

1

*NORTH DAKOTA WATER LAW
and the
WATER PERMIT APPLICATION
PROCESS*

**Prepared by the Water Appropriations Division
North Dakota State Water Commission**

2

**John Wesley Powell
Second Director of the USGS
in 1889
Gave a speech to the North
Dakota Constitutional Convention**

- * Set direction for water law in North Dakota based on the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation**
- * He knew from his work that water in west was scarce and that the Concept of eastern water rights Would not work.**
- * He proposed that ND adapt a law that water be held in Public Trust, Right to use water administered by State**

The 100-Year Anniversary of the Office of State Engineer

A Tour Through

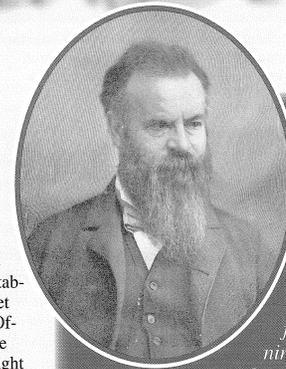
By Patrick Fridgen

The Foundation of the Office

Before the North Dakota Office of State Engineer was officially established in 1905, a series of events set the stage for what still makes the Office much of what it is today. Those events shaped the way people thought about water, and developed a mindset that recognized the importance of water for North Dakotans then, and generations to come.

In the summer of 1889, the first North Dakota Constitutional Convention was in session, laying the foundation for what would officially become the State of North Dakota later that fall. On the minds of the delegates in attendance was the future of a fledgling state that would undoubtedly rely heavily on agriculture if it were to prosper. As such, it was also apparent that the long-term success of agriculture in a northern plains state could only be achieved with certain safeguards in place – particularly irrigation.

On August 5, 1889, Major John Wesley Powell, Director of the United States Geological Survey, delivered a speech before the Constitutional



*Major
John Wesley Powell*

"...All other wealth falls into insignificance compared with that which is to come from these lands from the pouring on them of the running streams of this country. Don't let these streams get out of the possession of the people. If you fail in making a constitution in any other respect, fail not in this one. Take lessons from California and Colorado. Fix it in your constitution that no corporation – no body of men – no capital can get possession and right to your waters. Hold the waters in the hands of the people. Think of a condition of affairs in which your agriculture – which you will have to depend on largely – depending on irrigation, is at the mercy of twenty companies who own all the water. They would laugh at the ownership of land. What is the ownership of land when the value is in the water? You should provide in this constitution that you are making that the water which falls from the heavens and rolls to the sea, down your great rivers – that water should be under the control of the people subject always to the will of the people; that property in water should be impossible for individuals to possess. You should forbid the right to acquire property in water. The property should be in the land, and the right to the water should inhere in the land, and no company or individual should have property in the running streams. Such a provision will prevent your great agricultural resources from falling into the hands of the few."

August 5, 1889

North Dakota Constitution

1889

- Article XI
- **Section 3. All flowing streams and natural watercourses shall forever remain the property of the state for mining, irrigating and manufacturing purposes**

4

Office of the State Engineer Created in 1905

- **Regulate, administer and allocate the water that is held in public trust**
- **First statutes pertaining to water allocation also passed by 1905
Legislature**
- **Oldest water permit in files has priority date of 1906**
- **Current authorities also include drainage control, dam safety, floodplain management and sovereign lands**

5

North Dakota Century Code

Title 61

Waters

(1905)

- **61-01-01. Water of the State-Public Waters. All waters within the limits of the state from the following sources of water supply belong to the public and are subject to appropriation for beneficial use and the right to the use of these waters for such use must be acquired pursuant to Chapter 61-04**
 - **1. Surface Water, rivers, creeks, lakes, ponds, marshes**
 - **2. All ground water**
 - **3. All residual waters from beneficial use and artificially drained**
 - **4. All non contributing streams**

