

SRBC Tells Staff

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during a series of public hearings held prior to the July 14 SRBC meeting. The hearings were held to gather input about the impact of regulations as proposed in the June 8, 1994 issue of the Federal Register (Vol. 59 No. 109, page 29563).

While there were a number of comments already presented during the early hearings, the gist of comments by representatives from agriculture were similar to the position of the state Department of Agriculture.

PDA's response to the proposal was that, while applauding the effort to manage the life-sustaining resource that the water in the basin is, agriculture should be exempt from having to pay for the use of water, and also from having to pay for the monitoring and application for the use.

The PDA also asked for an extension on the amount of time that the public can provide comment on the proposed regulations. That extension was granted by the commission. The comment period

has been extended from August 1 to Sept. 1, 1994.

Cairo said the response from the commission means that the staff is "taking a new direction" in the way it is to approach agricultural consumptive uses of water within the basin.

"I think it demonstrates the responsiveness of the commission to agriculture," Cairo said.

Actually, the commission's decision came prior to the full run of eight scheduled public hearings on a set of proposed regulations that the commission staff had designed in order to control the use of water within the basin.

At primary issue is the withdrawal of waters in the basin for

consumptive uses. Consumptive uses are those that do not return the water to the flows of the basin, but rather eliminate it through a variety of means, such as evapotranspiration.

Based on a historic low flow, estimates are that 40 percent of the water in the Susquehanna River currently would never reach the Chesapeake Bay based on known consumptive uses. At the present rate of consumptive use, it is projected that after the year 2000, that would increase to more than 60 percent of the river's flow.

The commission is an autonomous inter-governmental pact formed in 1971 to manage the flow

of water in the basin. The commission is seated by the respective heads of the environmental agencies for Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York.

Included in a several-piece draft of the commission's proposed changes to regulations is a limit on the amount of free water that could be used by agriculturalists to feed livestock or water plants.

While most traditional farming techniques used in the basin do not exceed the threshold for free consumptive use, there are an increasing number of non-traditional operations which do consume quantities of water in excess of the proposed threshold.

However, since the majority of farms, because of the acres of open lands used for animal and plant production, also serve as significant contributors to groundwater recharge, as opposed to residential water consumers, it has been argued that agriculture should be exempt from the regulations which require compensation.

According to Richard Cairo, the staff will be making some significant changes to the proposed regulations which will require another series of public hearings. Therefore, the extension for comment on the current proposal was not made as lengthy, in order to move on with getting the new proposals, yet to be developed, out before the public.

Cairo said Thursday, during a telephone interview that "... after getting the basic concepts together, we will get people from the ag committee (to the SRBC) to look it over, and then call a meeting of the full ag committee.

"We will have to repropose and will have to hold hearings again. (The commission) made a change in direction, (the staff got) clear instructions to go back and (redraft)."

Included with the regular meeting report issued this week was a special announcement that outlined the background of the situation and reported on possible direction that the staff may take in redrafting.

"As a result of (public hearing input), the commission unanimously supported a motion by Commissioner Caren Glotfelty (who is the alternate commission member for state DER Secretary Arthur Davis) which directed staff to develop a new approach to regulating consumptive water use by agriculture.

"The commissioners directed staff to convene a group of representatives of the agricultural community to discuss potential options for revision of the proposed consumptive use regulation as it affects agricultural consumptive uses,

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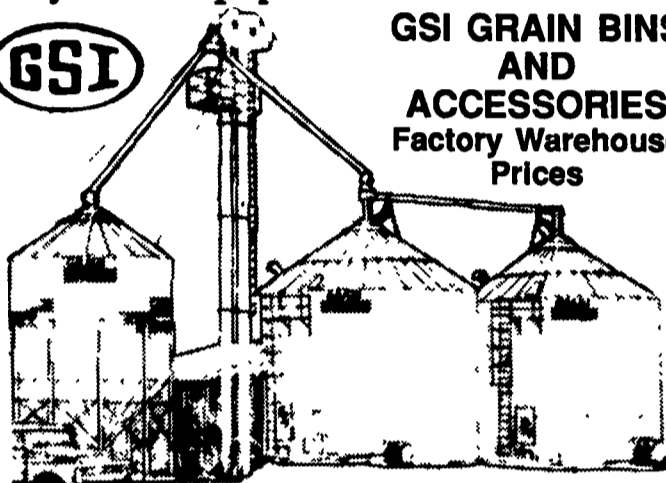
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