

WATER IMPORT TO WEST TEXAS AND NEW MEXICO

Bill Clayton^{1/}

One of the most urgent needs in the United States today is an expanded and accelerated program of comprehensive water resource development. This need must be met if we are to meet the pressing problems of the rising population and the growing economy. Here in this area, in Texas, and in New Mexico, we have recognized this need and are already pressing forward hand-in-hand, together with the Bureau of Reclamation, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, and state agencies in an effort to solve our problems.

In this day of almost instant communication and travel in jet planes at speeds that approach that of sound, no longer are arbitrary state lines realistic boundaries for planning and execution of water resource development projects. A good case in point is the Southern High Plains, which, you know, includes part of Western Texas and Eastern New Mexico. This vast expanse of fertile, level land is one of the nation's greatest assets; perhaps one of the greatest assets of the world. It is the largest contiguous area of high productive arable land in the world. Ever since man first tapped the clear, pure water lying beneath this great Southern Plains, the area's economy has flourished. The combination of fertile lands and underground water has resulted in one of the most productive areas in the world. Unfortunately, this vast reservoir of water underlying the Southern High Plains -- the reservoir we know as the Ogallala Aquifer -- is not inexhaustible. As you know, it is replenished only by percolation from the surface and at a rate infinitely lower than the rate of withdrawal. Recognizing this shortcoming, Texans and New Mexicans have united in a plan to provide supplemental water to the area.

The most likely source for this supplemental water in the immediate future -- and by the immediate future I mean within the next fifty years -- appears to be from the Lower Mississippi River. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, Texas and New Mexico are looking into the feasibility of such a major interbasin diversion of water. This joint undertaking is known by various names depending upon one's vantage point. Over in the area of the Lower Mississippi River, the venture is referred to as the Mississippi River Export Plan. In Texas, it's known as the Trans-Texas System of the Texas Water Plan, and here in New Mexico, the Bureau of Reclamation refers to the project as the West Texas-Eastern New Mexico Import Project. The basic question germane to the undertaking, regardless of which name you wish to use, is, "Is there, in fact, surplus water in the Mississippi River?" We cannot unequivocally answer that question today, but we are encouraged by preliminary reports.

Funds were included in the 1967 Public Works Appropriations Act to make it possible for the Bureau of Reclamation to make a preliminary appraisal of the best means of augmenting the natural water supply for the West Texas-Eastern New Mexico area. Early publicity on the Bureau's study stated that the Lower Mississippi River was considered a primary source for this supplemental supply.

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As this publicity reached the Mississippi Valley, a number of responsible leaders there, and here in New Mexico and in Texas, wanted to make sure that the present and future needs of the Valley were properly considered. As a result, through the efforts of Congressman George Mahon and others, resolutions were passed by the Committees on Public Works of the Senate on May 2, 1967, and the House of Representatives on October 19, 1967, directing the Secretary of the Army, acting through the Chief of Engineers and the Mississippi Valley Commission, to participate with concerned federal, state, and local agencies in studies to determine the feasibility for exporting any surplus water in the Mississippi River System to water deficient areas. Particular reference was made to the study by the Department of the Interior to supply water to West Texas and Eastern New Mexico. The keyword in these resolutions is "surplus." Funds were included in the Public Works Appropriations Act in fiscal 1968 to cover the initial requirements of the Corps of Engineers, and additional funds have been made available in subsequent years to continue the study. Although the Mississippi Valley Commission's final report is not due until 1973, early this year Commission officials began to disclose preliminary findings of the group. Fred H. Bayley, III, Assistant Chief of Planning Division, Mississippi River Commission, addressed the West Texas Water Institute in Lubbock on February 5. He made this comment, and I quote:

"Some Preliminary figures have been developed which indicate that there is a surplus above the fifty-year demands in some high-flow months, and that in many months, the flows will not be sufficient to meet the demands of the Mississippi River."

This, of course, is the word we have been waiting for. Simply stated, if the tentative findings stand up, during some months there is surplus water in the Mississippi River, hopefully for export.

In his budget, President Nixon has requested full funding for the continuation of these studies by the Bureau and by the Corps. These studies will, I am confident, continue to completion in 1973.

In Texas, our statewide water resource development program is referred to as the Texas Water Plan. There is one point about the Texas Water Plan that I would like to make clear. The Texas Water Plan was not -- repeating, was not -- defeated in the Constitutional Amendment Election in August, 1969. Voters were not, in fact, voting on the water plan, but on a constitutional amendment that would have provided 3 and one-half billion dollars for the state's cost-share for financing implementation of the water plan. As you will remember, this amendment failed passage by only about 6,000 votes in statewide balloting. The Texas Water Plan, which is flexible enough to adjust to changing demands, is statutory law regarding water resource development in the state. Even now, the Texas Water Development Board is perfecting plans to go ahead on a limited basis, limited only by available funds. Bonds totaling more than 300 million dollars and earmarked for water resource development projects have been authorized by Texas voters, however, an interest rate limitation has stymied efforts to market these bonds in the last three years with one single exception which has the sale of \$15,100,000 sold last month. A critical milestone in the Texas Water Development Program comes on May 18th when Texans will again be asked to amend their constitution. One proposed amendment on the ballot would raise

this interest limitation ceiling, if approved by the voters. I am confident that an informed electorate will see fit to raise this interest limitation, making these bonds available for immediate use. Although implementation of these projects planned with the limited resources do not relate directly to construction of the Trans-Texas System, that portion of the Water Plan which provides the facilities for transporting water into the West Texas-Eastern New Mexico area. They are vital to the overall plan. Included are some reservoir projects in which storage space for water will be acquired by the state, and this water will be earmarked for future sale to users in Northeast Texas and to users who will be served through the Texas Water Plan including those in New Mexico. This is a small, but an extremely significant step toward realization of our joint goal -- supplemental water for West Texas and Eastern New Mexico.

