

Monthly Briefing

A Summary of the Alliance's Recent and Upcoming Activities and Important Water News

2011 Annual Meeting and Conference: New Approaches to Old Challenges

The 2011 Family Farm Alliance annual conference held in Las Vegas February 23-25 featured diverse, high profile speakers and panel discussions that focused on the innovative ways and new partnerships that Western farmers and ranchers are developing to tackle old challenges.

The 23rd Annual Meeting and Conference theme was "Solving the Puzzle – New Approaches to Old Challenges". The Monte Carlo Resort and Casino in Las Vegas (NEVADA) once again hosted the annual event. The audience dynamic at this year's event was characterized by a strong presence of new participants, including national conservation organizations and representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

"We devoted significant time in the past year to engaging with new partners in some fairly untraditional forums," said Alliance President Patrick O'Toole (WYOMING).



*Alliance President Patrick O'Toole presents Treasurer Dan Errotabere with the 2011 John Keys III memorial award at the close of the 23rd Family Farm Alliance annual conference in Las Vegas on February 25, 2011 .
Source: TJ Burnham, Western Farmer-Stockman Magazine*

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"Our philosophy in the past year has been one of trying to get to the table, as opposed to being on the menu. We were pleased to have many of those new players in the room in Vegas."

The conference also maintained the strong, traditional presence of Bureau of Reclamation policy officials and participation by Congressional committee staff.

"It's a real honor and a credit to the Alliance that Reclamation and Capitol Hill staff are so engaged in our conference," said Dan Keppen (OREGON), Alliance Executive Director.

This special edition of the Family Farm Alliance "Monthly Briefing" summarizes the high points of last month's 23rd Annual Meeting and Conference.

Alliance President Addresses World Food “Gap”

President O’Toole (WYOMING) welcomed the audience to the Monte Carlo resort and opened up the Family Farm Alliance annual conference general session on the morning of February 24. He noted that growing urbanization and increased public demand for available supplies to provide recreational and environmental benefits are placing heavy demands on Western water, the key ingredient in the production of agricultural products. Farmers and ranchers are exposed to overlapping and inconsistent mandates from different regulatory agencies that are piled on year after year.

“Facing complicated challenges is a daily routine for Western agricultural water users,” said Mr. O’Toole. “Pressure is building on farmers to give up the lifestyle and preserve the remaining equity in their property for their families, or move farming operations to other countries where labor is plentiful, environmental concerns relaxed and economic development is welcomed.”

Mr. O’Toole discussed the recent Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Report issued by the Global Harvest Initiative (GHI). This report was developed to measure ongoing progress in achieving the goal of sustainably doubling agricultural output by 2050. Mr. O’Toole explained that, for the first time, the GAP Report quantifies the difference between the current rate of agricultural productivity growth and the pace required to meet future world food needs. The report predicts that doubling agricultural output by 2050 will require increasing the rate of productivity growth to at least 1.75 percent annually from the current 1.4 percent growth rate, an increase of 25 percent per year.

Mr. O’Toole pointed to other signs point to “the hard truth that we are facing a very real food crisis in the world today”. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in June 2009 reported that over 1 billion people world-wide go hungry every day. The world’s population is growing by 79 million people each year. The FAO estimates that the world will need to produce 70 percent more food by 2050 to keep pace with population growth and increased demand for calories.

“It’s going to take every bit of effort to close that gap and produce the food we need to for the country,” said Mr. O’Toole. “We need to give the world’s hungry a reason for hope by tackling food security with a renewed commitment to agricultural development at home, where only two percent of the nation’s population produces food for our country and the world.”

Mr. O’Toole noted the challenges associated with meeting the ever-increasing demand for water in the West in an era when there will be ever-decreasing supply.

“Improved conservation, water reuse and efficiency by urban and agricultural water users are certainly parts of the solution, but only a part,” he said. “We cannot continue to ‘conserve just a little more’ forever. Equal emphasis must be placed on modernizing and expanding our aging water infrastructure systems to provide more flexibility and meet multiple beneficial uses.”

A strong sentiment was expressed by Alliance directors and Advisory Committee members during internal association meetings held on February 23. While some conservation interests continue to insist that farmers tighten up water use and transfer water away from agriculture, Alliance leaders believe that irrigators should not be defensive in light of those arguments.

“Farmers and ranchers should be encouraged to put their “conserved water” to use as a means of expanding food and fiber production, instead of assuming that that water must automatically be transferred to meet new urban and environmental demands,” said Advisory Committee Chairman Dick Moss (CALIFORNIA).

Mr. O’Toole addressed this issue head-on in his opening remarks.

“Our own farmers and ranchers are subjected to increased regulations and related uncertainty that is making it harder to survive in a harsh economy,” he said. “Putting just a part of that group out of work and taking agricultural lands out of production so that water supplies can be redirected to new urban and environmental demands will impart huge limitations on our future ability to feed our country and the world.”



Patrick O’Toole (WYOMING), Family Farm Alliance President.
Source: T.J. Burnham, Western Farmer-Stockman Magazine

“It’s going to take every bit of effort to close that gap and produce the food we need to for the country.”

