

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION – Nebraska-Kansas Area Office
NEPA and Title Transfer Scoping Meetings
Ainsworth, Nebraska – April 23, 2003
Valentine, Nebraska – April 24, 2003

The Bureau of Reclamation's Nebraska-Kansas Area Office (NKAO) recently held the initial National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping meetings for the potential title transfer of the Ainsworth Project Facilities from Federal ownership to the Ainsworth Irrigation District. On April 23, 2003, there was a public scoping meeting in Ainsworth, Nebraska, and on April 24 in Valentine, Nebraska. At both meetings, oral comments were collected through brainstorming group techniques and written comments were submitted via comment cards. Subsequent to these meetings the NKAO has received additional written comments which are summarized below. We will periodically be posting updates as more written comments are received at our office.

In addition to NEPA related comments, Reclamation collected public input, suggestions, and concerns regarding the potential title transfer. Reclamation chose to combine these two public comment opportunities into one meeting in respect for the time commitment required of attendees as well as to become more informed at the beginning of the process of the public's perception of the transfer. Thus, we received a wide range of comments. As related at the meetings, we have separated the comments into those requiring a Reclamation response, those that could more effectively be addressed by the Ainsworth Irrigation District, and those requiring a joint response. Reclamation will be addressing public comments in future Ainsworth Unit Bulletins. If you are not on the mailing list and wish to receive future copies, provide your name and address to josullivan@gp.usbr.gov.

NEPA and Title Transfer Scoping Meetings
Ainsworth, Nebraska – April 23, 2003

COMMENTS RETAINED BY RECLAMATION:

- How does the repayment process work?
- Repayment plan – what money is out there to pay, and who pays?
- What is the cost for title transfer and how is this cost determined?
- Has a cost/benefit analysis been conducted?
- How did Middle Loup title transfer affect farmers?
- Would like to see information on what the cost will be to the District for title transfer.

- Who is paying for the cost of the facilities now?
- Does the debt stay with the Federal Government?
- Does title transfer change or limit access to Federal funding for improvements/maintenance?
- How is funding for improvements/maintenance handled now? (District or Federal funds?)
- What are the criteria for (title transfer)
- What kind of environmental impact would it take to negate this?
- Who will be financially responsible for the maintenance upkeep on Merritt Dam?
- Who is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the dam and will this change with title transfer?
- Concern for liability issues related to the Merritt Dam structure in worse case scenario (dam failure).
- What is the design life of the dam?
- Will the tax structure change on federal lands transferred?
- What happens to the real estate at the dam?
- Where will the checks and balances come from? Oversight?
- Inspections - after transfer will they continue? Who pays for these inspections?
- What role will the USBR have if the title transfer is completed?
- Why does Reclamation want to sell their rights to the Irrigation District?
- Timing of transfer – When?
- Water storage in Merritt Reservoir secured (in District's name) and ensure local control.
- Title transfer will help ensure future livelihood (water delivery) and land values, and offer protection from future environmental regulations, extremists, etc.
- Title transfer and continued water delivery will help ensure economic stability of the rural community.
- Title transfer will enhance local control and decision-making.

- Ainsworth Irrigation District can improve upon fisheries and wildlife benefits.
- Irrigation District is capable of continuing operations at the level they are currently at after accepting title.
- The district is not looking to profit from lands at the reservoir.
- Who controls the surrounding grounds at the reservoir? Leased back out to Nebraska Game and Parks Commission? Public campgrounds?
- Concern that transfer from Federal ownership could result in water quality impacts for recreational purposes.
- Concern that title transfer could impact access to public facilities at Merritt Reservoir.
- Will title transfer change the susceptibility to the endangered species act, etc.?
- Will the storage rights transfer and if so can they be pre-empted?
- Was the original purpose of the dam strictly irrigation or was it multipurpose?
- How low can the Reservoir be drawn down?
- Are there required river releases from the dam?
- The district is not looking to profit from lands at the reservoir.
- The ability to protect the long-term interests of fish and wildlife associated with Merritt Reservoir. The Ainsworth manager and board have not proven trustworthy and in the past have had only their best interests in mind, not even the irrigators/farmers. What would make anyone believe they would consider the best interests of the resources of that system for anything other than profit!
Look into their history and see their record for fish and wildlife conservation and fair dealings!
- Will the District's debt be wiped off if title transfer occurs?
- We are definitely against any change and do not want Merritt transferred to the Ainsworth Irrigation District.
- The Ainsworth Irrigation District has operated the dam and canals for 36 years and is best suited to continue to own and operate the entire facility. The Ainsworth Irrigation District has expertise, the ability, manpower and financial wherewithal to operate the dam and canals.