6

Dust storm of the 1930's

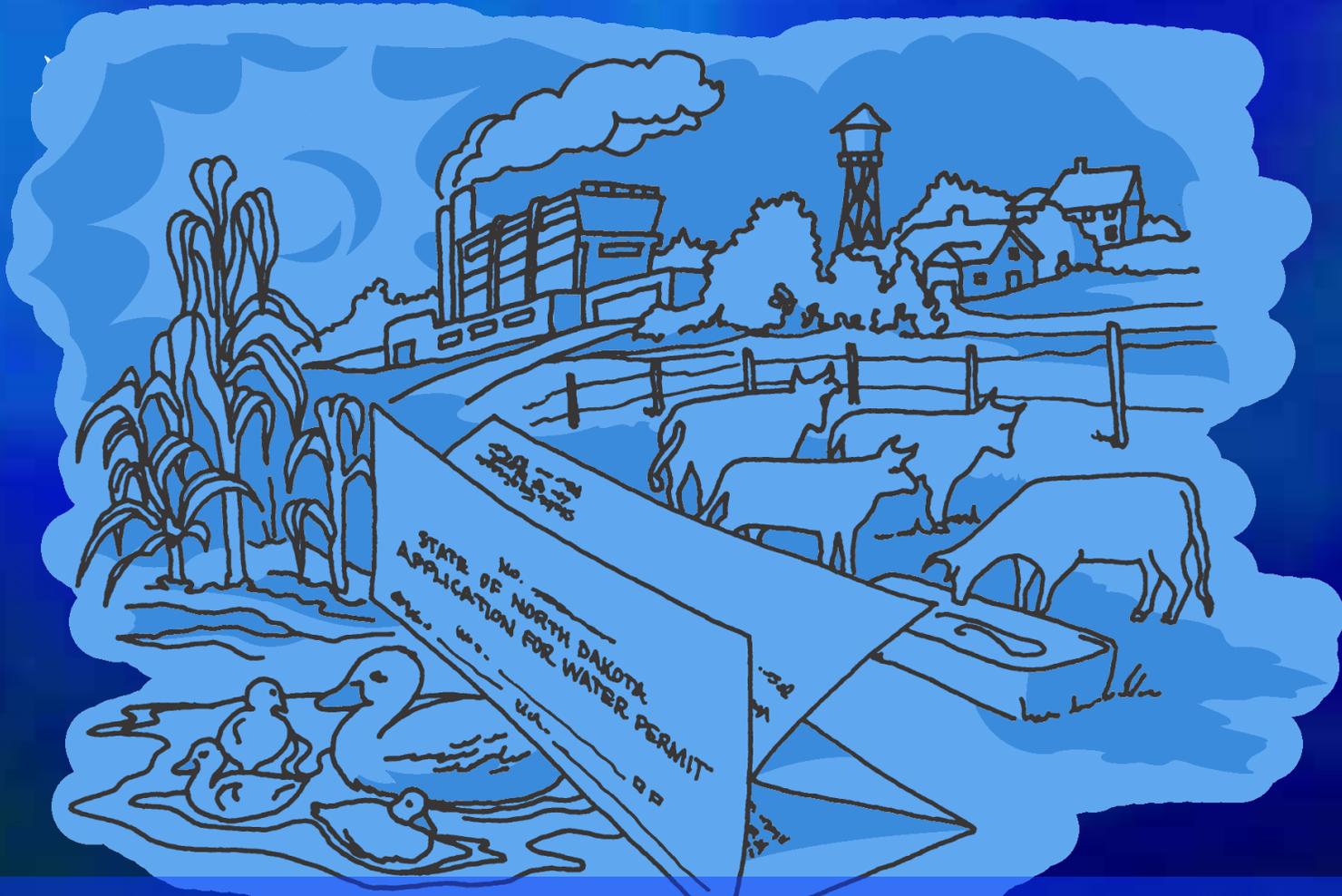


State Water Commission

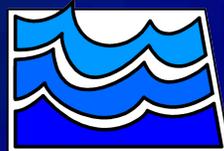
Established in 1937

(in response to 1930's drought)

- **Foster water development through promotion and investment of state capital**
- **Nine members on commission:**
 - **Seven citizen members appointed by the Governor-six year overlapping terms**
 - **Commissioner of Agriculture**
 - **Governor as Chairman**
 - **State Engineer appointed by the State Water Commission, State Engineer serves as secretary of the Water Commission**



Applying for a water use permit



**Office of the State Engineer
ND State Water Commission**

A water permit is required for:

- Irrigation of more than five acres
- Industrial use
- Municipal use
- Rural water system
- Storage of more than
12.5 AF behind a dam



NOT REQUIRED FOR DOMESTIC OR STOCK USE



Applying for a water permit:



**Obtain application forms and instructions -
call 701-328-3441.**



Complete an application form.



**Include a map made by a registered land
surveyor.**



Pay an application fee

Municipal/Public Use > 2500 pop. - \$500, <2500 pop. \$250

Irrigation - \$200; Recreation, Livestock, Fish/Wildlife - \$100

Commercial Recreation - \$200; Industrial <724 ac-ft - \$250, >724 ac-ft - \$750

Water Permit Amendments - \$50

Establishing a priority date:

- **Once a completed application has been received, a priority date will be assigned.**
- **North Dakota water law is based on the prior appropriation doctrine, where an established water right is superior to any water right with a later priority date.**

Giving notice of application:

- **Includes information from application: type of use, acre-feet, acres, pumping rate, location.**
- **Send by certified letter to:**
 - Landowners within one mile**
 - Water permit holders within one mile**
 - Public water use facilities within 12 miles**
- **Publish notice in official county paper once a week for two consecutive weeks.**

April 2004

	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Comment period: 30 days

**Once notices have been sent out and published,
interested parties have 30 days
to express their concerns.**

Recommended decision:

Once comment period has expired, application is assigned to a hydrologist or engineer to prepare a recommended decision for SE.

- Review the physical setting**
- Review the effects of ongoing water use**
- Consider the expected effect of proposed project**
- Address letters of concern**
- Make recommendation to SE**

Recommendation is based on...

- **Senior water rights not unduly affected.**
- **Means of diversion/construction adequate.**
- **Use of water is beneficial.**
- **The proposed use is in the public interest.**

Public interest considerations:

- **Benefit to the applicant**
- **Effect on economic activity**
- **Effect on game & fish and public recreation**
- **Alternate uses within a reasonable time**
- **Harm to other persons**
- **Intent and ability to develop proposed project**

Comment period:

Recommended decision is sent to people who submitted letters of concern.

