundwater source would only serve as an emergency back-up water supply because of poor water quality and inadequate quantity to meet long-term water needs. This back-up water source could be completed before the end, of the calendar year.

The Wakpala intake on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation also has been affected by the low water levels in Lake Oahe. The Wakpala intake provides water for a population of about 1600, including the community of Wakpala and the Grand River Casino. The Lake Oahe water forecast for the spring of 2004 indicated the Wakpala intake would likely become inoperable in the summer of 2004. The intake screen was lowered as a short term solution and the Tribe thus was able to maintain a water supply throughout the summer. Concerned about continuing reservoir decline, the Tribe secured funding through USDA Rural Development, Indian Health Service, and Reclamation to construct a replacement intake that will be approximately 9 feet lower than the existing intake. This new intake should be completed this fall. To address potential intake problems in the event of long-term low water conditions for both the Fort Yates and Wakpala service areas, Reclamation and the Tribe are conducting additional investigations for a horizontal well system near Fort Yates.

The Cannonball intake, constructed to provide a water supply to irrigate approximately 800 acres of cropland near the community of Cannonball, has also been impacted by the low water levels in the Missouri River. This area is upstream of Fort Yates. The receding water levels in Lake Oahe left this intake high and dry during the 2004 irrigation season. The Tribe used project funds to install a portable pump to provide a temporary water supply during this period.

This concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.