



Vol. 8, No. 6 — Final Issue

July-September 1981

Commission closes, states seek to continue activities

There will be no Missouri River Basin Commission after Sept. 30. The MRBC and four of its five sister commissions have been terminated by the Reagan administration effective at the end of the fiscal year. The fifth will be terminated in January 1982.

But the Commission's efforts will not cease if state and federal members have their way. Meeting for the 37th and final quarterly Commission meeting in Sioux City, Iowa, on Aug. 6, members agreed that coordination activities and two studies now in progress should continue under new auspices.

State members met in caucus prior to the Commission meeting and authorized Acting Chairman George Christopulos and Staff Director Carroll Hamon to proceed with legal steps to form a Missouri Basin States Association. The Association would be a non-profit corporation under Nebraska law.

Federal and state members joined in passing a resolution urging the 10 basin governors to seek to have Commission assets transferred to the Association on Sept. 30. A Water Resources Council action memorandum spelling out conditions of the termination process urged "If the states continue their interstate planning efforts, that the existing assets of the commissions, including their unobligated funds for operating budget and comprehensive studies and existing furniture and equipment are to be transferred entirely to their member states for their use in water resources planning . . ."

Commission members were agreed that, while federal representatives would not sit as board members of the new Association, the federal presence is necessary.

"Certainly, the concept here is that if such an Association is established, we would invite the federal members of the Commission to participate in the deliberations of the Association to discuss with us what's going on, keep us tuned in, and vice versa," Christopulos said.

Nebraska Alternate Member Dayle Williamson agreed. "Those of us in the states need to have that close contact with the federal agencies. And we need to have that close contact with the other states so we know what is going on," Williamson said.

While action of the State Caucus was sufficient to form the new Association, the resolution to the governors was necessary to demonstrate the consensus of the Commission membership. The resolution states in part "that the Missouri River Basin Commission hereby recognizes the need for continuing federal-state relations concerning the water and related land resources of the Missouri River Basin . . ."

"The point is that the federal agencies want to go on record as supporting and encouraging the action by the states," said Col. C.A. Selleck, Division Engineer, Army Corps of Engineers, Missouri River Division.

MBSA being organized

State members of the Missouri River Basin Commission will meet in Denver Sept. 28 to complete organization of the Missouri Basin States Association. George L. Christopulos, Wyoming State Engineer and Acting Chairman of the Missouri River Basin Commission will chair the meeting.

The Association will continue some of the activities previously conducted by the Missouri River Basin Commission. It is being established on a one-year interim basis to continue state-federal and interstate coordination and to complete the Commission's Hydrology and Flood Plain studies (status report, page two). During the year, members will decide whether some form of organization should be maintained in fiscal year 1983 and beyond.

Incorporation papers will be filed before the Sept. 28 meeting. But the Association will not "come to life" unless

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MBSA (Continued)

and until the federal government transfers MRBC assets to the new entity. Commission members passed a resolution at the 37th quarterly meeting Aug. 6 urging basin governors to ask the Office of Management and Budget to make the transfer.

Acting Chairman George Christopulos wrote all 10 governors following the Commission meeting to gain their signatures on a joint resolution to be sent to OMB. The transfer is expected once OMB has received the governors' request.

"While the transfer of Commission assets to the Association is not a certainty, we are acting in good faith with the intent expressed in the Water Resources Council memorandum terminating river basin commissions," said Staff Director Carroll Hamon.

"That memorandum urged — and this was re-emphasized in a cover letter from WRC Chairman James Watt — that Commission assets be transferred back to the states for their use in interstate water planning efforts," Hamon said.

"The Missouri Basin States Association is the vehicle which Missouri River Basin states have chosen to continue interstate water resources coordination and planning efforts," he added.

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The Missouri River Basin Commission is a state-federal body charged with coordination, planning and communication for water and related land resources in the 10-state region drained by the Missouri River, in accordance with Public Law 89-80. Ten states, ten federal agencies, and two interstate water compacts are represented on the commission. They are Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming; the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Army, Energy, Health and Human Services, HUD, Interior and Transportation, and the Environmental Protection and Federal Emergency Management Agencies; and Big Blue River Compact Administration and Yellowstone River Compact Commission. Canada and the basin's Indian tribes are represented by an observer.

George L. Christopulos, Wyoming, Acting Chairman

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In forming the Association, the state representatives adopted a preliminary budget which would cut the present MRBC full time staff by one-third, carrying over 12 of 18 people presently employed. The Association would also continue to have offices in Omaha.

About \$800,000 in unspent funds will be available for transfer from MRBC to the Association Sept. 30, Hamon said.

Federal presence is important

(Editor's note: Tom Eason has served as Nebraska's member since the MRBC was formed in 1972. He offered these observations at the 37th quarterly Commission meeting.)