These persons of record have 30 days to further respond and may request a hearing.

- **State specifically how they will be affected**
- **How the criteria considered have not been met**



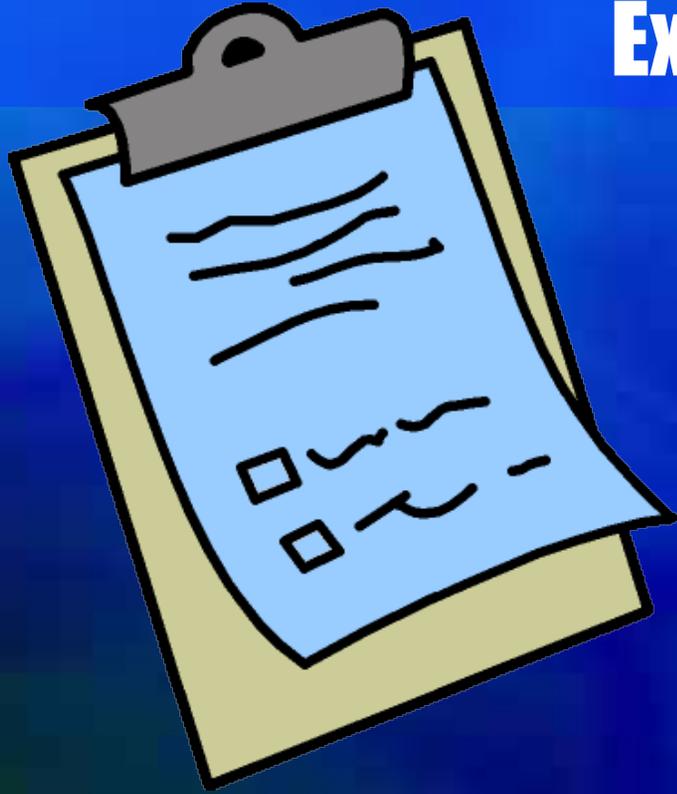
State Engineer's decision:

- **Determine if a hearing is needed.**
- **Grant conditional permit as applied for;**
or
Grant permit for reduced amount;
or
Deny the application.



State Engineer's decision:

- **If any portion is approved, the State Engineer may attach conditions to the permit to protect prior appropriators and public interest.**



Example Conditions:

- **Spacing requirement**
- **Efficient capture system**
- **Check valve**
- **Water meter**
- **Application specific conditions**

Beneficial use:

Water must be put to beneficial use by a prescribed date.

A beneficial use date will be included on the permit.

- **If no other applications are pending:
three years to develop**
- **If other applications are pending:
one or two years to develop**

**Beneficial use date can be extended for good cause,
if no applications are pending.**

89-03-01-11. Competing applications.

Applications for conditional water permits from the same source for different uses will be considered competing applications if received by the state engineer within ninety days of each other.

61-04-06.1. Preference in granting permits.

When there are competing applications for water from the same source, and the source is insufficient to supply all applicants, the state engineer shall adhere to the following order of priority:

- 1. Domestic use.**
- 2. Municipal use.**
- 3. Livestock use.**
- 4. Irrigation use.**
- 5. Industrial use.**
- 6. Fish, wildlife, and other recreational uses.**

Main Factors Delaying the Approval of Conditional Permits

- 1. Competition for very finite water resources**
- 2. Hearing requests**

Water Permit Application Process Time Table

Step #	Time period	Procedure
1.		Application, filing fee and map is received by State Engineer, priority date set.
2.	2 weeks +	The applicant is instructed to send a "Notice of Application" by certified mail to all record title owners of real property within 1 mile radius, all permit holders within 1 mile radius, and municipal and/or rural water facilities with 12 mile radius.
3.	1 to 2 weeks	After the Notice of Application has been mailed, the applicant completes an affidavit of notice and returns it to the State Engineer.
4.	1 month from first notice in newspaper	Upon receipt of the completed affidavit, the State Engineer publishes a notice of the water permit application in the official county newspaper. Notice of water permit application is published once a week for two consecutive weeks. Public has 30 days to comment in writing with concerns about the application
5.	1 to 6 months +	Hydrologist prepares a "Recommended Decision" to the State Engineer recommending approval or denial of the application. The criteria from which the State Engineer must base his decision to grant or deny a water permit application are in NDCC §61-04-06. If the proposed point of diversion is located in a highly complex, competitive hydrologic setting, additional hydrological data and analysis may be required to prepare a recommended decision. This could significantly extend the time required to prepare the Recommended Decision.
6.	1 month	The Recommended Decision is mailed to any person who filed written comments regarding the water permit application. Within 30 days of service of the Recommended Decision, the applicant and any person who would be aggrieved by the decision and who filed written comments may file additional written comments with the State Engineer or request a hearing on the application, or both.
7.	1 month +	If hearing is granted, 1 month or more could be added
Total	6 months to 1 year	