Patrick O’Toole, Family Farm Alliance President, February 24, 2011

Annual Meeting: Alliance Board Sets Priorities for 2011

Every year at its annual meeting and conference, the Family Farm Alliance board of directors, with input provided by the Alliance Advisory Committee, establishes priority issues to engage in for the upcoming year. The key initiatives developed last week in Las Vegas by you for 2011 include:

- **Advocating for solutions to deal with aging Western water infrastructure systems.**
- **Continuing to seek administrative and legislative solutions to streamline the regulatory process associated with developing low-head, low-impact hydropower development in existing conveyance systems.**
- **Seek ways to streamline the regulatory process so meaningful water enhancement and local conservation projects can be implemented faster and cheaper.**
- **Continuing to discuss potential effects and impacts of climate change, building upon the interest created by the Alliance’s 2007 climate change report.**
- **Monitoring and Engaging the National Committee on Levee Safety.**
- **Investigate and propose legislation that strengthens the Information Quality Act (IQA) to make it work as a tool of recourse for Western farmers and ranchers.**
- **Develop new resources through increased membership, participation and fundraising to allow the Alliance to fully serve its members.**
- **Continuing to monitor and engage administrative rule-making actions that pose threats to Western irrigated agriculture.**

“The focus in Washington, D.C. in the next two years will be on economy and jobs,” said Alliance Advisory Committee Chairman Dick Moss (CALIFORNIA). “There will be no new money to support projects, as has been the case in the past.”

Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen (OREGON) agrees.

“Emphasizing that we need new funding for infrastructure will not resonate as it did only two years ago, when the stimulus package provided an opportunity to advocate for more infrastructure money,” he said.

The Alliance intends to take an approach to counter regulatory proposals issued by EPA and other regulatory agencies and focus on the value of agriculture and irrigated agriculture as a job creator and sustainer.

“The challenge will be to articulate a message that advocates for user-friendly legislation, constructive, low-or no-cost changes to the Farm Bill, and the like,” said Keppen.



Alliance directors and consultants met on February 23 in Las Vegas to establish priority initiatives to under in the coming year: aging water infrastructure, continuing to discuss potential effects and impacts of climate change, monitoring and engaging the National Committee on Levee Safety, fundraising, sound science, water transfers, streamlining permitting for low-head hydro projects and monitoring and engaging on new administrative environmental regulations.

Above: Alliance Advisory Committee Chairman Dick Moss (center) reviews organization priorities at the joint meeting between his committee and the Alliance board of directors and contractors at the Monte Carlo Resort in

Colorado River Ag/Urban/Enviro Workgroup Brings Together Diverse Basin Interests

The opening panel discussion of the 2011 Alliance annual conference general session included representatives from a work group of diverse interests-agricultural, environmental, and urban-that has been funded by the Walton Foundation to seek the most effective and innovative ways water can be shared for mutual benefit. Though the initiative is aimed at finding solutions for the Colorado River Basin, the work group is investigating transfers and infrastructure challenges throughout the West in an attempt to uncover best ideas for the Basin. This effort also seeks to tie-in to the Colorado River Basin study authorized by Congress in 2009 and currently being implemented by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Panelists described their experiences with this process, and commented on both areas of common agreement and divergence.

“To be sure, we have our disagreements, but we also do have a shared vision of a better world,” said Jennifer Pitt (COLORADO) of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). “We have differences about storage projects - in principal - but even there, we made some progress.”

Ms. Pitt asserted that the Colorado River is over-allocated and is being used beyond its capacity to provide water.

“Farmers do have tough travails staring them in the face,” she said. “EDF asserts that a vibrant agricultural economy is essential. Voluntary transfers should be able to be crafted in a way that help rural communities.”

Ms. Pitt believes that, within the workgroup, the strongest agreement was reached on the need to have broad stakeholder support, which is critical for projects to move forward. She would like to see a convening of leaders from state water agencies to talk about specific programs that are in place.

“Our ag/urban/enviro group can play a role in bringing

those officials together,” she said.

Todd Doherty, who works for the Colorado Water Conservation Board, focused on the group’s efforts to develop a pilot, expedited water sharing program review process, using a high-level state policy official as a liaison to shepherd individual projects.

“We want to find ways to clear obstacles to implementation of water-sharing strategies,” he said.

Mr. Doherty also touched on the group’s recommendation to foster a flexible, basin-wide approach to develop a planning tool built upon a Basin-wide study currently being written by the Bureau of Reclamation. Terry Fulp of Reclamation’s Lower Colorado regional office – who is managing the Basin-wide study – summarized progress on that effort. This two-year, \$2 million study is being cost-shared by Reclamation and 7 Colorado River Basin states.

“Our intent is to have a transparent, collaborative study that reflects input from all stakeholders,” said Fulp.

Fulp directed the audience to Reclamation’s website - ColoradoRiverBasinStudy@usbr.gov – for detailed information on this effort.