- It would appear you would be putting control in the hands of those most interested in their projects and not for the care and conservation of the dam and reservoir.
- Good? No! Answers! Some people want answers. No environmental problem brought up.
- Why can't Cherry County have title?
Taxes? Any paid now or will there be to Cherry County?
What does the District pay for water now?
Is there debt on the dam - if so, how much? If title transfers what will happen to the debt?
Current Irrigation District manager (has) problems with Cherry County business owners.
- Ainsworth Irrigation District becomes private/commercial interest:
1) Unresponsive to secondary uses, 2) unwilling/unable to (handle) expense, security or rehabilitation when structure silts in. Does not assure Cherry County input for water originating and stored in Cherry County. Doesn't realize full worth to taxpayers who did initial funding. I am in total opposition to title transfer. Bureau of Reclamation needs to keep it.
- There are currently no problems with the Bureau of Reclamation and Game and Parks managing this area – why change? I don't trust the Irrigation District – especially the manager. Don't believe they would do anything that wouldn't benefit them personally.
- The irrigators paid for it so they should own it. The Federal Government should be happy to get rid of it and the expense.

COMMENTS FORWARDED TO AINSWORTH IRRIGATION DISTRICT

- How long will it take to pay back costs for title transfer?
- If the title transfer was completed and Merritt Dam failed, would FEMA be (or get) involved?
- Is insurance available in case of dam failure? Who will be responsible?
- Is the Irrigation District financially sound? Do they have enough money to maintain the district?
- Piping laterals is expensive – would the district (\$\$) still be able to make improvements to the distribution system?
- Will the landowners in the Irrigation District have a voice in what's going to be done?
- If there is an issue, will the district have time to correct it?

- How will the title transfer benefit Cherry County?
- What would the disadvantage to Cherry County be if the title transfer was completed?
- Is the running of the Irrigation District going to change?
- Assume that the employment level of the District will stay the same?
- Will water cost less with title transfer – especially additional water?
- Will water cost less with title transfer?
- Would the method for determining water allotment or handling water shortages change?
- Why is this title transfer being proposed? What is the benefit of such a transfer?
- 1) Can they put cabins around the lake in the future?
2) Will the Game and Parks receive assistance with the cost of chemical, fence, and other maintenance?
3) What is the main reasoning behind title transfer, i.e. why not leave it the way it is?
- Will the management of the lands around the Merritt Reservoir enable the Ainsworth Irrigation District to allow access or the building of cabins along the lake front? I hope not for wildlife management's sake. How will it affect the lake levels in summer – wildlife vs. farming?
- What are the water conservation practices of the Irrigation District?
If title is transferred who will maintain the dam?
What will the limit of draw down be? (Maximum)
Who will the Irrigation District answer to?
What is the annual cost of maintaining the dam?
What do they charge the consumer now?
What will they charge if they get title?
Could the District sell to out of state users or expand current?
What control of the area will the Nebraska Game and Parks have?
Could they sell lots around the lake?
Current Irrigation District manager (has) problems with Cherry County business owners.

**NEPA and Title Transfer Scoping Meetings
Valentine, Nebraska – April 24, 2003**

COMMENTS RETAINED BY RECLAMATION:

- How will the value of the project be calculated?

