

# Landowners in the Nowood seek to form irrigation district

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Staff Reporter

Concerned with late season irrigation water shortages a group of landowners in the Nowood Watershed District formed a steering committee to start an irrigation district.

The watershed is spread out over six counties. Big Horn, Washakie, Hot Springs, Natrona, Fremont and Johnson. The majority of the land lies in Big Horn and Washakie and includes the towns of Hyattville, Ten Sleep and Manderson.

The steering committee contacted the state to ask for a watershed study. The state through the Water Development Commission (WDC), hired a consultant to do the study. The study identified irrigation water shortages within the watershed. "They are called late season shortages because they typically occur the end of July through September," said John Joyce a member of the steering committee.

Since the level one study identified shortages it showed there was a need for storage of water. The study identified possible locations for reservoirs. They came up with 39 sites over the entire watershed.

These were narrowed down to the ones that were most feasible — Alkali Creek near Hyattville and Meadowlark Lake. The location at Alkali would have to have a reservoir built. At Meadowlark the project would include enlarging the lake.

The top three priorities for the irrigation district are:

- Working with the Forest Service to release water that is presently in Meadowlark Lake. (It was noted that it was originally a reservoir built for irrigation purposes).
- Raising the level of the lake. It can be raised 10 feet without flooding out the highway or cabins.
- Build a new dam at Alkali Creek.

One of the advantages of organizing an actual district is that they can apply for funding. Joyce said, "The only way we can apply with the state for grants or loans is to be a legal entity." Additional benefits are: increasing the amount of water available for the late-season irrigation, allowance of water exchanges through purchase of stored reservoir water, and the ability to be assessed for only those projects that would benefit individual landowners.

Because of the work done by the steering committee, landowners in the watershed are now eligible for project cost-share through the Small Water Project of the Wyoming Water Development Commission. For more information on the web go to, [www.wwdc.state.wy.us/small\\_water\\_projects](http://www.wwdc.state.wy.us/small_water_projects).

There are more than 27,000 acres within the watershed that have irrigation rights.

Currently 21,000 of those acres are being irrigated. While the committee doesn't expect all the acres to join the district they do hope that many of the landowners will attend an open house, April 6 at the Washakie County Fairgrounds from 1-4 p.m.

There will be representatives from the State Engineer's office and Wyoming Water Development Office as well as members of the steering committee.

For more information call Joyce at 568-2514.