Today, we have collectively taken action to turn a state-federal river basin commission into a states' association. As I say this, I am very aware that what is missing in this description is a statement of our deep appreciation, as state members, of the role which the federal representatives have played in the Commission.



*Thomas K. Eason
Nebraska Member*

Let me say one more time what we have heard here again and again. We hope that federal members will continue their cooperation, interest, and commitment in these coordination and planning efforts

It has been a major asset for the state of Nebraska to have had state agency heads who know the

people in the federal agencies at the regional administrator level. By knowing these people through the Commission, our state officials have improved their working relationships with federal officials. It's a pretty bad idea to wait until you're in the middle of a big problem before you get acquainted for the first time.

Some of you may not remember that when the Commission was formed, most people thought state and federal government agencies were all enemies; every agency had a piece of the pie to protect. Today . . . this rivalry has become more appropriately a concerted effort, an effort to assume separate responsibilities while working toward the same ends. And, I don't have to remind anyone here the end we seek is responsible management of the water resources we all hold in common

. . . To sum up, I hope that this new states' association will issue a formal invitation to our current federal members to continue to work with this group on matters related to water resources. The need for coordination between the two levels of government doesn't end, just because the forum is changing.

Parting thoughts — Acting Chairman George L. Christopoulos

On Aug. 6 in Sioux City, Iowa, about 40 people gathered for a "regular quarterly meeting" of the Missouri River Basin Commission. The business of the day was orderly — and anything but regular.

Commission members were deliberating how best to continue reaping the benefits of the organization, even though the Reagan administration has terminated river basin commissions effective Sept. 30. The Commission has served for nearly a decade as "the principal agency for the coordination of federal, state, interstate, local and nongovernmental plans for the development of water and related land resources" in the Missouri River Basin.



*George L. Christopoulos
Acting Chairman*

The President's intention to balance the budget and return more responsibility to the states is recognizably the mandate he received last November. But the Missouri River Basin Commission has done some good work over the years that should not be overlooked. The Commission is also currently in mid-course on projects that must be completed.

Those who met Aug. 6 determined that a states' association will be formed to continue these efforts for one year. While work is under way to form that organization, I offer these thoughts about the role MRBC has played in this region.

The Commission was authorized by the Water Resources Planning Act of 1965 and created seven years later by executive order at the request of the 10 governors. The authorizing act spelled out a four-part mandate: cooperation and coordination, joint comprehensive planning for water resources, arriving at a consensus of regional priorities, and undertaking special studies to support and fulfill the other three mandates.

The need for this river basin commission arose out of the "climate of the times." Former North Dakota Governor William Guy was among the 10 governors who sought presidential action creating the MRBC. In a 1980 letter to former MRBC Chairman Millard W. Hall, Gov. Guy explained the situation as follows:

In both 1961 and 1962, I was chairman of the Missouri States Committee composed of the governors of the 10 Missouri River Basin states. We acted as the political action arm of the Missouri Basin Interagency Committee (MBIAC) . . . There were many factors at play then which are absent or changed today.

Some of the factors included:

- (1) The Interagency Committee was controlled by federal agencies that exercised a sometimes arrogant disregard for state input. The Governors Committee sought to interject state viewpoint in contrast to the Federal agencies' positions. Today MRBC puts state and federal agencies on an equal basis
- (2) There were "causes" to support by the governors. The basin states in the early 1960's were on the rebound from eight years of the Eisenhower administration "no new starts policy" on water projects. There was also the governors' effort to pass the legislation establishing the Water Resources Council and the river basin commissions
- (3) The Pick-Sloan Plan was still fresh in the minds of governors who saw water management as a basinwide integrated plan in which one state receiving water management benefits owed support to other states, as they too sought benefits

Those of us who have enjoyed the cooperative attitude and genuine commitment of the state and federal membership in recent times may find it difficult to recall a time when the federal role could be described as "arrogant disregard." In the mandate to serve as the principal agency for coordination of planning among all levels of government, this Commission has largely been successful.

Last February, former Chairman Hall pointed out, in a speech before the 35th quarterly meeting, that the role of this Commission has not only been to coordinate planning, but more importantly to preserve a way of life and a quality of life in the basin. This way of life can only be preserved by conscious acts of responsible decisionmaking bodies such as this Commission.

Chairman Hall went on to say, "this is a time when cool-headed realistic planning is urgently needed to protect the public interest and ensure individual opportunities." In creating an association of states, it is our intention to adapt the Commission's role to the challenges ahead.

Will any of us live to see the day when water is piped from Missouri River reservoirs to replenish the Ogallala Aquifer in western Kansas? Probably not. What about the possibility of a coal slurry pipeline taking Wyoming coal to Arkansas? We are likely to see that day soon.