Pat O’Toole moderated the panel, and noted that he has seen “stunning successes” driven by motivated individuals from the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, working in tandem with local interests on conservation projects.

“How do you take those examples and inspire other agency people to do the same?”, he asked.

Both Mr. Doherty and Ms. Pitt recognized that the ag/urban/enviro working group developed solutions that are fairly broad and wide-ranging. However, there is some momentum with the group that should be capitalized on to move forward, working with groups like the Western States Water Council.

“People are breaking the mold,” said Ms. Pitt. “It’s amazing to see.”



Colorado River Panelists (from left to right) - Terry Fulp (Bureau of Reclamation), Todd Doherty (Colorado Water Conservation Board), Jennifer Pitt (Environmental Defense).

Source: T.J. Burnham, Western Farmer–Stockman Magazine

“Charting New Waters” with New Partners

Citing a looming freshwater crisis that could affect the nation's economy, the livability of our communities and the health of our ecosystems, a diverse coalition of businesses, farmers, environmental not-for-profits and government agencies issued a landmark call to action in 2010 aimed at ensuring the quality and abundance of our freshwater. "Charting New Waters: A Call to Action to Address U.S. Freshwater Challenges," is the result of an intensive two-year collaboration exploring solutions to U.S. freshwater challenges. Panelists at the Alliance conference featured participants in this process from academia, agriculture and the conservation community. Lynn Broaddus (Director, Environmental Programs, The Johnson Foundation at Wingspread) moderated this panel.

Roger Wolf (Iowa Soybean Association) explained why his organization participated in this nearly-two year process. Iowa is the “bull's eye” of many outside interest groups, since it is so integrally tied to the Mississippi River. Drainage issues in Iowa are a critical concern, since farms have extensive and aging tile systems that drain highly organic soils.

“We have lots of water monitoring and remote sensing underway, and many watershed planners working on multiple scales,” he said. “Sediment, nutrients, hydrology and more frequent recent flooding are all issues of major concern in Iowa.”

Iowa Soybean engaged in “Charting New Waters” because it wanted to play a role in an action-oriented program where there was real “skin in the game”, said Mr. Wolf.

“We felt we had a real opportunity to

reinforce the importance of agriculture at a national level,” he said. “Along with the Family Farm Alliance, I believe we had a huge impact on changing the initial tone of the report.”

Mr. Wolf mirrored concerns made by Pat O’Toole earlier in the day, emphasizing that farmers would prefer to work with USDA using voluntary, incentive-driven approaches to conservation.



“Charting New Waters” panelists, from L to R: Steve Malloch (National Wildlife Federation), Roger Wolf (standing, Iowa Soybean Association), Lynn Broaddus (Johnson Foundation at Wingspread), John Ehrmann (Meridian Institute) and Joel Lipsitch (John Deere Water). Photo Courtesy of T.J. Burnham, Western Farmer-Stockman Magazine

“We aren’t nimble enough and fast enough to work within a rigid regulatory framework,” he said. “We need flexible systems.”

Iowa Soybean has committed to going forward with “Charting New Waters” pushing for performance-based approaches and adaptive management, working with diverse interests who are honest brokers.

“The reality is – the issues are complex,” Mr. Wolf said. “We need to capture value presented by new opportunities.”

Steve Malloch (WASHINGTON) from the National Wildlife Federation

focused his comments on two general points: looking for areas of common interest between environmental and agricultural groups, and describing one place where that is starting to occur. He noted environmentalists would rather see productive agricultural land than rows of tract homes or weeds.

“The environmental community and ag interests should be working to protect productive farm and ranch land,” he said.

One area where these interests are beginning to come together is the Yakima Basin of Washington state, a region characterized by interests who support a strong agricultural economy and a desire to restore salmon runs. There, a basin study authorized by the SECURE Water Act is underway. Irrigation districts, the Yakima Nation and environmental groups are involved with a collaborative study that has already identified Basin demands and supplies. The solutions package developed through this process includes expanded reservoir storage and one new reservoir.

“American River and National Wildlife Federation are actually considering supporting this package,” said Mr. Malloch. “There may be a

need to include new infrastructure to help address climate change variability. We are trying to manage the system rather than being managed by the crisis.”

Mr. Malloch noted the good representation by the conservation community in the audience at the Alliance conference.

“Reaching out to these groups is a good exercise of leadership,” he said. “We need to push forward on having our policies based upon true facts, rather than political facts. We need to work towards peace.”

Joel Lipsitch with John Deere Water (NORTH CAROLINA) outlined his com-

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Priming for the New Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is increasing being viewed as a mechanism that can provide volunteer, incentive-driven conservation program tools. This approach may help avoid the types of train wrecks that can occur when a heavy-handed federal regulatory approach is taken. On the afternoon of the opening day of the general session, a diverse panel of experts touched on how the looming Farm Bill can be modified to improve the Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEP), low impact hydropower generation opportunities, partnerships, and opportunities to enhance conservation project coordination between the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, and young farmer programs. High-level officials with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Bureau of Reclamation joined House Agriculture Committee staff and Western water users for a discussion on these topics and other issues relevant to the developing Farm Bill.

