

## NATIONAL WATER RESOURCES ASSOCIATION

### 86<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE, November 15-17, 2016, Tucson, AZ

The 86th Annual National Water Resources Association Conference was held in Tucson, AZ on November 14-17, 2017. Representatives present from Nebraska included Don Kraus, Tom Knutson, Jasper Fanning and Lyndon Vogt. The total registration for the conference was approximately 300.

The NWRA Board of Directors met on November 14, with Don, Lyndon, Jasper and Tom all having seats on the Board. Actions included adoption of a final budget for 2018 and a tentative budget for 2019 (dues remained the same for 2018); election of Officers (Ron Thompson, President; Cheryl Zittle, Vice President; and Tom Myrum, Treasurer) for an additional term; approval of an audit policy (full audit every two years (board members) with an external auditor retained every six years) and approval of a minor Bylaw amendment. The next meetings of the National Water Resources Association will be a Leadership Forum on January 4-5, 2018 in Las Vegas (to set priorities and agenda for 2018) and the Federal Water Issues Conference in Washington DC on April 9-11, 2018.

**Caucuses** - Each of the Caucuses met in business meetings, including Groundwater, Municipal, Irrigation, and Professional Services.

Fanning and Vogt attended the Groundwater Caucus, where there was discussion involving numerous court cases concerning groundwater, state primacy on groundwater regulation, GW conservation measures, storage vs recharge, drought planning, and water supply. California and Idaho also explained their concerns and challenges with managing groundwater on tribal lands.

Kraus and Knutson attended the Irrigation caucus where there was discussion on issues affecting irrigation districts across the west. One example is the conflict with historical preservation laws and maintenance of diversion structures.

#### **Wednesday, Nov. 15**

**Attracting the Next Generation of Water Professionals** moderated by Jennifer Persike, Deputy Executive Director of external Affairs, Association of California Water Agencies. She stated that one out of three persons in irrigation districts will be leaving in the next few years.

**Kathy Tieg**s, Board Member of Cucamonga Valley Water District (CVWD) and President of the Association of California Water Agencies. She described the goal of CVWD is to create a pipeline of talent. New employees spend 1.5 days with human resources for orientation prior to beginning work.

**Chris Udall**, Executive Director of the Agribusiness and Water Council of Arizona, discussed the Water Management Certificate Program that has been implemented in Arizona. The process began in 2008 with the first class in 2013. The faculty consists of over 40 non-University practitioners in Arizona. Students meet 1.5 days/month for nine months.

**Brad Coffey**, Assistant Group Manager of the Water System Operations Group with Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD), discussed the efforts that MWD makes to provide employees for the future. They use a Cooperative Education Program for college students to work as interns. One example is to assist with set up of computer programs for staff as a way to help recruit future IT professionals. They have difficulty recruiting mechanics or electricians and with a four-year apprentice program, 40% of new mechanic hires are recruited through the program.

**Tom Knutson**, Consultant HDR Engineering, discussed the Water Leaders Academy in Nebraska. The program has been in place for seven years and has provided training for 102 students. Meetings are held in different areas of the state with experts from the industry as faculty.

## **Water Infrastructure and the Economy.**

**Jeremy Aguero**, Principal of Applied Analysis. His topic was the economics of water.

He discussed the migration of people to the Southwest sector of the United States. Concerns were expressed about the price of water. Over a million people rely on the Colorado River Basin for water. From 2000 to 2015, water flows in the Colorado River Basin were the lowest in the last century. In addition, there has been a 7% decline in the Colorado River flows in the last 30 years. No single sector can provide the solution for sustainability. He stated that quality of life is higher in the Southwest and growth will continue. In addition, the infrastructure needs to be addressed. There are over 240,000 water main breaks each year in the US. Over one trillion dollars is needed to maintain and expand service over the next 25 years. By 2060, there is expected to be a 3.8 million acre feet deficit in the Colorado River flows. As price goes up, use will go down. He was optimistic that they will be able to meet water needs.

**Lobbying Effectively** - The Honorable Doc Hastings, former Chairman of the U. S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources provided insights on how to lobby effectively.

He indicated that a congressman will usually consider two issues when listening to a proposal from a constituent:

1. What is best for his district
2. How does the proposal fit with his political philosophy.

The lobbying approach should consider how familiar the congressman is with the issue:

If familiar with the issue, the discussion can get into more details. If the congressman is not familiar with the issue, discussion should focus on highlights – 2 or 3 big points.

Other points made by Congressman Hastings:

- Need to keep in touch with staff
- How much time is available – typically 15 minutes
- Know the points to make and reduce the socializing time
- Schedule meeting in the District if more time is needed
- If there is a private meeting with the congressman, follow up with a memo or call to staff
- Emphasize the positive, but if asked, acknowledge negatives
- If dealing with an agency and not having results, write a letter and copy the congressman

#### **Thursday, Nov. 16**

**Keynote Speaker Alan Mikkelsen** - Acting Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Mr. Mikkelsen discussed the 129 day delay in the appointment of Commissioner nominee Brenda Burman. The usual delay is 30 days (Commissioner Burman was confirmed the next day). He stated that one goal from Commissioner Nominee Burman is to organize the USBR to be close to constituents.

