



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release December 20, 1984

SECRETARY CLARK RECEIVES RECOMMENDATIONS OF GARRISON COMMISSION

Secretary of the Interior William Clark today received the recommendations of a Commission established by Congress to evaluate alternatives to the \$1.3 billion Garrison Diversion Unit, a major federally funded water development project. In August, Congress created the Commission to "examine the water needs of North Dakota and propose development alternatives which will lead to the early resolution of the problems identified."

Authorized in 1965 as part of the 1944 Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program, the Garrison Unit was designed to divert water from Lake Sakakawea on the Missouri River to irrigate 250,000 acres of farmland in central North Dakota. Benefits under the original plan also were to include fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, recreation development, flood control, and municipal and industrial water supplies.

However, opposition to the Garrison Unit from Canada over possible effects on Canadian commercial and sport fisheries, and from environmental groups over potential impact on wildlife migration and wetlands, has resulted in delays to the project.

Congress directed a 12-member blue ribbon Commission be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior and report its conclusions by December 31, 1984. Any recommendation of the Commission had to be approved by eight or more of the 12 members. The Commission, chaired by former Louisiana Governor David Treen, held three public hearings, and received testimony from scores of individuals and groups representing a broad array of interests.

In receiving the report from Governor Treen, Clark said he was "impressed with the intensity, openness, and fairness with which the Commission has operated." He also praised Governor Treen who "led this extraordinary effort. That he and the other 11 members would even accept a task of this complexity and sensitivity is a tribute to their patience and conviction that individuals can work constructively to reach accord on any issue -- no matter how divisive -- if they will take the time to listen to and reason with each other," the Secretary added.

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Under the special law which created the Commission, all construction work on the project was halted until January 1, 1985, pending the Commission's recommendations. At that time, Federal responsibility for the project reverts to the Secretary of the Interior and a total of \$53.8 million (the current appropriation for this year) becomes available for the project.

The recommendations delivered to the Secretary this afternoon have not yet received Departmental review. However, Secretary Clark has pledged a prompt and thorough review and analysis of the Commission's recommendations, as detailed in the formal report. The review will focus on the legal, programmatic and budgetary aspects of the recommendations. The resulting analysis will provide the Secretary the necessary information to determine how to proceed with the many complex elements of the recommendations.

This Departmental effort will be led by Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Robert Broadbent and Solicitor Frank Richardson. Secretary Clark directed that the review and analysis be completed early in the new year for his consideration. He then will make final decisions promptly on how to proceed with the Commission's recommendations and carry out the special law governing Federal responsibilities for the Garrison project.

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