

## MOTHER NATURE, DROUGHT AND TRUTH – DEBUNKING THE MYTH

At a November 6 hearing of the Central Platte NRD in Grand Island, Nebraskans First Director Dave Thom of Hastings addressed the board to encourage them not to impose a moratorium on new wells. In part, this is what he said: "I've traveled to Australia for a number of years. Australia has been in a drought for sometime, and so they have gone to an allocation of 30% of normal water use. They are getting rain now and are hoping the lakes will fill back up. In Australia, they blame the drought on Mother Nature. In South Africa, they

are cutting their allocation of water back to just 32% of normal. They blame this on the drought. In California, it is typical to be getting less irrigation water than their full appropriation, but Californians know that the problem is due to lack of snow in the Sierra Mountains. It seems that only here in Nebraska, when we get hit with a drought and our surface water flows are low, do we blame groundwater irrigators."

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### 600 PAGE DRAFT E.I.S. RELEASED

Almost on cue with the introduction of LB 962 and the ongoing paranoia caused by the drought, our friends at the US Fish and Wildlife Service served up their 600-page Environmental Impact Statement (E.I.S.). This massive document is what the Kooperative Agreement Governance Committee folks have been waiting for. The EIS is the USFWS' assessment of what they say needs to be done in the Platte River Basin to improve habitat for target species. This is their initial proposal that they say will be just a first step towards compliance with the Endangered Species Act, while also "providing greater regulatory certainty for water users." Their basin wide preferred plan will, they say, accomplish their objectives in a "comprehensive and collaborative fashion" through regulatory means that are "coordinated and effective." What the EIS recommends is pretty much in line with what the Kooperative Agreement folks are putting together. It will take some time to wade through this lengthy document. We have until April 2, 2004 to provide comments to the USFWS.

Keep this in mind and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. The Kooperative Agreement program is not a done deal. I know the state DNR desperately wants it to be adopted, as do all the environmental groups supporting the USFWS. But none of these people are elected officials. They are bureaucrats who just love this kind of stuff involving more regulations and control of private property and water. All of this will boil down to whether or not Governor Johanns wants to sign off on it. He will first be advised by a diverse group of citizens he put together called the Governor's Platte River Advisory Committee. Then, he will hear from the general public, and more importantly, he will hear from stakeholders - irrigators who stand to lose a great deal if it goes forward. We have met with the governor and advised him that it would not be wise to sign onto a program that will effectively hand over control of the entire Platte River in Nebraska to the USFWS forever under what they call "adaptive management".