In either case, we cannot pretend that the responsibility for these decisions rests with someone else — some future generation — or that any of these decisions can be made in the interest of one state to the detriment of others.

To summarize the Commission's achievements, I have mentioned successful coordination and cooperation. The Commission has also met its other mandated responsibilities. A regional plan has been compiled and published. It includes

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Parting thoughts (Continued)

programs and projects of water resources management agencies in all 10 states. The first regional plan was published in 1975. An update published earlier this year included an assessment of the environmental impacts of the plan.

The Commission is now on the verge of developing a water accounting system to better assess the effects new development would have on water supply in our region's streams. The basinwide hydrology study is among the efforts the new state association would complete next year. The study and its products (including the accounting system) are the result of many years of support from basin governors. The effort has required cooperation among more than 600 state and federal agency personnel. When completed, water resources managers will be able to quantitatively analyze the effects of new proposals for water use.

The study process has required agreement by all participants at each key decision step. MRBC member agencies and study participants have agreed to validity of the data collected and methods applied throughout the course of this study. It is the collective intention of Commission members to use the study products in the ongoing process of coordination and cooperation. The completed hydrology study will be a boon to our future understanding of water resources planning and development.

The Commission has also completed several studies of smaller areas of the basin over the years. These special studies and level B studies have supplemented understanding of the problems and opportunities of these areas.

The Commission is now engaged in a study of the Missouri River flood plain from Ponca, Neb. to the confluence with the Mississippi. Like the hydrology study, this effort will be completed under the auspices of the new states association.

The Commission has contributed more directly to public understanding of water resources issues through other special projects. Through the Western Coal Planning Assistance Project, MRBC worked with the U.S. Geological Survey to provide technical assistance workshops and a four-volume reference system for residents of the basin having problems related directly to energy development. Again, cooperating with the Geological Survey, MRBC provided workshops on community water conservation efforts this summer and is completing another project to help identify water use information needs.

This past year, MRBC has held seminars on the Pick-Sloan Program Missouri Basin Account and on drought management. In connection with the hydrology study, MRBC hosted a national symposium on the state of the art of identifying irrigated land using remote sensing techniques. Proceedings of all three events were published for distribution to a wider audience.

Furthermore, MRBC has been represented in testimony before congressional committees throughout the near-decade of its existence. The priorities reports published by the Commission had begun to have an impact as a



MRBC Acting Chairman George L. Christopoulos, right, talks with Jack Hart, special assistant to Nebraska Gov. Charles Thone following Commission endorsement of a resolution urging action by basin governors. Gov. Thone wrote the other nine governors in July seeking their support for continuing MRBC activities under auspices of a states' association.

congressional resource when priorities efforts were discontinued last spring.

In conclusion, the history of the Missouri River Basin Commission is a history of accomplishment. The organization was true to its mandate. And, while neither the canoers on the basin's rivers, nor an irrigator in western Nebraska, nor a little boy getting a drink of water in Missouri, nor the many other water users throughout the region may miss the Commission by name, the necessity continues for some organization to fill this role.

The ending of the Missouri River Basin Commission does not alter the fact of the serious concerns that face this region in the years ahead. It is the collective obligation of those states and agencies who have been members of the Commission to continue the cooperation begun this past decade and to accept the responsibility for the decisions that must be made. These decisions will affect those who live in this region long after the Missouri River Basin Commission has been forgotten.

Water conservation — one town's story

During the summer of 1980, many South Dakota communities experienced drought conditions. One community with a long recognized problem is Huron (population 13,000). The city currently pumps about 4.2 million gallons per day from the James River and could expect a peak demand of 6 to 7 mgd if the supply were available. To reduce the demand, citizens are on an alternate day schedule for lawn and garden watering. The city is now working on a pipeline to bring an additional 1.5 mgd from a well field 3 miles west of town. Because of the community's interest and support of the Oahe Project, it has completed a diversion dam and water treatment plant with a capacity of 10 mgd. The treatment plant is now underutilized until the city receives water from Oahe Reservoir. The community fears that it will continue to lose population until it can improve its water supply. Until then, conservation practices are necessary to reduce demand.

Communities seek tips on water conservation

Workshops in three cities brought out 132 representatives of communities, state governments and consulting firms to learn how they could use water conservation techniques to help solve water supply problems.

The Missouri River Basin Commission and the U.S. Geological Survey cooperated to sponsor the day-long sessions on water conservation. The workshops were held in August in St. Joseph, Mo., Sioux Falls, S.D., and Billings, Mont.

Workshop leaders told participants there are two basic approaches to water supply problems: "supply side" solutions and "demand side" solutions. The supply side actions include actions to be taken by those responsible for utilities plant management. Examples are installing metering devices, leak detection and repair, pressure reduction, evaporation control, and improving watershed management practices.

