



Jon D. Evert, Published November 06 2011

Diversion asks too much of Comstock-Hickson area

I have been put in a difficult situation with the current Fargo-Moorhead diversion plan. As a Clay County commissioner, I represent the district that elected me and also all the people of Clay County as we, together, strive to make this place a safe, sustainable and pleasant community to live in.

I know that long-term, permanent protection from flooding is needed for the two-thirds of our population that live in the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area. I, however, cannot support the current plan to use my home community as the “sacrificial lamb” to increase the comfort level of the metro area.

I understand that the city of Comstock (my hometown) will be surrounded by 3 feet of water and can be protected with a ring dike. I understand that the roads and railroad tracks will be raised to allow for access to Comstock during times of flooding. Life in the community will be challenging and intense, but doable.

However, the Holy Cross community surrounding Comstock will be destroyed as numerous homes, farms, farmsteads, historic sites and our three parish cemeteries will be covered with from 3 to 9 feet of water. In early settlement days, “Holy Cross” referred to Holy Cross Township in Minnesota and Pleasant Township in North Dakota.

While this will be devastating to the people of Comstock, we are even more concerned for the west half of our Holy Cross community that lives on the Dakota side of the Red River. There, even more farms and farmsteads will be destroyed. In addition, the whole village of Hickson (including their church, community center and bar), the whole city of Oxbow (including their golf course, country club/restaurant and the community recreation facilities) and the community of Bakke will be eliminated.

In total, three North Dakota communities and hundreds of homes will be erased from the map. Predictions are that their water levels will be several feet higher than on the Minnesota side. They, too, will experience the flooding of their cemeteries and numerous historic sites.

I have hoped that the planners of this flood control project would come to realize that this sacrifice asked of the Comstock-Hickson communities, the surrounding townships of Holy Cross and Pleasant and the farms and homes on the 54,000 acres to be flooded is more than should be asked of anyone.

While I know that we are in this together and some sacrifice is expected by all, it seems strange that homes and farms that in some cases were established 140-plus years ago are not worth saving for historical and cultural

purposes, if not for the sake of the families that live there. If these lands had been used by earlier dwellers, accommodations would be made to protect and preserve their dwelling and burial sites. Since our settlements were developed by immigrant populations rather than native populations, does that make their value less significant? Do our laws protect our heritage, as well?

It is time to go back to the drawing board and look for a way to protect us all.

Evert is a Clay County commissioner.