

SRBC Ag Committee Supports Proposed Regulations

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land's water registration program and talked about consumptive use in agriculture. In short, Maryland has instituted a purely informational program of registration and priority volunteer management, with respect to its water uses.

Over broader interest to all farmers was the presentation on regulations proposed by the SRBC.

The SRBC is an autonomous, federal-state compact with the responsibility and authority to regulate the flow of water within the entire basin of the Susquehanna River. That basin includes portions of New York state, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

The commission members are the heads of the respective state environmental agencies and the United States secretary of the interior.

The agency formed in 1970 and since created a series of regulations that were not necessarily formed to interlock smoothly.

Last summer, the SRBC proposed a complete revision of all its regulations, in order to eliminate confusion, frustration, and wasted time.

The regulations should be considered to be two-parts.

One part deals with the function of commission, such as how it will hold meetings, how it administers its water-withdrawal approval process, and how it registers and tracks water use within the basin.

This is the part that is now under consideration.

The second part of the regulations — which are not now being considered for approval — deal with controlling the removal of water from the basin above natural losses due to water use.

This second portion of the regulations was the most contested last summer, especially by agricultural interests.

As it was proposed, a "make-up" requirement would have been charged to "consumptive" users of water, including agricultural uses.

Water is consumed within the basin when it is changed from its liquid state into a gaseous state. As an example, the steam clouds rising above the cooler tower at Three-Mile Island nuclear power facility are an example of taking river water and removing it from the basin.

It was reported that during a severe drought, as much as 40 percent of the river would be converted and diverted out of the river flows by such actions.

As a way of making up for these losses to the river's flow, the SRBC had proposed either arranging to stockpile water reserves to be used during drought, or paying a compensatory fee. With the funds raised, the SRBC would pay the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to release water from up-river reservoirs to augment the flows of the drought-stricken river.

The proposal had included fees for agriculture. The resulting debate largely resulted in an acknowledgement by the SRBC that traditional agricultural operations within the basin — those that maintain a large amount of land capable of absorbing rainfall and recharging groundwater — perhaps actually provide more benefit to the river.

At the same time, public water companies were proposed to also fall under the consumptive regulations, since they are controlling the sale of providing water in large quantities.

The water companies have

balked, complaining that the water consumed by their customers is not under their control; that the companies are merely the providers of water and shouldn't be held responsible for the lack of water conservation.

All of these issues and more, which affect the consumption of water and its makeup (including how much credit agriculture gets for maintaining beneficial watershed and how it is determined), have been put on hold since the eight public hearing held last summer.

The regulations that are on the table now would require agricultural users of water which withdraw in excess of 10,000 gallons per day (on a 30-day use average) from either groundwater or surface water to register that use with the SRBC.

All agricultural organizations and supporters present at the meeting urged the support for this portion of the regulations.

The registration of water use by agriculture will protect those who may well likely find themselves in dispute with others attempting to take water from the same aquifer or surface water source.

According to David Heicher, representative of the SRBC, the SRBC prioritizes agricultural water use as a second level priority. Residential uses and non-emergency uses have less priority.

If a farmer's use of water is documented, the SRBC will have record of that and that record can be used in the future to protect the rights of the farmer to continue to use at least that much.

Though the future of regulations isn't known, with demand upon limited water supplies ever-increasing, increased controversy over proprietary uses can be expected.

The registration of water use would be simple, according to Leon Ressler, who also happens to sit on the SRBC agricultural advisory board. The SRBC would provide a simple, one-page form to complete.

Ressler said that while purposefully inflated reports of farm water uses (which some might consider possibly doing for the purpose of ensuring access to more than currently used water supplies) would not be allowed, farmers are encouraged to provide the peak amount of water used during a 30-day average, even if it doesn't break the 10,000 gpd threshold.

