



Douglas RWD 1 and RWD 5 Sign Agreement for Continued Contract Services

During the past thirty years, Douglas County RWD 1 has closed its inadequate water treatment plant and contracted for water from the City of Lawrence, developed agreements with the City on annexation issues and the District's service to Clinton Lake State Park, installed radio-read meters and mapped the District's infrastructure, completed KRWA's Board training program, and generally adapted to changing economic and political conditions.

In the fall 2011 issue of *The Kansas Lifeline*, Douglas County RWD 1 reported the benefits of working with KRWA to map the District's infrastructure and locate water line leaks. The article also included information on RWD 1's decision to not hire a replacement when their District Manager retired, but to contract with Douglas County RWD 5 to provide the on-site assistance. This is a one-year anniversary update on how that contractual relationship between two rural water districts has worked out.

Briefly, RWD 1's District Manager not only performed the normal responsibilities (e.g., monthly radio-read of meters, collecting unpaid bills), but also had a backhoe business and installed meters, lines, and made repairs for the District. An analysis of both work responsibilities and candidates applying for the position revealed that the District needed only a part-time employee if he/she did not also operate a backhoe service. For cost and management reasons, the decision was made to contract with RWD 5 because that district would have four full-time employees to provide

Reviewing the relationship after one year . . .

At the one year anniversary of the contractual agreement for contract services by Douglas RWD 1 with Douglas RWD 5, RWD 1's Board of Directors reviewed and approved the on-going contractual relationship with District 5 because RWD 1 patrons are receiving better service from four employees than from one, operations and leak repairs are more efficient with four employees than with one, and the employee cost to District 1 is less for those four people than for the previous District employee. In addition, while capital expenditures were higher during the first year of the contract as ignored maintenance issues were addressed, water losses are lower and water system performance is improved.

Lessons Learned

District #1's Board confirmed that:

- ❖ The District remains a viable water district without a District Manager, instead relying on knowledgeable contract employees;
- ❖ Two rural water districts can very cost-effectively collaborate on employee, vehicle, and other shared expenditures;
- ❖ Multiple persons familiar with a water district provide superior patron services and are more likely to complete the "small" tasks that make a district operation more effective;
- ❖ District 1's Office Manager can effectively coordinate work assignments for the District 5 employees in partnership with District 5's management team;
- ❖ Contracting for services reduces employee compensation expenditures for both districts, thereby reducing upward pressures on patron water rates; and,
- ❖ Flexibility, planning, evolution, and regional cooperation do not mean loss of "control" for District 1.

coverage 24 hours, 7 days per week. It was anticipated that the contractual relationship would result in lower costs to District 1 (contract payments were less than salary and benefits of the previous Manager, and District 1 no longer would need a truck). While those savings may yet accrue after deferred system capital maintenance investments are completed, there have been significant operational benefits to the District's patrons because of the number and knowledge of District 5's employees.

As was previously reported, District #1's Manager did not report nor repair "small" leaks on the distribution system and therefore the District's Board could not reduce the water loss rate. District 5's multiple employees permit them to identify and repair all leaks. Furthermore, in making those repairs they also locate previously unknown valves on the system, thereby resulting in a more accurate system map; implement District #1's meter replacement program (with a one million gallon threshold), and install signage for underground valves.

District 1's Board of Directors remains in control of water rates, capital investments, and other primary functions related to operating a water district. Patrons call the Office Manager of District 1 and payments for water are made to the District. The City of Lawrence provides all treated water and negotiates annexation and other issues with District 1. District 1's Board must provide prior approval of all major expenditures of money and personnel time. In addition, District 1's Office Manager provides work orders (e.g., line locate requests, patron issues) to District 5's employees each day.

RWD 5's employees provide counsel and labor in providing exemplary customer service to our patrons. For example, a County bridge replacement program resulted in RWD 1 needing to relocate service lines. Because of legacy demand issues, the District had 1½-, 2-, and 4-inch lines running parallel to each other with meters on both sides of the road being served from each water line. The Board determined that abandoning the smaller two lines was appropriate and separately decided to minimize digging in patrons' front yards. District 5's employees accepted that many more 45 to 70 degree "turns" in the 4 inch water line would be necessary, with the resultant risks to system integrity, but honored District 1's desire to minimize impact

on patrons. This was particularly important because one of the patron's lateral system is in his front yard, just off the original water line easement.

District 1 and RWD 5 both needed water towers inspected, serviced, and painted. Packaging both projects resulted in lower bids to perform the services and allowed the contractor to more efficiently use equipment and manpower. This was particularly important when high winds prevented the exterior painting of District 1's tower and the crew could be used in District 5's tower, rather than "sitting" around waiting for the wind to slow.

District 1 and District 5 each needed a half-time new employee, but could not justify the expense of a full-time employee with the available workload. Combining the workload and contracting for services permitted District 5 to hire a full-time employee and the Districts essentially share District 5's four employees. This was particularly beneficial because District 5 now has two young employees being trained to succeed their two older workers, thereby creating a succession plan for both districts.

Thomas Sloan has been Chairman and Director of Douglas RWD 1 west of Lawrence for the past 27 years. He has also represented the 45th District in the Kansas House since 1995. He and Gail raise registered Columbia sheep and have three adult children and two grandchildren. Tom is a member of the Dept. of Energy's Electricity Advisory Committee, Federal Communications Commission's Intergovernmental Advisory Committee, Chairman of the Vision 2020 Committee, and he received the KRWA Friend of Rural Water award in 1996.



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