Kira Finkler, Deputy Commissioner for the Bureau of Reclamation, moderated the panel.

Robert Apodaca, appointed by President Obama as the Assistant Chief to the US Department of Agriculture/Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provided an overview of NRCS efforts to advance agricultural efforts in the West. While the Farm Bill has historically expanded NRCS programs, Mr. Apodaca anticipates that the new Farm Bill could result in consolidation and collapsing of existing activities.

“Do we need four easement programs?,” he asked. “Do we need five conservation programs? Congress will likely look at NRCS to simplify programs for our partners and find ways to become more efficient.”

He stressed that NRCS programs are voluntary programs, intended to help partners in agriculture to meet or address issues before they become regulatory issues.

Josh Maxwell, professional staff member for House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Frank Lucas in charge of handling conservation, credit,

ance.”

He also explained some of the public misconceptions about Farm Bill spending, where critics of agriculture often focus solely on the perceived large chunk of that bill that supports subsidies.

“Right now, 70% of Farm Bill spending actually goes to nutrition programs,” he said. “In the next Farm Bill, that number will approach 80%.” He emphasized the importance of ensuring that American producers can continue to do what they do best, and pulled out a quote from the past to underscore the importance of agriculture and food production.

“How long can a nuclear submarine stay under water?” he asked. “Until it runs out of food.”

Jim Stone (MONTANA), the Chairman of the Blackfoot Challenge - widely touted as a

national model for landscape-scale conservation – provided inspirational comments on how landowners in the Blackfoot River Valley decided to work with other interests and “work from the bottom up” to solve resources challenges.

“This is a diverse group,” said Mr. Stone. “Our watershed group adheres to the ‘80-20’ rule. Instead of focusing on the 20% of things we can’t agree on, we train on the 80% of issues we can agree upon.”

Mr. Stone explained how ranchers in his valley are taking a look at broad landscapes, partnering with “anyone” who is solution-oriented, and getting involved with groups like Trout Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wild-



The February 24 panel on the Farm Bill featured (from L to R) presentations by Robert Apodaca (Assistant Chief to the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service), Jim Stone (Blackfoot Challenge), Kira Finkler (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Deputy Commissioner) and Marc Thalacker (Three Sisters Irrigation District). House Agriculture Committee professional staff member Josh Maxwell participated via video conference from Washington, D.C.

and energy issues, participated via video conference from Washington, D.C. Mr. Maxwell outlined Chairman Lucas’ agenda for the 112th Congress and the outlook for the new Farm Bill.

“Oversight, Farm Bill and budget issues are priority with our committee in this Congress,” he said.

Mr. Maxwell made reference to a resolution that focused commitment on oversight, with particular attention on the activities of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“There are many new Members in the House, and they are looking for solutions,” said Mr. Maxwell. “We will be looking to those who are getting things done on the ground for guid-

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New Waters (Cont'd from P. 5)

pany's involvement with "Charting New Waters". John Deere decided not to sign on the final document. While the company has a record of collaborating with multiple parties in constructive forums, John Deere avoids controversial positions.

"We make very few political statements," said Mr. Lipsitch. "We are very careful with what we say."

John Ehrmann with the Meridian Institute (COLORADO) explained his role as a mediator in the "Charting New Waters" process. He focused on next steps, where participants will work on implementing recommendations and setting up regional forums towards that end.

"This is all about building relationships and mutual respect," he said. "We need good information and we need to be pragmatic, using real-world, successful examples as templates for the future."

Mr. Ehrmann also discussed his firm's role in a related effort - the Initiative on Food and Agriculture Policy - which is a new, independent action intended to "support work that better enables U.S. food and agriculture policies to meet our needs for food, nutrition, environmental quality, and rural development within America and abroad". This effort was initiated by U.S. foundations interested in employing broad collaboration in looking at long-term U.S. agricultural policy.

"This effort seeks to improve productivity, environmental performance, promote rural development, and find ways to best supply the world with nutritious food," he said of the Initiative, which will be housed in the Washington, D.C. offices of Meridian and managed by new executive director Deb Atwood.

Farm Bill (Cont'd from P. 6)

life Service Partners Program.

"We need little pieces of success to show what we can get done," said Mr. Stone. "It's about people. This is big stuff. We are about that end result."

Marc Thalacker, the manager of Three Sisters Irrigation District (OREGON) since 1997 has farmed and ranched in Central Oregon since 1988. As a member the Advisory Committee of the Family Farm Alliance and as a leader in the Oregon Water Resources Congress and the National Water Resources Association, Mr. Thalacker is seen as a cutting edge, "outside of the box" problem solver by many in the water world. He outlined how Oregon farmers and ranchers are working with cities to get credit for sound environmental stewardship, such as providing compensated upland best management practices in exchange for downstream cities to opt out of expensive stormwater treatment requirements.

"Cities are a good place to go if you have a service to offer," he told the audience.