- Fair market value of facilities and lands being transferred?
- Without title transfer when would dam be paid off?
- Who can potentially be a title transfer “ownership” candidate? Is the project up for bid?
- Who is eligible for title transfer (state, county, any municipality)?
- Is the District the only entity who could get title? If so, why?
- Does the Ainsworth Irrigation District have the sole rights to title transfer of the project, or could some other entity take title?
- If title transfer occurs, what type of deed will Reclamation give to the Ainsworth Irrigation District (general, quitclaim, warranty, special)?
- Who is the Ainsworth Irrigation District? (Government Agency or private entity?)
- If environmental document says title transfer is O.K., is authorization from congress still required?
- If environmental compliance says no transfer, does it kill the deal?
- If title transferred, who has liability?
- Who has liability if something happens to the facilities?
- Liability – who will be liable for repairs and upkeep of the dam and associated expenses?
- Liability issues associated with the Merritt Dam structure – what happens if there is a failure of the dam?
- Is there currently a debt against the dam, and how will title transfer affect the debt?
- Will the project be transferred free of debt?
- In the past, Reclamation has provided funding assistance to Nebraska Game and Parks for weed control, fencing, chemicals – how will title transfer affect this assistance?
- How many Federal tax dollars were expended in 2002 to operate the Ainsworth Irrigation District?
- Who pays taxes for the project now, and who pays if title is transferred to Ainsworth irrigation District?

- Taken from private, then developed at taxpayers expense, and now (title transfer) transferred to other private entity.
- Concerned about the transfer of water rights from public to private.
- Against title transfer – am happy with the current operation and do not want to see any changes.
- In favor of the title transfer to the Ainsworth Irrigation District – don't see that it will change anything.
- Concern that control of the dam is being put in the hands of those (Ainsworth Irrigation District) whose own interests will come first instead of the whole concept to include everyone's interests.
- Concern that the District may not be the best agency to administer the project's multiple uses.
- Concerns about "future" management decisions if transfer occurs.
- For 36 years the Ainsworth District has operated and maintained the dam and all of the facilities.
- The district has been doing an excellent job with managing – don't see why there would be a problem with title transfer.
- Concerned that after title transfer, the District will be less responsive to public concerns.
- Failure of public involvement would impact economy of the source.
- Think it should be an EIS - more public meetings and opportunity to comment throughout the process.
- Main source of information is from the Ainsworth Irrigation District. The Bureau of Reclamation should be providing information independently.
- When will Reclamation hold general informational meetings as to the results of the transfer meetings? "A.k.a." a follow-up meeting like this to explain the transfer process and its effect on adjoining landowners and resources, so the public can come forth with concerns.
- People who could be affected by title transfer are not being involved (eastern public center).
- Need the local newspapers to put in notice of meetings, and at an earlier date.
- Not enough advance notice for the public involvement process.

- Will the land in the District go on the tax rolls if title transfer takes place?
- Can Reclamation reduce the perimeter around the reservoir, and if so, could others buy for an inflated price which raises taxes for all others in proximity?
- Will there be any changes in land taxes and tax base in Cherry County?
- How much does Cherry County get in lieu of taxes?
- Why can't Cherry County get title transfer to County?
- Concern that there is a value to the water leaving Cherry County. Cherry County needs to be represented in the future in case title transfer is accomplished.
- Does this give Ainsworth Irrigation District water rights and how far up the river would it go?
- District doesn't charge for water, they charge for service.
- What is the #1 priority for the use of Merritt Reservoir water?
- Increased draw-downs will impact fisheries and increase shoreline erosion.
- What is the life expectancy of the dam? Is silting monitored? Are silt models run and are they accurate?
- When dam fills with silt, what happens?
- How will silt at the dam be handled? How long before silt becomes major problem?
- When it silts in, what then?
- Will the Ainsworth Irrigation District be responsible for the silting in of the dam? Will they do the dredging?
- The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission leases the land around the reservoir. If title transfer occurs, will that lease remain in effect? When does it expire? Can any of the provisions be changed?
- Who controls the land around Merritt Lake now and will that change?
- Need to bring people up to date on the project and its history. This should have been included as part of the introduction at the Ainsworth Scoping Meetings.
- When will the questions and comments from this meeting be answered?

- Why can't our questions be answered? When can they be answered?
- How will these answers be distributed?
- Can/will the answers to these questions be put in the Ainsworth Bulletin?

