

**Statement of Senator Heidi Heitkamp
Northwest Area Water Supply Project
Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
July 23, 2014**

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the draft supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Northwest Area Water Supply Project (NAWS).

Before I begin, I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to all of those here tonight. Many of you have worked for years on this project. Your will and determination have been critical in getting us to where we are today.

The need for the NAWS project is real. Since construction first began in 2002, the need and urgency for it has only increased. Economic growth in Minot and the surrounding region will increasingly depend on having a reliable supply of quality water now and well into the future. NAWS will serve as the cornerstone of that growth and will ensure tens of thousands of people in the region have access to a stable supply of quality water.

The years of study and then continued delays from the court challenges have been frustrating. I, like many in this region and those here tonight, believe the time for continued study of this project is over. Significant work has already been done on this project over the last several years and this study is hopefully the last and final step in this very long process.

The preferred alternative adequately addresses the concerns raised by our neighbors to the North and goes to great lengths to mitigate the risk of any potential transfer of biota. Quite frankly, the risk of a biota transfer from natural pathways is far greater than under the preferred alternative. And it also puts to rest the misguided claims by those downstream the project will result in significant cumulative depletions from the Missouri River system that will impact their use of the river. In fact, the depletions would be less than 0.2% when compared to the no action alternative.

I think it is important again to remind folks what North Dakota lost more than 60 years ago with the construction of the Garrison and Oahe Dams. In exchange for losing hundreds of thousands of acres of prime bottom land, the federal government made a commitment to us that we would be able to utilize the abundant source of water from Lake Sakakawea to meet our needs. Today, we are still fighting to make sure this long-standing federal commitment to our state is met, and NAWS is part of that promise that has yet to be fully realized.

In the end, this project is about moving water from an abundant source to a place of great need. It has been studied, studied and studied again. The time is now to move forward on this critical project and bring it to a final conclusion.