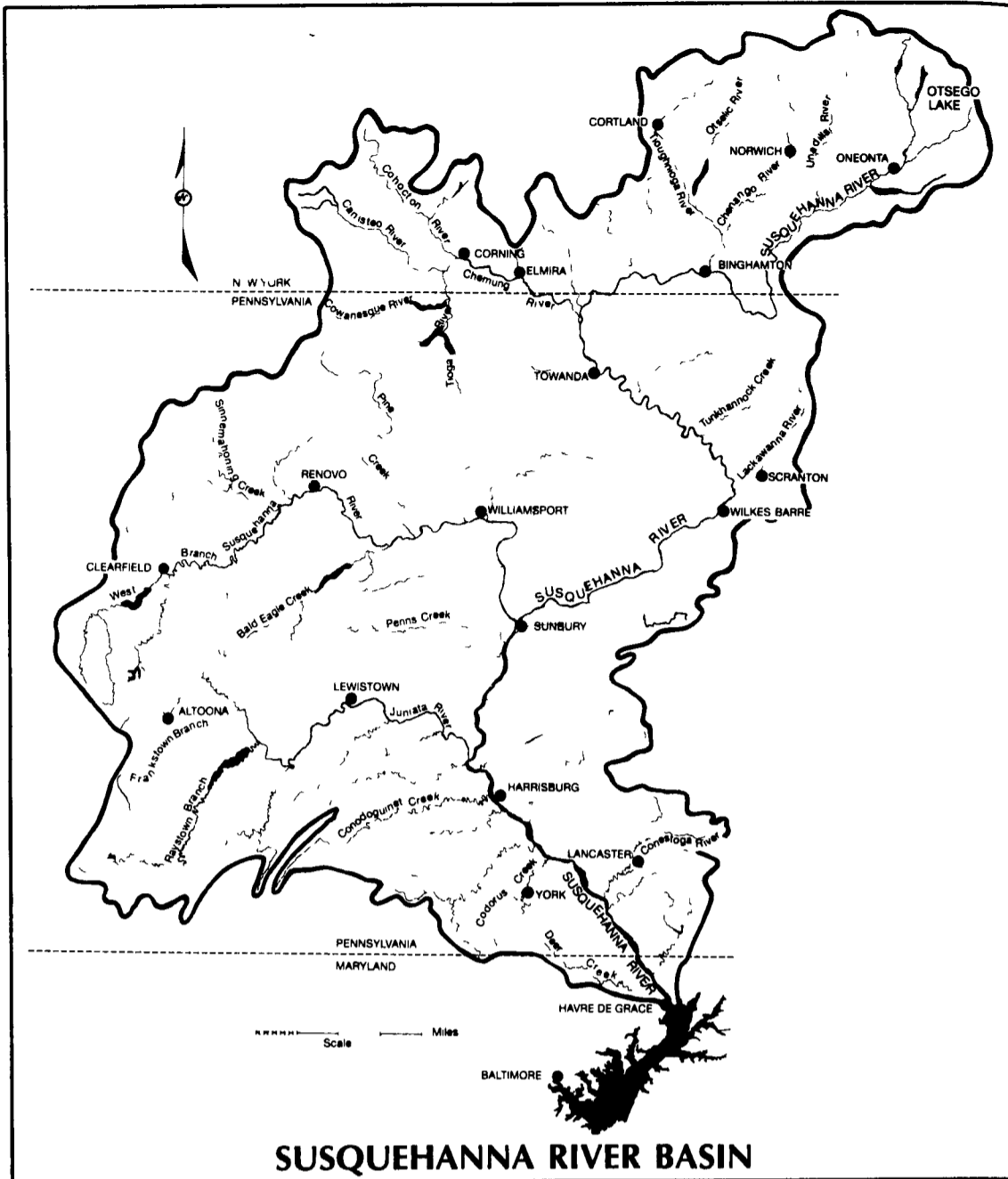
Ressler said that, for example, a farmer used 30,000 gpd during 1991, then that should be the amount registered with the SRBC. He explained that registering that level of water use is what can protect the farm's use of water during future shortages, and potential water disputes.