COMMENTS FORWARDED TO AINSWORTH IRRIGATION DISTRICT

- Why change the way the project is operated now?
- If there are major repairs of part of the entire system – especially major failure of the dam itself – who is responsible? The District, farmers as users, State of Nebraska, Federal Government, Brown County as a public entity, or Cherry County?
- Safety of the dam – will the District continue annual examination and can they afford it?
- What is the main objective of this title transfer (for the District and Reclamation)? Why right now? Is there a deadline/cut-off date for the title transfer?
- Why does the District want to assume the liability and responsibility for the project from the Federal Government?
- Seems like Ainsworth irrigation District's taking title would increase their liability. Why are they willing to take this risk?
- Does the District have the resources and funding to handle catastrophic events?
- Does Ainsworth Irrigation District have the funds to maintain Merritt Dam on a long term basis?
- Would the Ainsworth Irrigation District be willing to purchase long term liability property insurance?
- What guarantee will there be that the Ainsworth Irrigation District will not walk away from major operation and maintenance issues?
- Who would the Ainsworth Irrigation District answer to if the title transfer goes through?
- If title is transferred to Ainsworth Irrigation District, who will they answer to?
- If the Irrigation District operates under specific Federal guidelines, will they still apply after the transfer? Who will the District have to answer to?
- If District gets title, will Reclamation still have oversight?

- Who would have oversight of the District after title transfer? If public had concerns, who would they go to?
- If the title transfer goes through, will the District have permanent control without public input and concerns, or will there be periodic reviews (that involve public opinion)? The District has been doing a good job, but what about after title transfer and in the future?
- At present, under Federal ownership everyone has a say in the operation of the project. If title transfer is accomplished, how will Cherry County be represented?
- Can Cherry County be involved in management of the project?
- Can Cherry County receive compensation for water originating in Cherry County?
- Water originates, is stored in, and is piped out of Cherry County, with no revenues to Cherry County. What happens to the money that farmers pay for the water? Can any of this money be available for Cherry County?
- In the future, would Cherry County get paid for any of the water, or will only Brown County (Ainsworth District) continue to receive payment? Irrigators pay Brown County for water and not Cherry County.
- Good water – could it be shipped out of state? Should Cherry County be compensated (i.e. water from public lands)?
- Could the Irrigation District (Ainsworth) or whoever governs water distribution at Merritt Lake sell the water to entities other than themselves?
- If the District owns, can they sell to anyone?
- Could the District sell water to out-of-state users?
- If they get title, can they resell?
- How does the fee structure work now and how will it work if the title transfer goes through?
- Will the water rates of the District go up if the title is transferred?
- How will title transfer effect rates?
- If transfer occurs, who does the Ainsworth District answer to regarding water use, i.e. how much is taken from reservoir, will water be used for irrigation only, and can water be diverted for other purposes?
- The District pays the Bureau of Reclamation for water now. After title transfer, who would they pay? Water service contract?

- What is the maximum drawdown at the lake if title is transferred?
- For 2 out of the last 3 years there were extensive drawdowns. If title transfer occurs, what control mechanisms will be on the Irrigation District as to how much water they can draw, and on monitoring conservation efforts?
- Who is going to have control over water levels?
- Does Nebraska operate with a water master? Who determines water release schedule?
- Could a minimum elevation (or pool) be specified as part of the title transfer?
- Could the water levels be managed differently than has been the case historically?
- Concern that there will be an increase in irrigated acres and reservoir draw-down if title transfer is accomplished.
- How will the water level in the Reservoir and downstream releases be affected under a title transfer to the District?
- Would the District take responsibility for downstream issues (flood plain)?
- Who will be responsible for damages, and the costs involved, caused by irrigation (erosion, flooding, stream degradation).
- Ainsworth Irrigation District has said there will be no changes in operation if title transfer occurs. There are always many changes in life. What protection will the public have from hydropower development, real estate development, and increasing irrigation acres?
- Can the District expand the base of users?
- Will water be used for irrigation only?
- Could the District seek to use water from Merritt Reservoir for power generation?
- Concern with hydropower – who will control the revenue and electrical generation?
- What kind of security will there be, especially if a power plant is built?
- Concerned that there is a planned hydropower generation system to be installed at Merritt. Who pays – taxpayers? What are the possible impacts to fisheries? Who gets the power?
- Concerns about moving ahead with electrical (hydropower) plans without meaningful public involvement. Title transfer could speed up that process.