He also pointed to efforts in Oregon by farmers and ranchers to install on-farm meters and other efforts to reduce diversions and conserve water and energy. In his own district, he has learned that collaboration with other entities is key in these endeavors, although it can be a mixed bag.

"More partners bring more headaches, but also bring more money," he said.

Mr. Thalacker wove his personal experiences into observations into summary recommendations that he would like to see addressed in the new Farm Bill.

"Conservation opportunities are already moving forward," he said. "Projects involving green renewable energy generation and conservation are things that need to be tied in at the irrigation district and farm level. It would be helpful if AWEP could be revamped to better work for irrigation districts. The existing 'Bridging the Headgates' program that ties Bureau of Reclamation and USDA water conservation programs should be expanded to also include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service."

Inside Washington:

A Look at D.C. from the Hill

Washington, D.C. Congressional staffers once again participated in the "Inside Washington" panel via teleconference from Capitol Hill. On the screen, from L to R, are Kiel Weaver (Republican Staff Director, House Water and Power Subcommittee), Camille Calimlim Touton (Legislative Staffer, House Water and Power Subcommittee) and Josh Johnson (Republican Professional Staff Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee). Tanya Trujillo (not pictured - Senior Counsel, Democrat Majority of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee) participated in the discussion from the conference in Las Vegas. Mark Limbaugh, the Alliance's DC representative, modified the hour-long panel.



Australian Response to Climate Change: Campin Says “Floods, Flames a Certainty”

Dave Campin, an environmental technical specialist for energy policy and regulation in Queensland, Australia, provided the keynote address at the opening day conference luncheon. Mr. Campin has travelled extensively and in recent years he has worked with the UK Environment Agency in England and, in 2010, spent six months working with the Office of Water, US EPA, in Washington DC, as a result of winning a prestigious Queensland International Fellowship.

Mr. Campin provided an in-depth report of important Australian agricultural demographics before launching into Aussie climate change history and predictions for the future. Since 1960, surface temperatures have risen, there has been an increase in the number of ex-

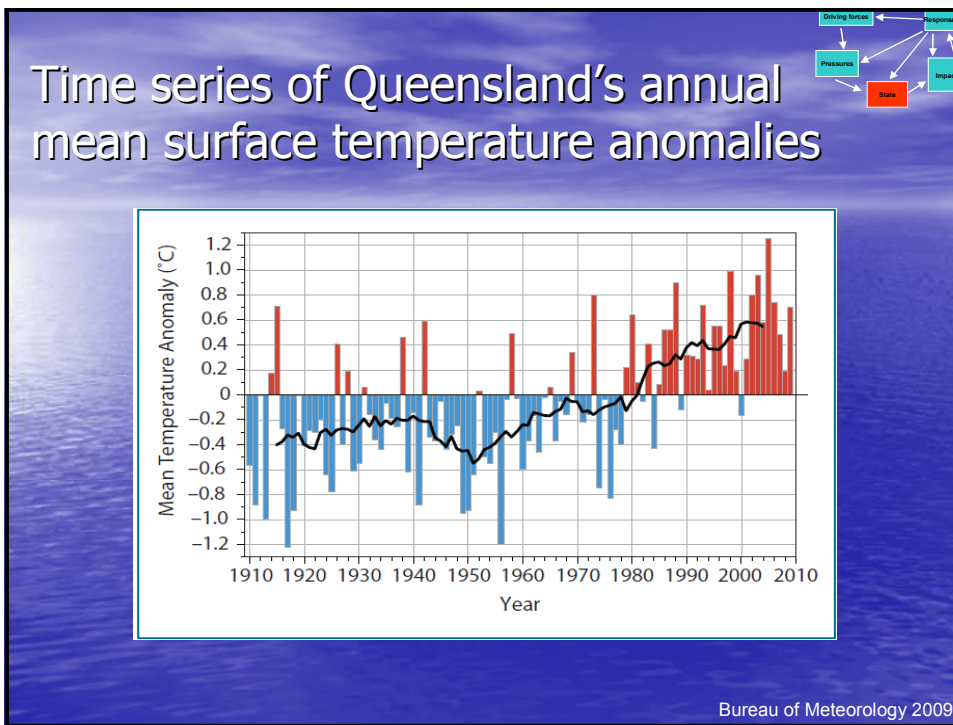
remely hot days, and a decrease in the number of cold days. Northwestern Australia has experienced a significant increase in rainfall, while the southeastern regions of the country have seen a decrease in precipitation. Since 1920, the sea level has risen about 1.2 millimeters per year.

In the future, average temperatures are predicted to increase, and average annual rainfall is expected to decrease over much of the continent. More intense daily rainfall over many areas is also expected to occur. Severe tropical cyclones are expected to increase, even though the total number of cyclones will likely decrease.

More frequent heat waves and droughts are anticipated. In Queensland, sea levels are rising faster than expected and the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimate of a 0.26–0.79 meter rise by 2100 may be a “significant underestimate”, according

to an audience. “The debate is highly complex, and policy initiatives are not pleasant and risky at the ballot box.”

