

City Declines Water Support, County Delays Decision

(KNZA)--Saying there are too many unanswered questions, the Hiawatha City Commission has declined to sign a letter of support for the Kickapoo Tribe's efforts to gain Congressional approval of a water rights agreement that will help it create a reservoir to provide a stable and permanent source of water on its reservation.

That was the general consensus of Commissioners Monday evening.

Commissioners Bill Collins and Toni Hull along with City Administrator Mike Nichols attended the Brown County Commission meeting Monday morning where state officials and the Tribe discussed the agreement and Tribes plans to construct a reservoir on their reservation.

Discussing the agreement were Kickapoo Tribal Attorney Steve Moore and David Barfield, chief engineer for the Kansas Division of Water Resources, along with Kansas Water Office Director Tracy Streeter.

Also participating in the discussion via phone were representatives of the offices of U.S. Senator Jerry Moran and Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins.

Moore says the agreement, which quantifies the Tribe's senior water rights in the Delaware River basin, was approved last September but still must be ratified by Congress.

"What we're asking for from the Brown County Commissioners today is a letter of support to the delegation that would allow us to go forward, introduce a bill, and go through the legislative process in Congress...there will be hearings in Congress to testify on these things."

Under the agreement, Barfield says the Tribe may divert or redivert, as available, up to 4,705 acre-feet of water per year for use by the tribe. An average of 50,000 acre-feet of water travels through the Delaware Drainage Area.

A group of landowners concerned with the Tribe's effort to revive the Plum Creek Reservoir project urged the Commission in February not to sign a letter of support.

Moore says the tribe is looking to downsize the Plum Creek project, getting it down to a size that makes more sense for water storage purposes and requires less non-tribal land.

He says there are other potential storage sites on the reservation.

“They all have the same situation that Plum Creek does. Some of that land is owned by the tribe, and some is owned by their non-Indian neighbors. In the future, the non-Indian folks that live on, and around, the reservation will have needs for water, too, so there may be a need for a cooperative development of a storage project.”

Moore said there will probably be more than one storage site.

The County Commission decided to table a decision on a letter of support until next week.

Many Signals Communications