

MANAGING AN IRRIGATION DISTRICT

William J. Saad

Treasurer-Manager

Elephant Butte Irrigation District

I would like to thank Dr. Bahr for saving the Elephant Butte Irrigation District for the last presentation of the morning. It is understandable to save the best for last and I am only cooperating with his wishes. We are the largest, most prosperous and successful irrigation district in New Mexico and West Texas. We have the greatest agricultural yields and profits in the state. We are the stronghold of agriculture. The green belt that runs south of Elephant Butte Dam to the Texas state line is proof of our successes and accomplishments.

INTRODUCTION

The Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) is a quasi-municipal corporation organized in August 1917. The EBID has succeeded to all the rights, powers, privileges, liabilities and assets of the Elephant Butte Water Users' Association. That association was the corporation that made the original contract for the construction of the Rio Grande Project under the U.S. Reclamation Law.

An irrigation district is a public corporation, functioning for the purpose of public improvements rather

than for governmental purposes. It is organized under a state law and is, therefore, a political sub-division of the state and possesses most of the powers and privileges of county or city governments. The powers and duties of its officers and directors are strictly defined by statute.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RECLAMATION SERVICE
AND THE DISTRICT

The U.S. Reclamation Service now has complete control of the storage, drainage and distributing system of this district with title to all canals, rights-of-way, structures, reservoirs, etc., vested in the United States and held for the benefit of the water users and land owners of the district. The United States is proceeding with the construction and completion of such drainage and irrigation works under contract with the EBID. The contract calls for the expenditure of \$6,530,000, of which nearly \$5,000,000 has been spent. The U.S. Reclamation Service also is operating and maintaining the works under annual water rental contracts.

The chief function of the district in the past (as a Water Users' Association) has been, and in the future will be, representing the landowners as a legal entity in negotiating with the United States. A second function now growing rapidly in importance is the levy and assessment of administration, operation, maintenance and construction

charges. Ultimately, of course, the district will take over the control, operation and maintenance of the completed works.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ELEPHANT BUTTE IRRIGATION DISTRICT

The EBID is part of the Rio Grande Project, which is responsible for the surface waters of the Rio Grande, commencing 4 miles south of Caballo Dam and diverted by the three major diversion dams within the boundaries of the EBID. The actual size in the district is 133,000 acres but federal law currently allows the EBID to irrigate from surface water rights, 90,640 acres. The district has 90,639.48 acres on the tax rolls. Our tax assessor has already guaranteed us that we will have 90,640 acres next year. We now have a waiting list for 700 acres from people wanting to receive EBID irrigation water. However, we are at our maximum acreage. When we receive suspensions, we resolve the names on a first come, first serve basis.

The philosophy of the district and its elected officials is to encourage agriculture and its benefits in our community. We do not insist on immediate urbanization but rather on a planned progressive movement to balance the urban/rural need of the constituents. The agriculture demand for irrigation water is apparent from the long list of those waiting to get into agriculture. The profitability of our farm products also speaks for the

success of agriculture. For example, in 1985 the yields and the per acre revenue for the EBID were \$1,403 per acre compared with \$700 for the El Paso County Water Improvement District and \$588 for the Hudspeth County Water Resources District.

STRUCTURE OF ELEPHANT BUTTE IRRIGATION DISTRICT

We service 328 miles of laterals and canals and more than 200 miles of drains. To accomplish the tasks of servicing the farming community in the EBID, we employ from 96 to 106 people at the peak time of irrigation. During the 33-week irrigation season we are on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week in 11 geographic areas. In addition, our dispatchers work alongside our operations personnel, receiving orders, contacting ditch riders and logging others into the computer.

During the irrigation season, the accumulated water orders are placed with the Bureau of Reclamation. The farmer is then alerted to the time the water will be ready and when and where to expect the ditch rider. He will also be told the amount of water he is to receive, the beginning and ending delivery times, and the amount of water used. Monthly during the season, the EBID furnishes the farmer with a bank statement. The statement shows his beginning allotment, amount used, ending balance, and the year-to-date data by crop and water usage. Disputed charges are metered

and upon request, any farmer can receive an individual or permanent metering request. Our contact with the farming community and our ability to deliver services satisfactorily has led to a minimum of metering requests.

At the completion of the irrigation season (or upon request), a constituent can receive a complete owners' history, giving him the entire water season at a glance. The computerized history tells the farmer the day and time he placed the order, how much he received, when he received the order and when delivery was complete. This computer program answers any questions concerning services.

The cost to the farming community is based on a formula that has been followed successfully in the past. In a full allotment year, the taxpayer is billed a fixed amount per acre for the first two acre-feet of water. After that amount is consumed, the constituent can purchase an additional amount at an additional charge per acre-foot. For example, the 1987 irrigation season will provide the farmer with 2 acre-feet at \$25; an additional 2 acre-feet for \$5 each, or \$10; or 4 acre-feet for \$35. The total cost runs \$8.75 per acre-foot. The EBID has been able to hold the basic \$25 rate since 1982.

Annual reports were a regular occurrence at the district in previous years. The reporting process was stopped in the 70s but was re-initiated in 1979 when the

District took over operations and maintenance responsibility from the Bureau of Reclamation.

In an annual report to the farmers the following was presented:

- the best water supply in America.
- the best climate in the Southwest.
- the best soil in the Southwest.
- the most successfully drained lands.
- the lowest water rates in the Southwest.
- the cheapest farm labor in the West.
- the most miles of concrete paving and
graveled roads in the state.
- the best educational facilities in the
Southwest.
- the best railroad facilities in the
Southwest.
- the best markets in the Southwest.
- one of the greatest irrigation, drainage
and storage systems in the world.
- the strongest farm organizations in the
Southwest.

These Facts to Remember were printed in an annual report and are still in existence today. The only interesting facet of these facts is that they occurred in 1920 in the Report to Farmers. At that time it was a dream

and not a reality as it is today. We have grown through this dream into an irrigation district unsurpassed in our area in revenues, profits and overall efficiency.