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The Granddaddy of Wasteful Water Projects: Garrison Diversion

**One in a series of reports on the
Garrison Diversion legislation from
the National Audubon Society**

*Garrison Diversion:
\$600 million debt paid
by federal taxpayers...
one North Dakota special
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Wetland drainage in North Dakota.

The granddaddy of all wasteful water project is about to be dusted-off, re-packeted and sold as the latest answer to North Dakota's water needs.

The \$1 billion "Dakota Water Resources Act" is a fancy new name for the same old grab bag of pork barrel goodies known as the Garrison Diversion project which special interests in North Dakota have been trying to build for over 50 years. It is about to be revived at the insistence of the local water district – the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District.

This legislation does not authorize construction of one engineering marvel. Rather, it makes Federal funds available for a broad collection of expensive projects and programs designed to buy the political support of a cross-section of North Dakota interest groups.

There's a \$40 million bridge; a \$25 million grant program for environmentalists; \$200 million for Indian tribes; and, there are municipal water projects, rural water projects, and industrial water projects which all add up to another \$300 million. These are bundled together with money to finance an unjustified proposal to move water from the Missouri River to the eastern part of the state.

What is the reasoning behind this \$1 billion extravaganza? One North Dakota special interest claims the state is still owed a debt for the construction of Garrison Reservoir on the Missouri River in the 1950s. Promoters of the bill claim North Dakota gave up 500,000 acres of land to protect downstream cities from flooding when they agreed to Garrison Reservoir. The promoters maintain the state was never adequately compensated.

The truth is Federal taxpayers have already paid their debt to North Dakota for the Garrison Reservoir.

The State of North Dakota has received \$614 million in Federal appropriations since the Missouri River dams were constructed. Nearly 100,000 residents have received better drinking water from these Federal investments. The Corps of Engineers estimates that in addition to the \$614 million Congress has already appropriated, the state also receives \$130 million in yearly benefits in flood control, water supply, low cost hydroelectric power and recreation benefits from the Missouri River reservoirs.

Garrison Diversion: \$600 million debt paid by federal taxpayers... one North Dakota special interest pressures congress for one billion dollars more.

The Garrison Diversion legislation raises many questions challenging questions:

- **Why should one state get \$1 billion for an assortment of water facilities and other projects?**
- **Why does North Dakota and the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District deserve additional debt forgiveness of more than \$350 million in sunk costs owed to the Federal treasury?**
- **Why shouldn't North Dakota communities pay full reimbursement costs for municipal, rural and industrial water development like other states rather than the twenty-five percent local cost share provided for in the bill?**
- **Why does the legislation carry a hodge-podge of unrelated public works and transportation projects?**
- **Why should Congress swallow the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District's latest ploy to get the federal government to pay for a discredited 19th Century dream of Missouri River diversion?**

There are other compelling reasons to oppose the \$1 billion Garrison Diversion legislation. It would lead to the destruction of thousands of acres of wetlands that are critical to migratory waterfowl. The Canadian government is strongly opposed to the legislation because of possible water quality contamination. Other states have expressed opposition because it would transfer water from one river basin to another.



Aerial view of North Dakota prairie potholes.

It's time to blow the whistle on this bailout of the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District. Congress, and the American taxpayer, have paid their debt to North Dakota. We don't need to spend another billion dollars chasing an idea that is neither environmentally acceptable, economically feasible, diplomatically viable, or politically possible.



Wetland sunset in North Dakota.

The Taxpayers for Common Sense included Garrison Diversion in their annual "Green Scissors" report which details unnecessary and Federal spending with negative environmental impacts.



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