- Would the open space around Merritt Reservoir be further developed, reducing the recreation value of this open space?
- Could the District sell any of the lands at the reservoir?
- Will the land management around the reservoir stay the same? Will Nebraska Game and Parks Commission continue current management? Who will the District answer to?
- If title transfer occurs, who will manage the grounds around the lake? Will it continue to be the state? What assurance do we have of this?
- Will the Nebraska Game and Parks fisheries experience any changes due to the title transfer?
- If title transfer occurs, will the business and fishery interests be looked out for?
- District planning on offering Nebraska Game and Parks a conservation easement?
- Who would Nebraska Game and Parks report to if title is transferred?
- Would the Ainsworth Irrigation District replace lost land management subsidies to Nebraska Game and Parks Commission?

COMMENTS TO BE ADDRESSED THROUGH JOINT RESPONSE

- What is each side (Reclamation and the Ainsworth Irrigation District) looking at gaining and losing from the title transfer?
- What are the pros and cons of title transfer for Reclamation and the Ainsworth Irrigation District?
- If the Irrigation District operates under specific Federal guidelines, will they still apply after the transfer? Who will the District have to answer to?
- River releases are made in coordination with the trout fisheries.
- Will the timing of water releases (rate and amount) be managed to protect the trout fishery below the dam?
- Will title transfer effect any future usages such as hydroelectric power, shipping out of water – or what if farming conditions change, or there are other future changes?
- If hydropower is added to the project, will the District receive all the benefits?
- Will the Ainsworth Irrigation District be able to develop the land around the lake?

Proposed Ainsworth Title Transfer Comments and Letters

No./Date Received	From	Format	Subject Matter
4/29/03 #030488	Unsigned Valentine, NE	Letter	Against title transfer to Ainsworth District. Concerned the Irrigation District would manage the project for personal gain (particularly with regard to drawdowns affecting fisheries and recreation) as well as relations with concessionaires
4/29/03 #030489	Unsigned Long Time Valentine, NE resident	Letter	Against title transfer to Ainsworth District – satisfied with current management by Reclamation and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Concerned the Irrigation District would manage the project for personal instead of public gain. If title transfer MUST occur – consider Cherry County as a candidate.
4/30/03 #030490	Unsigned Valentine, NE Business Owner	Letter	Satisfied with current operations management and is concerned the Ainsworth Irrigation District would not manage the project at the high standard currently experienced and would manage for personal and not public gain. Asks that we “move very carefully on this transfer.” It is an “issue of utmost importance” to the area.
4/30/03 #030491	Marian Davenport Concessionaire 143 South Main St Valentine, NE	Letter	Against title transfer to Ainsworth Irrigation District who has history of not being cooperative or openly communicative with others who have an interest in Merritt, including Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and concession owners. Concerned no one will oversee the District’s actions, and they might develop the area around the lake (businesses) Can an entity other than Ainsworth I.D. take title? “Please reconsider this action most carefully.”
5/1/03 #030492	Bernard Eklund 805 N. Green St. Valentine, NE	Letter	Thinks a “high level of cooperation” amongst the Ainsworth I. D., NEG&P, and concession owners is vital to maintain both fishing and irrigation. Mutual agreement/ground rules must be reached on drawdown levels, life of the structure, repairs/improvements needed and funded, feasibility of power generation or sale of public areas for housing.
5/1/03 #030493	Mark Schubauer Business Owner DBA Corner Market 133 E 2 nd St. Valentine, NE	Letter	Wants Reclamation and NGPC to continue running things. Concerned Ainsworth District will draw down the lake too much, hurting the area’s recreation industry. Understands District can take title but doesn’t favor it – concerned about liability issues.
5/1/03 #030494	Unsigned Valentine, NE	Letter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Will the Ainsworth I. D. pay real estate taxes on project property? -Will NGPC continue to oversee conservation? -Will the District be able to sell lots around the lake for development? -Where else in the U. S. has an Irrigation District purchased a dam?

