

WANTED: Your Input

Public participation is vital to the Bureau of Reclamation as we initiate the NEPA scoping process to determine the feasibility of transferring title of all project facilities in the Ainsworth Irrigation District from Federal to non-Federal ownership. If you would like to offer comments or questions, please fill in this form, detach, and mail to Judy O’Sullivan, Bureau of Reclamation, PO Box 1607, Grand Island, NE 68802.

Name and Address (Optional) _____

Comments: _____

PRSR1 STD

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

GRAND ISLAND, NE

PERMIT NO. 28

Bureau of Reclamation

P.O. Box 1607

Grand Island, NE 68802

Ainsworth Unit Bulletin

Newsletter for the Ainsworth Irrigation District Title Transfer Process

Bureau of Reclamation

Nebraska-Kansas Area Office

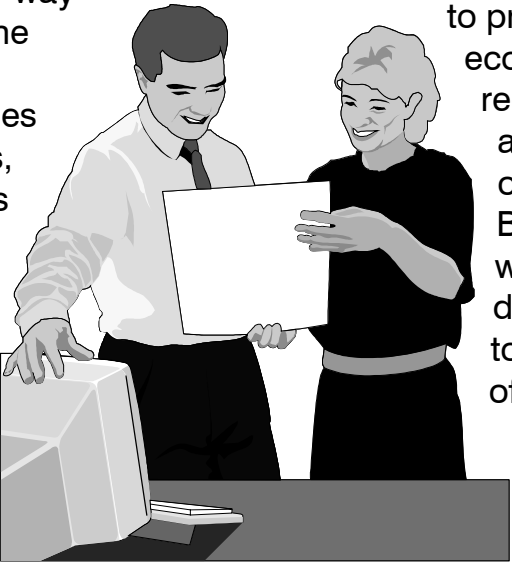
April 2003

WHY THIS NEWSLETTER?

Welcome to the first issue of the *AINSWORTH UNIT BULLETIN*, a periodic newsletter designed to keep interested publics informed about the possible title transfer of the Ainsworth Unit, Merritt Dam and Reservoir, canals, and associated facilities to the Ainsworth Irrigation District. Through this newsletter we will provide information on the transfer and related issues in the Niobrara River Basin and maintain frequent and timely contact with you — our concerned publics.

This first issue provides general information about the transfer process and the facilities which could be transferred. Future issues will not be printed on a set schedule, but as there is a need to share information.

In addition to public meetings, the *AINSWORTH UNIT BULLETIN* is another opportunity to encourage two-way communication throughout the process and provide you with schedules of events, summaries of activities, progress updates, and information on key issues of interest. Each issue will address some of your questions from the initial public scoping meetings as well as those areas of concern which surface as we proceed through the transfer process.



Some of our answers may provoke new questions, and the need for even more specific information. That is exactly what we want — to keep an open, clear, two-way communication channel. To accommodate busy lifestyles and encourage reading of our publication, we will be brief and concise. However, your questions need not be. Please use the opportunity this newsletter provides to share your ideas and concerns with us by filling out and returning the comment form on the back.

WHY IS THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION INTERESTED IN TITLE TRANSFER?

Reclamation was founded in 1902 as a civil works construction agency whose mission was to develop the water resources of the arid western United States in order to promote the settlement and economic development of that region. The results of that work are well known in the hundreds of projects owned by the Bureau of Reclamation that were developed to store and deliver water. If constructed today and located in other parts of the country, many of these public utility facilities would likely be owned, operated, and funded by publicly regulated private corporations or

local government agencies. It has been Reclamation's policy for decades to transfer operation and maintenance of projects to local entities where and when appropriate. In recent years, interest in the actual transfer of title (with its attendant responsibilities) has grown.

For the past several years, Reclamation has been undertaking an effort to transfer title of facilities that could be efficiently and effectively managed by non-Federal entities and that are not identified as having national importance. Since 1996, Reclamation has transferred 13 projects, or parts of projects, in the 17 western states and is currently implementing transfer legislation for three additional projects.

CRITERIA FOR TITLE TRANSFER

Reclamation's *Framework For The Transfer of Title* developed August 7, 1995, references general guidelines for determining projects eligible for transfer. The document also states that the following six major criteria must be met before any project is transferred:

- 1) The Federal Treasury, and thereby the taxpayer's financial interests, must be protected.
- 2) There must be compliance with all applicable State and Federal laws.
- 3) Interstate compacts and agreements must be protected.
- 4) The Secretary's Native American trust responsibilities must be met.
- 5) Treaty obligations and international agreements must be fulfilled.
- 6) The public aspects of the project must be protected.

HOW DOES THE TITLE TRANSFER PROCESS WORK?

In general, title transfer will proceed according to the process as outlined in the Bureau of Reclamation's *Framework for the Transfer of Title*. A summary of the Framework can be found on the Internet at <http://www.usbr.gov/framework.html> or copies are available from Reclamation's Nebraska-Kansas Area Office.

This process encompasses many activities including determining the base value of facilities, soliciting and addressing public issues, and considering the potential effects of a transfer on the environment. Following this, if title transfer is found to be feasible and meets the criteria in the Framework document, an agreement will be negotiated and the appropriate legislation pursued to authorize the transfer of the facilities.

WILL TITLE TRANSFER REQUIRE AN ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW?

Yes. Reclamation is studying the possibility of transferring facilities from federal to non-federal ownership. If the transfer is completed, Reclamation will no longer own the above named facilities and the federal government will no longer have the responsibility or the liability for them. In consideration of these issues and because title transfer is a major significant federal action, Reclamation is required by law to evaluate and disclose to the public the effects of the proposed action and to identify a range of reasonable alternatives. The process by which we will do this is outlined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). At this time it has not been determined whether an environmental assessment (EA)

or environmental impact statement (EIS) will be prepared. Once the public comments and issues are examined, the decision will be made. Reclamation will oversee the preparation of the appropriate NEPA compliance document.

HOW LONG WILL TITLE TRANSFER TAKE?



Because of the number of variables and diverse issues associated with title transfer, we can't provide you with an absolute time frame at this point. If initial scoping indicates that tile transfer is feasible, we expect the NEPA process to be completed by September 2004. The actual transfer would occur soon thereafter when legislation is enacted which specifically authorizes the transfer to be completed.

DOES THE PUBLIC HAVE A VOICE IN THE DECISION?

One of the most important aspects of title transfer is public participation. Reclamation is committed to carrying out any title transfer process in an open and public manner. We are announcing the upcoming scoping meetings for title transfer through this brochure and the local media. In addition to these meetings, there will be other future opportunities for public comment including review of the draft environmental document and during the phase when Congress considers legislation to authorize title transfer.

AINSWORTH UNIT TITLE TRANSFER SCOPING MEETINGS

Beginning at 7 p.m.

**April 23 – Ainsworth Conference Center
Ainsworth, NE**

**April 24 – 4-H Building at Fairgrounds
Valentine, NE**

If you have questions, or need assistance prior to the public meetings, contact Judy O'Sullivan, Public Involvement Specialist, at (308) 389-4622, ext. 211.

Those who attend public meetings will have the opportunity to add their names to the mailing list to receive future copies. You may also receive copies or add your name to the mailing list by sending an e-mail to josullivan@gp.usbr.gov or returning the form on the back of this newsletter.

STAY TUNED

There is much work ahead. When we have more information about the Ainsworth Unit title transfer process, we will share it with you. We request your participation and ask that you stay involved with the process.