



Oakes Test Area Title Transfer Moving Forward

Sen. John Hoeven recently hosted a roundtable discussion in Oakes to go over the title transfer process for the Oakes Test Area (OTA). The Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (Garrison Diversion), City of Oakes, Fish and Wildlife Service, Dickey Sargent County Water Board, and Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative were on hand for the visit, as well as local water users and land owners.

Sen. John Hoeven listens during a roundtable discussion about the title transfer process for the Oakes Test Area.



The 2019 Lands Package signed by President Donald Trump in mid-March will allow the title transfer for the OTA to move forward, pending a final deal between the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Dickey-Sargent Irrigation District (DSID). The bipartisan legislation removes the need for congressional authorization prior to transferring the title of a Reclamation project facility, such as OTA. The Lands Package aligns with legislation Sen. Hoeven introduced, with Sen. Kevin Cramer as an original cosponsor, to authorize the title transfer of the facility to the DSID.

“The Oakes Test Area holds the promise of truly benefitting local water users and land owners,” said Sen. Hoeven. “We should make the best possible use of this infrastructure, rather than letting it go to waste.”

Since the roundtable in February, the title transfer has become closer to reality. Sen. Hoeven says he has secured a commitment from Reclamation’s Dakotas Area to account for and apply all possible credits toward lowering the cost estimate, which resulted in a decrease from \$17.9 million to \$9.4 million. Hoeven’s office released a statement that work continues to ensure that the final

estimate reflects factors including the fact that OTA needs significant maintenance and updates.

Although Reclamation currently owns OTA, the Garrison Diversion Operation and Maintenance (O&M) staff performs the daily operations, which includes operating pumps, servicing equipment and maintenance of the extensive system of subsurface pipe drains. Since federal funding was eliminated for OTA in 2011, irrigators within the DSID came to an agreement with Reclamation to assume all O&M costs associated with OTA. DSID would see several benefits from a title transfer of the facilities, including more efficient and economical O&M operations, the ability to make and set their own O&M decisions and priorities, and the ability to modify facilities without undergoing federal processes.

When the title transfer goes through, Garrison Diversion is ready to help DSID bring OTA back to its full potential. “Garrison Diversion and the Bureau of Reclamation, as well as other state agencies, have a great working relationship,” says Kip Kovar, Garrison Diversion district engineer.

Sen. John Hoeven provides an update on the status of title transfer of the Oakes Test Area from the Bureau of Reclamation to the Dickey-Sargent Irrigation District.



Meet the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District's Staff

Dustin Offerdahl

POSITION:

Electronic Industrial Controls Specialist at the Snake Creek Pumping Plant since February 2019

RESPONSIBILITIES:

Day-to-day operations and inspection, facility maintenance, future facility project upgrades, water management of the Lake Audubon elevation level, and scheduling the pumping to achieve proper lake elevation

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB?

“The vast variety of different tasks, learning new things, understanding the process, and applying that to how we can upgrade the facility with new technology.”



Darrell “Spin” Brummond

POSITION:

Operations and Maintenance Specialist at the Oakes Test Area since June 2018

RESPONSIBILITIES:

Operation and maintenance of the pumping plants, maintaining equipment and weed control

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB?

“My favorite part of the job is I don’t get bored. It seems like every day is different, with different things to do.”