Several present at the meeting reported already having had disputes with neighbors over water uses.

One man reported being sued by a residential neighbor who erroneously thought that the farmer, who was irrigating crops out of a surface pond, was causing the residential well to go dry.

Other, similar situations were reported.

Also, given the history of non-farming and farming community debates over nutrient management, and other environmental concerns, logic and science are not particularly the stronghold of the general public when it comes to assigning responsibility for caus-



SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN

Farmers in the Susquehanna River Basin should consider the free registration of their water use as a means to protect their farm's interest in future water use, according to agricultural supporters.

ing a problem — people will see one piece of irrigation equipment in a field along a road, but not the thousands of clothes and dish washers, garden hoses and watered lawns, or washed cars, etc.

In an SRBC news release that was created specifically for the agricultural community, the proposals have been concisely reported.

According to the release, the SRBC is to hold a public hearing to receive final comments on this first portion — the non-consumptive — of regulations starting 9 a.m., March 9, at the Radisson Penn Harris Hotel and Convention Center, in Camp Hill. The hearing is to be held in conjunction with the commission's regularly held meeting, which occur once every two months.

According to the news release, "Comments on the proposed regulation revisions will be accepted until the close of the hearing on March 9, when final action is expected to be taken.

"No application, registration, or water use fees of any kind are proposed for agricultural projects under the proposed revisions. The revisions will make the regulations easier to understand, and help to streamline the approval process."

The release also further defined that those withdrawing more than 10,000 gpd will be required to register that use with the commission. (Special meters will not be necessary. Water uses can be calculated by a variety of methods, ranging from the amount of time a pump of a specific capacity was used to the type and number of livestock being watered.)

And it also reports that "Small farming operations with less than 10,000 gallons per day will not be

required to register their water use, but are encouraged to do so in order for the commission to be able to provide more protection of their water needs. Typical projects using more than 10,000 gallons per day include:

- "dairy operation with more than 200 cows;
- "beef cow/calf operation with more than 250 cows;
- "swine farrow to finish operation with more than 250 sows;
- "swine feeder production operation with more than 900 sows;

• "poultry layer operation with more than 125,000 chickens (no evaporative cooling system);

• "poultry broiler or pullet operation with more than 250,000 chickens (no evaporative cooling system)."

"All new surface water withdrawals that are greater than 10,000 gallons per day will need to be approved by the commission."

For more information on the topic, contact a local farm organization representative, extension office, or the SRBC at (717) 238-0423.

Judging Contest At Beef Expo

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — The 1995 PA Beef Expo is adding a judging contest to its slate of activities. This first-ever expo judging contest, aimed at testing the skills of cattle enthusiasts of all ages, will held on Saturday, March 11, beginning with registration at 7 a.m. and competition at 8 a.m.

Advanced registration is not required, but a \$2 individual entry fee will be charged to help defray contest expenses.

The contests will feature three age divisions based on the contestant's age on the day of the contest: Beginner (12 years and younger); Intermediate (age 13 through 20); and Adult (21 years and older).

Everyone will compete as an individual. Winners will be announced during the cattle sales on Saturday afternoon, and the top 10 individuals in each division will receive ribbons.

A minimum of six classes of

beef cattle will be judged. Potential classes include both breeding classes with and without data and market classes, depending on the availability of cattle.

There will be two questions classes, with approximately 10 questions per class.

There will not be any oral reasons, nor will there be any team divisions or awards.

Junior contestants may want to use this competition as a practice for the Block and Bridle contest to be held on Saturday, March 18.

Keith Bryan, instructor and coach of the Penn State Livestock Judging Team is leading the efforts to establish and organize the contest, along with help from former members of Penn State judging teams who will help with scoring, official placings, and contest questions.

Contact Bryan at (814) 863-0569 for additional information.



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