Demand side solutions more directly involve and affect those who use the water. Some examples are rate increases to discourage overuse or waste, regulation of use (such as banning car washing or requiring alternate-day watering of lawns), installation of water saving devices in homes, and educating water users to the problem and to individual actions that could help.

Carl Teinert, MRBC staff coordinator for the workshops, said most water shortage problems require a combination of supply side and demand side actions. The solution also depends on whether the water shortage is a long-term or short-term problem.

"The goal of the workshops was to take people through a logical process of selecting appropriate conservation methods for their individual situations," Teinert said.



Several workshop participants ponder the assignment to create a water conservation plan for a community where the wells are drying up. They were attending a Water Conservation Workshop in Sioux Falls, S.D., Aug. 12. The workshop was sponsored by the MRBC and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Study leaders report status

MRBC members heard reports of the status of two Commission-led special studies at the 37th quarterly meeting Aug. 6. Study leaders reported progress on both the Missouri Basin Hydrology Study and the Middle and Lower Missouri River Flood Plain Management Study.

Director of Hydrologic Studies, Donald L. Ohnstad reported that one of the hydrology study's main objectives — establishing a data base of water use and streamflow information for the Missouri River Basin that is agreeable to state and federal member agencies — is nearing completion. He said about 70 percent of the data has been entered in computer storage files and remaining data will be entered before Sept. 30.

Ohnstad pointed out one of the primary reasons for initiating the hydrology study was that in the past, state and federal agency estimates of irrigated acreages and water consumption by irrigation in the basin have differed.

"The number of irrigated acres in each county of the basin has now been agreed to by state and federal study participants," Ohnstad said. He said the acreage figures should be available by the end of September.

"A tremendous amount of data has been collected," he said. "Getting that data into usable form in an accounting system will be the objective in fiscal year 1982."

The water accounting system will allow water resources planners and managers to analyze what would happen to water supply throughout the basin if specific proposals for water use would be developed. A brochure announcing the water accounting system will be published before Sept. 30.

Flood Plain Study Manager Donald A. Becker reported data is continuing to be gathered to meet the three goals of the study: (1) determination of the effect of channel accretion and encroachments on river stage-discharge relationships; (2) analysis of the degree of flood protection of existing levees; and (3) mapping of current land uses, flood hazards and floodways.

The technical report for the land use portion of the study will be an atlas of about 130 maps and overlays. Becker said the atlas could be used by states, local governmental officials and others interested in developing plans to more wisely use the flood plain.

Becker pointed out that continuing the study under auspices of the Missouri Basin States Association would allow achievement of some of the original study goals suspended in May in order to complete data gathering tasks on an accelerated schedule.

"Next year, we will project flood plain land use needs and attempt to develop criteria to guide future land uses, especially criteria to ensure that future development adequately considers flood hazards and environmental needs," Becker said. "This will require the participation of affected states so that a compatible, interstate approach can be developed."

MRBC assesses user needs for USGS

Four years ago, the U.S. Geological Survey began work on a cooperative federal-state effort designed to collect, store, and report water use information. The National Water Use Data System is intended to gather and provide information for water resources managers.

To find out what kind of information those managers need, the Geological Survey contracted with MRBC to research potential user needs in the 10-state basin. The Commission project is called an "Assessment of Water Use Information Needs and Applications."

The project was begun in May. Initially a mailing list was drawn up. It included a cross-section of about 350 persons and organizations in the Missouri River Basin who utilize information about water use. Then, a questionnaire was sent. The questionnaires and information generated from other telephone and personal interviews are now being analyzed to identify the needs of those who will use the data.

The questionnaire results will be used in evaluating the National Water Use Data System. A project report including recommended improvements will be sent to USGS by Oct. 1.

Final Issue MRBC Basin Bulletin

This is the final issue of the MRBC Basin Bulletin. The Bulletin's publisher, the Missouri River Basin Commission, will close its doors Sept. 30. The Commission may be succeeded by a Missouri Basin States Association, which may continue publication of a newsletter. Subscribers to the MRBC Basin Bulletin would automatically receive the MBSA publication. No further information is available at this time.



Donald (Skip) Meisner, executive director of the Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council, tells MRBC members the role of the Commission needs to be continued and should be expanded to improve cooperation with local entities. Meisner spoke at the 37th quarterly Commission meeting luncheon.

MRBC publications available

The Missouri River Basin Water Accounting System — announcing the water accounting system being developed by the Missouri Basin Hydrology Study and explaining how and why the system has been developed and how it can be used.

Although the MRBC is closing Sept. 30, requests for Commission publications may continue to be honored. Write to the Commission at Suite 403, 10050 Regency Circle, Omaha, Neb. 68114. A complete list of publications available will be sent on request.



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