Priorities:

Improved Infrastructure – USBR has not been invited to be at the table as infrastructure funding has been discussed. The COE has been invited to discuss. Need to determine how to finance – USBR supports public/private partnerships. California has tremendous ability to pay for new infrastructure.

Storage/Conservation – Feasibility studies underway on major projects in California – focus on storage. Invasive mussels are a concern. If they occur in the Columbia Basin, the cost could be \$500M/year.

Environmental Compliance Process – Some EIS processes will take 6-9 years.

Columbia River Basin – Drought still exists with Lake Meade 10 to 15' above mandatory restriction levels.

Indian Water Right Settlements – Currently working on 35 agreements.

#### **Federal Affairs**

At the Federal Affairs session Chairperson Christine Arbogast discussed the priorities for the administration. Currently, the tax reform bill dominates discussion and NRWA activities will be focused on minimizing any impacts to its membership. NWRA supports keeping municipal

bonds tax exempt. In addition, NWRA is working to make water conservation rebates tax exempt. Other priorities:

- Support Water Transfer Rule and working with Western Governors Association
- Forest Health – Waterman bill is controversial. Trying to get forest health up to consideration with earthquakes and floods.
- Infrastructure – Delayed due to tax reform bill. With unemployment rate low, harder to get through congress.

**Breakout Sessions:**

**Irrigation Caucus:** Participants discussed operation and maintenance issues and problems with the Reclamation Reform Act. One district was having problems with the USBR regarding maintenance of a diversion structure and also having problems with the Historical Preservation Office regarding maintenance of older structures.

**Awards Luncheon –** The following awards were given:

John Sayre Leadership Awards	Ivan Flint, Utah
	Norm Semanko, Idaho
John Sullivan, Thomas Choules	
Water Policy Award	Steve Hernandez
Distinguished Service Awards	Ernie Schank, Nevada
	Carly Burton, Utah
	Chris Udall, Arizona
	Elston Grubaugh, Arizona
Nominated for	
Lifetime Achievement Award	Dale Swenson, Idaho
James Trull Award	A. J. Olson
James Trull Award	Barbara Hjelle

**Education and Training Sessions**

Media Training – The session focused on how to handle an interview with local media. If staff is approached by media, refer them to an appointed person in the District. If you are doing the interview, understand the issue the reporter is discussing. Relax, smile

and be animated. Anticipate tough questions. Answer the question asked and do not volunteer additional information.

## **Inside Washington**

The Honorable Doc Hastings, Bob Szabo (partner with Van Ness Feldman), Allen Freemyer (Persident Freemyer and Associates, P.C.) and Michael Conner (Former Deputy Secretary of the Interior; Partner Wilmer Hale)

Obama Care – Repeal did not pass. Focus on select issues – Individual Mandate ??.

Infrastructure – Generally did not believe there would be an infrastructure package if tax reform adds significantly to national debt.

Ag Policy – Farmers are losing clout. Ag workers are at 3% of population. Not getting the respect they deserve. Doc Hastings thought Trump made a mistake on the TPP.

## **Friday Morning Nov. 17**

### **NWRA Board Meeting**

The revised strategic plan was approved. Members were asked to name their priority issues. Infrastructure financing and improvement to conferences were named a number of times.

### **Western Water Roundtable**

#### **Moderator Ian Lyle, Executive Vice President, NWRA**

##### **CE Williams, President Groundwater Management Districts Association**

GMDA began in 1975 and on the first board of directors were Frank Dragoun and Mel Nofke from Nebraska. There is no paid staff in GMDA. GMDA is considering working with NWRA on possible representation in Washington DC.

##### **Ward Scott, Western Governors Association**

Prorities are:

Western Resource Management with the following issues: State Authority, infrastructure, adequate data on stream flow and aquifer levels and water quality.

Stronger State - Federal Relationship: WOTUS rulemaking, EPA Water Transfer Rule, USACE proposed Water Supply rulemaking, USFS proposed Groundwater Directive, USFS proposed Ski Area Water Rights Directive

##### **Dan Kappen – Executive Director of Family Farm Alliance**

The original goal of FFA is to put people affected by federal decisions in touch with those making the decisions to protect and enhance water supply for the seventeen

western states. Issues discussed include: modernize ESA, Colorado River issues, Westwide water supply, administrative rulemaking, streamline title transfer, water supply enhancement, National Historic Preservation Act and Klamath issues.

**Steve Bigley, President of Western Coalition of Arid States – WESTCAS**

WESTCAS advocates for sustainable water quality and quantity in the arid states. The most recent issue is participation in litigation related to chromium 6 in waste water drainage issues.

**USACE FORUM**

**John Crotty, Advisor to NWRA**

John discussed the ongoing activities related to rescinding the WOTUS rule and providing comments on a new WOTUS rule. NWRA will be sending out draft comments within a week for membership comment.

**Bob Szabo, Partner Van Ness Feldman**

Bob discussed potential reform to the COE rules. The goal will be to finalize comments prior to the proposed WRDA bill in the first quarter of 2018 (late February or March). He encouraged NWRA to participate.

By Don Kraus, Tom Knutson, Lyndon Vogt and Jasper Fanning