NO./DATE RECEIVED	FROM	FORMAT	SUBJECT MATTER
5/1/03 #030495	Stephen Isom Valentine, NE	Letter	Against title transfer to Ainsworth District -Will Cherry County receive tax money from the District? -Does Ainsworth I. D. have the funds and expertise to maintain the project? -Can title be transferred to another entity, such as Cherry County? - Who will the District answer to? - To what levels could lake be drawn down? -Could the District sell water to another state or expand consumer base? -What does and will the District do to conserve water? A. Usage, B. Evaporation -Concerned as to who will control the relationship of the Irrigation District management with local businesses and leasing entities.
5/2/02 #030496	Jerry Rhoades City Council Business Owner Rhodes Electric Valentine, NE	Letter	Against title transfer – Concerned about maintaining the recreational use of the lake, which is so important to Valentine’s economy. Also concerned that Cherry County receives NO revenue form the water flow from that county. Will there be any future changes?
5/2/03 #030497	Cork & Mary Young Business owners Young’s Western Wear Valentine, NE	Letter	Against title transfer – Urge Reclamation to continue management. If not, then turn over to Cherry County. Concerned the Irrigation District will not manage for fish and recreation – negative economic impact on the community.
5/7/03 #030498	Cherry County Resident	Comment Card	FORWARDED TO DISTRICT: 1. What is the payroll of each Ainsworth Irrigation District employee including management (Benefits, Bonuses, etc.) 2. Are Ainsworth Irrigation District Board members compensated? 3. Who audits the Districts financial records and how frequently?
5/12/03 #030514	Toby Miller	Letter	Against transfer to any other non-federal organization. Believes Reclamation is only entity capable of dealing with liability issues, dredging and maintaining a lake and further property transfers
5/13/03 #030519	Michael T. Varn Fisherman	Letter	Against title transfer – general public would not be well served by such. Concerns of loss of public access to the reservoir or an expensive fee based system for fishing implemented. If transfer does occur, should have an enforceable guarantee that the area will remain open to public for fishing and related activities
5/15/03 #030529	Unsigned	Letter	Against title transfer to the District. Feels public would not be well served. Reconsider – give Cherry County some time and a choice

NO./DATE RECEIVED	FROM	FORMAT	SUBJECT MATTER
5/17/03 #030538	Bart Weaver Concerned citizen	Letter	Against title transfer – Why the change? If not broken, don't fix it – concerned that the public will be harmed by the transfer. If Cherry county lost proceeds from recreation they would have nothing.
5/22/03 #030563	Unsigned	Letter	Against title transfer. Concerned the project would be managed for personal gain rather than public good. Question the ability of the Ainsworth Irrigation District to work amicably with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
6/1/03 #030602	Francis E. Bejot Bejot Feed Lots	Letter	Support title transfer – feels would be beneficial to all concerned
6/16/03 #030641	Robert S. Miles Long time resident, farmer and cattle feeder Ainsworth, NE	Letter	Support title transfer – District has done an excellent job of management for last 35 years. Other state and federal agencies provide a regulatory framework District must comply with and outside expertise can be obtained by District if needed. Title transfer would allow local control by people most familiar with project.
6/18/03 #030651	Jim Newport Long Pine	Letter	In favor of title transfer. Ultimately, the success depends on the mgt. by the local board – feels they are very capable.
6/25/03 #030676	Concerned Citizen Cherry County	Letter	Support title transfer. District works well with the public and do good maintenance. Concerned about marina operations.
7/7/03 #030707	Sheila M. Lead	Letter	Concerned about title transfer affection the recreational facilities and the water table in the surrounding ranching area
7/14/03 #030740	Paul Plate, Farmer	Letter	Supports title transfer – project should become property of those it was designed to benefit
7/28/03 #030787	Ken Hollopeter Resident & Business Owner in Valentine	Letter	Concerned if the District will still maintain the program as it is now and protect the interests of wildlife and the public
8/12/03 #030846	Stephen Isom Business owner in Valentine	Comment Form	Concerning 2 nd edition of the <i>Ainsworth Unit Bulletin</i> (which can be linked from this website): Some answers were to vague: #4 – What do they pay for water? #9 – What is the cost? No dollar amount shown. #16 – Will the District be able to develop the land? #28 – How far up the river? #20 – Why didn't Reclamation hire someone to do the (environmental) study rather than the District hiring someone? If District is paying for the study is that a conflict of interest?
7/28/03 #030788	Stephen Isom Business owner in Valentine	Letter	Against title transfer to the District. If transfer occurs: (a) Could have negative impact on entire Merritt reservoir, Snake River, Boardman Creek and the scenic Niobrara River systems