He noted that there is a significant body of knowledge on adaptation, and stressed that collaboration is “essential”.



“There are many government agencies and NGOs taking initiatives at the sector/interest level,” said Mr. Campin.

He noted that the agricultural sector has a long history of innovation in dealing with adverse factors.

“Life will get more difficult,” he predicted. “But humans are remarkably resilient.”

In closing, Mr. Campin offered up suggestions

to Mr. Campin.

All of these factors add up to a projected future challenge to supply water to meet urban and agricultural demand due to decreasing rainfall and runoff, and increasing temperature and evaporation. There are also significant anticipated impacts to terrestrial and marine biodiversity, particularly in the Great Barrier Reef due to increased acidification of oceans.

Mr. Campin summarized the situation with clarity.

“The heat is on,” he told the lunch-

to the Family Farm Alliance on the climate change issue.

“First, you must look to the science, and expect subtle, temporal shifts and greater extremes,” he said. “Interrogate your forebears, share wisdom, and build resilience.”

Mr. Campin further recommended that water managers “seek assistance from all quarters.”

“This is a time where it is essential that you collaborate with fellow travelers,” he advised.

Finding Ways to Make Title Transfers Work

Given tight federal budgets, the Bureau of Reclamation and Western irrigation districts are looking harder at title transfer as a tool for addressing aging infrastructure issues. This tool can provide additional flexibility to water contractors when they actually own the asset(s) for dealing with both major maintenance issues and other contemporary needs. On the opening day of the general session, conference attendees were provided an opportunity to learn how title transfers can be work and be made to work better by representatives of Reclamation, Congress and local water purveyors.

Over the past 15 years, the Family Farm Alliance has worked closely with Reclamation on both individual title transfers and on title transfer policy. Since 1996, more than two dozen Reclamation projects have been transferred or authorized to be transferred to local entities. Those local agencies are usually the irrigation or water district that has fulfilled its federal obligation to pay for construction of the project.

James Hess, Associate Director of Operations for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, has served as Reclamation's title transfer coordinator, having been involved in the process that resulted in the transfer of title to more than 25 Reclamation projects and facilities. Mr. Hess opened up the panel discussion with an overview that covered the context and background on Reclamation's title transfer efforts. He outlined title transfer policies, including progress made on this issue via the "Managing for Excellence" (M4E) process, which illuminated what has and hasn't worked in title transfer endeavors, lessons learned from those experiences, and proposed programmatic changes intended to improve things in the future. According to Mr. Hess, Reclamation's focus is currently on "non-complicated" projects, those which are single purpose, with no competing interests, and where financial arrangements and legal / institutional concerns are easily defined and can be readily addressed.

"We have dealt with complicated issues in transfers, and in some cases have worked through them, but they do make it harder," said Mr. Hess. "They require a lot more work for what may not be a significant benefit."

Mr. Hess offered up some suggestions for local entities interested in pursuing title transfer.

"This is a big investment of time, energy, and potentially money, especially if you have lots of issues," he said. "You must be clear on why you want title transfer – it cannot be perceived as just a whim. Your reason for wanting title should be based on long-term needs, not short-term."

Family Farm Alliance Advisory Committee member addressed this topic from the water users' perspective. Mr. Knutson has over 30 years experience in water resource management and worked for nearly eight years to get a full title transfer of irrigation facilities in the State of Nebraska for a Reclamation District and two irrigation districts. Most of that work was done in Washington D.C. The Reclamation District, Knutson's employer, owns all of the facilities including a reservoir that holds approximately 70,000 acre feet and provides water to approximately 70,000 acres in parts of four counties.

"Title transfer can open up new opportunities for irrigation districts to better manage irrigation and flood waters for multiple benefits," Knutson told the audience. "Title transfers are a positive means of strengthening control of water resources at the local level. In addition, they help reduce federal costs and allow for a better allocation of federal resources."

By assuming control of their projects, Knutson explained that Sargent and Farwell Irrigation Districts are in the driver's seat and have found new partners and opportunities to work for multi-benefit solutions to aging infrastructure, flood control and water management challenges.

Kiel Weaver, Republican Staff Director of the House Water and Power Subcommittee, participated on the panel via video conference linkage from Washington, D.C., and believes improvements can be made to facilitate transfers, but much work remains to be done.

"I honestly think the title transfer process is broken both from the Reclamation and the Congressional side," he said. Mr. Weaver has played a key role in his staff role on the Subcommittee in recent years to find ways to legislate provisions to make title transfers easier, and he expressed an interests in continuing to further this effort in the future.



Western Levee and Canal Safety

In the Post-Katrina Era

The National Committee on Levee Safety (NCLS) is in the process crafting draft federal legislation that would subject Bureau of Reclamation-owned canals and ditches to the new levee standards recommended and adopted by the Committee. The NCLS is made up of non-federal representatives and flood control professionals from various organizations and local and state governmental entities, as well as the Corps of Engineers and FEMA. On February 25, conference attendees heard from federal experts and Western water users about what this means for local water managers and the customers they serve.