The Corps of Engineers is also studying possible routes for the imported water across Louisiana and to points in Northeast Texas. The Bureau of Reclamation Office at Austin is making the same investigation from those points in Northeast Texas up to the Plains and to Bull Lake Reservoir, located just east of the New Mexico state line. The Bureau of Reclamation Office at Albuquerque concurrently is studying possible supply routes from Bull Lake into Eastern New Mexico and distribution routes in the Plains area of New Mexico. Incidentally, the initial possible supply routes from Bull Lake developed by the Albuquerque Office of the Bureau are shown on the map attached to this paper and will be published in the proceedings of this conference. I hope you will study this map, and I am sure that Mr. Rowland Fife, the Area Engineer in charge of the Bureau's Albuquerque Office, would be most happy to hear your reactions concerning the service areas and tentative supply routes. Needless to say, the New Mexico State Engineer's Office, along with other state agencies and your own water resources institute, are cooperating to the utmost with the federal agencies and other states involved in these studies. As a matter of fact, as we sit back and view the entire project, cooperation is the keyword. It is most gratifying that all petty jealousies have gone out the window and that all of the various state and federal agencies involved are cooperating to the fullest degree possible.

In Texas, our Legislature convenes every two years. We have been in session only since January and already state lawmakers have met the water challenge with virtually no opposition of note. The Texas Legislature passed the constitutional amendment voters will be voting on May 18th. This amendment would make available 100 million dollars through the sale of bonds and to be used as the state's matching share to local governmental entities so they may obtain additional federal funds for construction of waste water treatment facilities. The amendment also would raise the water development bond interest rate from four to six percent making these bonds marketable. This could be the most significant water legislation that will be passed by the Texas Legislature this year. Another significant piece of water legislation, with which I am intimately involved, is the recodification of all the state's water laws. A four-year project of rewording and organizing systematically all of the state's water laws into a state water code has been completed, and the recodification bill has now passed the House of Representatives and is under consideration by the Senate. I might add parenthetically that there is no significant opposition to this legislation either. Over 200 other bills have been

introduced dealing with water resource development or the environment so we have plenty of work ahead of us for the remainder of the Texas Legislative Session.

Here in New Mexico, I am informed that more than 30 separate pieces of proposed legislation dealing with water in one way or another have been introduced during the 30th Legislature. Although I would certainly not present myself as an expert on New Mexico water law nor legislative activities, I think it would be a valid assumption in view of this legislative load, that your elected representatives in state government are facing up to their responsibilities in water law just as we are in Texas.

From an engineering standpoint, this water import program -- believed to be the largest water resource development program ever conceived in the mind of men and carried through the planning stages -- is, I am told, quite feasible. From an economic standpoint, the project can be justified. In the final analysis, our problems boil down to one thing -- people. There is a grassroots organization serving basically West Texas and Eastern New Mexico that is dealing with this "people" problem. I refer, of course, to Water, Inc., an organization that I am most delighted to represent. Water, Inc. is meeting head-on the challenge of the necessity for an informed people. Water, Inc. is the catalyst for public understanding. Its membership totals almost 3,000 and represents the broad spectrum of the West Texas-Eastern New Mexico economic life. Our members are farmers, ranchers, businessmen, educators, financeers -- the whole bit. At the risk of being called a "namedropper," let me list a few New Mexico leaders participating in Water, Inc. activities. First, the President of this great University, Dr. Thomas, was one of the organizers of our organization and has served faithfully as an Advisory Director since that time. Dr. Stucky, one of the most knowledgeable people in New Mexico in the field of water resources development currently serves on our Advisory Board, as does Steve Reynolds, John Shanklin of Albuquerque and Rogers Aston of Roswell. Lloyd Calhoun of Hobbs, whose dedicated service to this conference you know so well, is a member of our Board of Directors. Also serving on the Board are State Representative Hoyt Pattison from Clovis, Marion Foster of Lovington, Bill Bacon of Roswell and Eddie Harrington of Clovis. I could go on with the list, but I think that you get the point. In Water, Inc., your leaders have joined with their counterparts east of the border, and together they speak with one voice, a true voice of unity.

Information passes both ways through Water, Inc. First it is a vital instrument for informing the people, not only of the area, but the entire region, and our states, and neighboring states, providing all with information that is vital to their understanding the needs of water resource development and the problems appertaining thereto. On the other side of the street, the traffic moves in the other direction. Water, Inc. is a natural instrument for passing on to these governmental agencies the needs, the desires and the wishes of the people it serves. It is a unique organization. No other that I know of serves this purpose. Its goals are lofty, but obtainable. Our primary goal -- adequate water for all. We at Water, Inc. have been referred to as "dreamers." Perhaps so. I am reminded of a

remark made at Water, Inc.'s third annual membership meeting last year in Lubbock by Assistant Secretary of the Interior, James R. Smith, and I quote:

"Men of small dreams accomplish very little, and men of great vision frequently accomplish more than they ever dreamed possible."