			<p>(b) Irrigation District could install a hydropower system</p> <p>(c) No system of checks and balances</p> <p>(d) How would Board of Directors (as irrigators) handle the misuse of water?</p> <p>(e) District is a special interest group in Brown county trying to get title to land in Cherry County where all the district water comes from. If title is transferred it should go back to Cherry County or State of Nebraska and be leased to the District for water use.</p> <p>Concerned that the environmental document is being done by a private consultant hired by the District. The assessment does not take in the whole picture. Environmental assessment should be done by Reclamation.</p> <p>Current management of water for irrigation and recreation is working well with Reclamation. Need a checks and balance system to ensure sound management is continued so that recreation and tourism are not impacted.</p>
August 22, 2003 #030881	Bill Ward	Letter	Oppose title transfer to the Ainsworth Irrigation District as to their management abilities. Also concerned about the impact to Cherry County taxpayers.
November 12, 2003 #031156	Kenneth D. Bay	Letter	Opposed to title transfer. Wants Reclamation to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement rather than an EA. Concerned that the Ainsworth Irrigation District does not have the financial base to maintain and provide for the needs of the future of Merritt.
Dec 5, 2003 #031217	Steve Bartak Farmer/landowner in Brown County	Letter	Supports title transfer. Feels the Ainsworth Irrigation District delivers an excellent water supply on a timely basis and at a reasonable cost. Confident the District would continue to do the same if they held title to the project.
Dec. 3, 2003 #031210	Ed Heinert, President of the Niobrara River Outfitters Inc.	Letter	Oppose title transfer. Feel the natural resources of the reservoir, the downstream Snake River and the Niobrara National Scenic River would be put at great risk of degradation. Feel the Ainsworth Irrigation District cannot achieve the cooperation, management goals, or funding necessary to maintain a balanced ecosystem for either river system. Liability – Does the District have funding to cover downstream liabilities? We don't believe they have the funding for major emergencies. Also concerned that the Ainsworth Irrigation District is supporting a hydro power proposal for Merritt Dam and the firm doing the environmental work for transfer is a partner in the corporation doing the hydropower study. Believe the fisheries of Merritt and its indirect resources plus the Snake and Niobrara Rivers would be negatively impacted by a hydropower plant.

No./Date Received	From	Format	Subject Matter
Dec. 15, 2003 #031252	Frank Williams	Letter	Supports title transfer
Dec. 16, 2003 #031260	Daniel Moody	Letter	Supports title transfer
Dec. 17, 2003 #031263	Tony Bloomquist Landowner in Brown County and business owner in Norfolk	Letter	Supports title transfer rather than contract renewal for the Ainsworth Irrigation District
Dec. 19, 2003 #031271	Kelly Boettcher Minnesota	Letter	Plans to relocate to Ainsworth Area in the future. Supports the District getting title to the project to ensure the viability of the area
Dec. 22, 2003 #031279	Neil & Betty Fernau Ainsworth LandOwners	Letter	Support the District taking title. They have successfully operated the project for the last 40 years and will continue to do so.
2004			
Jan. 5, 2004 #040003	Archie & Audrey Christensen Ainsworth Landowners	Letter	Favor the District taking title to the project. It is a must for the Sandhills to continue to grow and prosper – without irrigation that would not be possible.
Jan. 16 #040062	Don Brudny Gretna, Nebraska	E-mail	Against title transfer. Concerned that Ainsworth Irrigation District has shown little regard for protection of the area and are only concerned with selling water to their customers. Have drawn down the reservoir in recent years to record low levels having negative impact on the wildlife and also increasing erosion. Nebraska has few recreation areas of this quality and we need to protect the ones we have.
Jan. 21	Francis E. Bejot	Letter recd by Fax	Supports title transfer as a Landowner and farmer in the Ainsworth Irrigation District.