Eric Halpin leads the Corps of Engineers billion dollar annual dam safety and levee safety programs and is the senior advisor to leadership on all dam and levee safety issues and decisions. He is the primary agency safety representative on inter-agency, congressional, and international safety organizations and serves as the Vice-Chair of the NCLS.

In Las Vegas, Mr. Halpin quickly got to the point of contention that has Western irrigators concerned about the NCLS recommendations submitted to Congress: Should structures along water delivery canals be included in the definition of “flood control levees”, which was the focus of the NCLS effort?

“Canal agencies should be required to comply with the proposed National Levee Safety code envisioned by the NCLS,” said Mr. Halpin. “The intent is for these proposed standards to apply for all structures.”

However, Mr. Halpin stressed that the proposed NCLS standards are not duplicative of, or in conflict with, existing canal policies and programs.

“The NCLS will consider exemptions, especially for low-risk structures,” he said. “We will look to you and others for specific recommendations on that, especially for canal structures and laterals that have

very low risks, and where flow can be shut off.”

Bob Quint, Director of Operations for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and responsible for providing operational direction, management and coordination among Reclamation offices, outlined his agency’s concerns with the NCLS recommendations.

“Although there are structural similarities, we see our water delivery canals as fundamentally different facilities from levees,” he said. “Unlike levees, our canals are not designed to provide flood protection benefits. As such are not part of a flood protection systems nor do they establish an expectation of flood protection.”

Although a canal failure can result in flooding Mr. Quint explained that the consequences of water conveyance canal failure are generally much less severe than for the that a major levee breach..

“We acknowledge that our canals are not without risk,” said Mr. Quint. “We consider the nature of these risks to have more in common with those presented by smaller dams, and are more appropriately addressed within the context of traditional dam safety considerations in which the responsibilities of the owner are already well established and regulated.”

Mr. Quint explained that Reclamation does not believe the language of the 2007 WRDA legislation intended for Reclamation’s water delivery facilities to be incorporated into an Army Corps levee program, as is being considered by the Levee Committee today. Typically, a change like this would warrant consideration by Reclamation’s Congressional oversight committees.

“We understand that the NCLS had some internal discussions on these is-



Eric Halpin, Vice—Chair of the National Committee on Levee Safety.

sues but want to add perspective to the debate,” said Mr. Quint. “From the original wording of the levee act, which is supported by the stated purpose of the proposed legislation, it is clear that the intent of Congress was to address the safety of the flood protection systems upon which much of the nation’s infrastructure depend. Our interpretation is that the definition of canals as defined in the act was intended to address navigation and drainage canals that form an integral part of a levee flood protection system. The stated purpose of the act was to address the issues of inadequate or misunderstood levels of flood protection that are currently provided by the nation’s levees and are the driving impetus behind the levee safety act.”

Mr. Quint stressed that the proposed NCLS standards are duplicative

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Conference Audience Questions NCLS (Cont'd from P. 10)

of, or in conflict with, existing Reclamation processes. Expanding the scope of the Act to include water delivery canals is “problematic”, he emphasized. He also conveyed Reclamation’s concerns that the NCLS is mandating federal compliance with national levee code, and expanding the Act to include dam safety, which could “likely force federal and state agencies into a single risk management framework, one that places all the eggs in one basket under the control of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.”

Mr. Quint explained that Reclamation is current completing inspections of urban canals and is working with stakeholders to develop recommendations to improve related safety concerns. A report is due in early 2012, for which Reclamation is preparing to brief Congressional offices.

“We will continue to work with NCLS on important issues of levee safety,” he told the audience.

Gary Esslinger (NEW MEXICO), the Treasurer-Manager of the Elephant Butte Irrigation District since 1987, provided an entertaining and informative local perspective of the proposed NCLS recommendations. He described how arroyo flood flows associated with Southwestern monsoonal

events wreak havoc in his neighborhood.

“Canal breaks will flood agricultural lands and occasionally impact urbanized areas,” he said. “However, these breaks pose a minimum threat to public safety and welfare compared to river levee breaches.”

Mr. Esslinger stressed that, in New Mexico, irrigation conveyance facilities long pre-date urban development, which often occurred with little attention paid to the minimum risk of canal breaks to local communities.

“We are sprouting houses instead of crops,” he said. “Developers should be responsible for flooding impacts, not irrigation districts.”

Mr. Esslinger elaborated – with great humor, and references to the wily rodent responsible for tearing up the golf course in the movie “Caddy Shack” – on the fact that gophers are responsible for 90% of canal breaks in earthen-lined canal systems.

“Gophers will dig through any uniform standard code proposed by the NCLS,” he quipped.

But he also offered up more serious concerns, including the “sleeping giant

of funding.

“Who is going to pay for this huge unfunded mandate?”, he asked.

The question and answer session that followed the panel presentations was spirited and demonstrated the high level of concern that Western irrigation interests have with the proposed NCLS recommendations.

Alliance Advisory Committee member Ivan Ray (UTAH) noted that the proposed levee safety program will severely impact states’ rights. He also expressed concern about insurance and liability issues, impacts to third parties, and how private non-profit water management entities fit into the mix.

