

Bits & Pieces . . .

Great Bend plans to issue \$7.8 million in bonds for water, wastewater systems

The city of Great Bend recently advanced towards the issuance of \$6 million in bonds for new water system improvements and another \$1.8 million to refinance existing debt.

The council approved ordinances to authority the sale of bonds to refinance a 2007 water system improvement bond which would reduce the interest rate from 3.9 percent to 1.55 percent and call a 2009 sewer improvement loan through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and refinance it with a general obligation bond, reducing interest from 3.1 to 2.23 percent according to the *Great Bend Tribune*.

The city was initially considering a \$3.1 million project to improve waterlines in downtown Great Bend. But because of historically low interest rates and an aging system, the city council expanded the scope to include more pipeline.

A 15 percent increase is anticipated in the water rate. The city of Great Bend purchased the municipal water system from Central Kansas Utilities in 1999.

Conway Springs approves funding for water system

A funding package of nearly \$8 million is planned for the city of Conway Springs in Sumner County in south-central Kansas. Conway Springs has a population of approximately 1,225 people.

Doug Goetz with Wilson & Company, the project consultant, reported in the *Conway Springs Star/Argonia Argosy* that in the next two years, the city would be installing new water wells, constructing a new water storage tank and upgrading distribution lines. In addition the city will construct a water treatment plant.

The proposed funding is as follows:

- ◆ The city will contribute \$495,000 of internal funds
- ◆ USDA Rural Development will provide a grant totally \$2.85 million
- ◆ USDA Rural Development will loan the city \$2.4 million for the project
- ◆ The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has approved a \$1.6 million loan for the project
- ◆ KDHE has also agreed to provide \$697,000 in principal forgiveness to the city.
- ◆ The funding from USDA will be for installation of the new wells, water storage tank and pipeline. The KDHE loan will be used to construct the water treatment plant.

The city has had compliance issues with the nitrate standard of 10 mg/l. According to the city's Consumer Confidence Report for 2015, the nitrate ranged from 9.8 mg/L to a high of 13 mg/L.

Pretty Prairie votes to proceed with nitrate removal plant

The city of Pretty Prairie recently voted to proceed with funding applications to construct a nitrate removal plant for their public water system. South-Central Kansas Economic Development District (SCKEDD) is preparing a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application in the amount of \$500,000 for the project, leaving \$917,600 to be applied for under a loan through the Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Fund.

The KDHE loan provides a 30 percent principal forgiveness for the treatment facility.

The city has received numerous enforcement actions by KDHE and EPA since the 1990's with regard to the nitrate level. According to the city's 2015 Consumer Confidence Report, the nitrate tested 19.7 to 21 mg/L. The city has a population of fewer than 700, and provides service through approximately 300 service connections. It should be noted that the city has provided bottled water for many years to citizens with children less than one year old who might be affected by the nitrate level. EPA employees, KDHE employees, engineers, and grant writers all agree that the city should build a nitrate removal treatment plant because providing bottled water is not appropriate.



Graphic by Linda Windler

Other Voices:

— from *Hutchinson News*, July 15

Where the state has declined to take assertive action to save the groundwater resources in western Kansas, two farmers have taken the initiative and shown everyone else that conservation is the only way.

In a small area in the Colby area of northwest Kansas, the farmers voluntarily have pledged to reduce their water usage by 20 percent for at least five years. And the initial results are promising: In the so called Local Enhanced Management Area, or LEMA, state officials report that the water table, which had been dropping rapidly each year for decades, is now showing a slight increase.

It's the first of its kind in Kansas. But we are going to need many more of them if the state continues to forgo its responsibility to regulate water usage in a part of the state where water rights were way over appropriated years ago.

That miscalculation opened the doors to extensive irrigation, allowing farmers to grow corn and other water intensive crops in a region where the annual precipitation otherwise wouldn't support it.

But the vast underground ocean known as the Ogallala Aquifer has been steadily drying up as a result and now can't be relied on as a long term water resource.

One way or another, there will be a day of reckoning. Sheridan County farmer Roch Meier would rather confront that reality sooner than later.

"I'd rather irrigate 10 inches a year for 30 years than put on 30 inches for 10 years," Meier said. "I want it for my grandkids."

It's not the only conservation measure that smart, forward thinking farmers are taking. They also are planting more

drought tolerant corn and other crops. Western Kansas could use more environmentally conscious farmers, and the state needs to aid, if not prod, in ramping up LEMAs and other water conservation programs.

Incentives and voluntary behavior modification always are preferable to government mandates and regulation.

But the state needs to be ready to step in if more farmers don't see the wisdom of what Meier and others are doing.

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