“The definition of levees endorsed by NCLS is disconnected with the West,” he said. “Plus - who will be responsible for inspecting these facilities under the new standards?”

The Family Farm Alliance, in coordination with other interested parties, will directly respond to the request made by Mr. Halpin and develop specific recommendations and criteria to the NCLS for canals and ditches that should be exempted from the proposed program.



Gary Esslinger, general manager of Elephant Butte Irrigation District, describes the unique nature and history of levees and canals in New Mexico.

“We are sprouting houses instead of crops. Developers should be responsible for flooding impacts, not irrigation districts.”

Commissioner Connor Joins Reclamation Roundtable

The Commissioner of Reclamation and the five regional directors of Reclamation on the last day of the conference gathered to discuss hot Western water issues in this time-honored Alliance conference tradition. Reclamation Commissioner Mike Connor—in his first appearance at the Alliance conference - directed his opening on the need to protect our agricultural economy, referencing Agricultural Secretary Vilsack’s recent comments on the growing importance of producing food for the world.

“We need to recognize that we are part of that issue,” said Commissioner Connor. “A fundamental goal of ours is to take care of the needs of our country. There is a huge opportunity for us to provide for ourselves and others in the world. Much of the recent unrest in the Middle East is driven by hunger issues. That demonstrates the seriousness of the issue and the importance to focus on the importance of agriculture.”

The Commissioner touched on activities underway in the new session of Congress and how that will affect Bureau priorities.

“We would like certainty with respect to 2011 funding and appropriations levels,” he said. “There is a very serious debate going on in this country about government spending, but we can have that debate and still move forward in an efficient manner. I just hope Congress will continue to work with us to deal with local and regionally crafted solutions to Western water challenges.”

Commissioner Connor noted that Reclamation will have to work under a very budget; the President’s \$966 million request represents an 8% reduction from the 2010 enacted spending level. Priority Reclamation programs that will be funded include Indian water rights settlements, California Bay-Delta activities, and conservation programs. Energy initiatives, WaterSMART, loan guarantees and Interior Secretary Salazar’s “Youth in the Great Outdoors” initiative will all be addressed in the new budget.

“We are very satisfied with the overall budget request,” said the Commissioner. “I think this demonstrates, that in a tough time, when others agencies are facing 10-15% cuts, how important water and power resources are to the Administration.”

The five regional directors followed up the Commissioner’s remarks with summaries of key activities throughout Reclamation’s Western states sphere of influence. Mid-Pacific Regional Director Don Glaser caught the attention of many in the audience when discussed the importance of being innovative and generating support for finding solutions to the very expensive, high profile challenges in California’s Bay-Delta. He mentioned his experience in 2009, when he saw people who produce food in the Central Valley community of Firebaugh standing in food lines in the most productive agricultural area of the country.

“Solutions in the Bay-Delta have to address all public interests,” said Glaser. “However, providing water to our contractors this year is most important to us.”



The Reclamation Roundtable: Commissioner Michael Connor (center) speaks to the Friday morning audience. All five regional directors also participated. From L to R: Larry Walkoviak (Upper Colorado Region), Karl Wirkus (Pacific NW Region), Don Glaser (Mid-Pacific Region), Commissioner Connor, Lorri Gray-Lee (Lower Colorado Region) and Mike Ryan (Great Plains Region). Photo courtesy of Andrew Pernick, Bureau of Reclamation.

Highlights from the 2011 Annual Conference



Clockwise from upper L: Reclamation's Terry Fulp discusses the Colorado River Basin study; Reclamation Commissioner Michael Connor; Pat O'Toole delivers introductory remarks; Dan Errotabere shows off his John Keys III Memorial Award, which goes annually to an individual that makes significant contributions towards protecting and enhancing Western irrigated agriculture. Sources: T.J. Burnham and Andrew Pernick, Bureau of Reclamation.



Highlights from the 2010 Annual Conference



Bureau of Reclamation Mid-Pacific Regional Director Don Glaser (above L) caught the attention of many in the audience when he discussed the importance of being innovative and generating support for finding solutions to the very expensive, high profile challenges in California's Bay-Delta. (Photo Courtesy of Andrew Pernick, Bureau of Reclamation). Larry Dozier (above R) poses a question to the Western levee and canal panel on Friday morning.



Alliance President Patrick O'Toole's opening remarks on Thursday morning (above L)—“Our philosophy in the past year has been one of trying to get a seat at the table, as opposed to being on the menu.” Above right, Bureau of Reclamation Deputy Commissioner David Murillo summarized how “Managing for Excellence” (M4E) is being implemented throughout Reclamation, over two years after the process wrapped up. M4E was the Bureau of Reclamation's response to Managing Construction and Infrastructure in the 21st Century Bureau of Reclamation, a comprehensive report completed by the National Research Council. Executing the action plan was a primary initiative for Reclamation during the latter years of the Bush Administration. Photo Courtesy of Andrew Pernick, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

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