



THE SPIGOT

from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

Educating Utilities to Provide Quality Water in the Decades to Come

North Dakota Rural Water (NDRW) held its semi-annual leadership retreat in Medora in July. Our retreat is a fantastic opportunity for utility staff, managers and board members to learn and network, and scenic Medora is a gorgeous backdrop for our event. Attendees from water utilities across the state gathered to network and bring home new ideas that will help them continue to deliver quality water to the taps of customers across North Dakota for years to come.

Our retreat began with a golf scramble on Wednesday afternoon, coordinated by Rural Water's resident golf expert and training specialist, Chuck Mischel. Sixteen participants hit the links in foursomes. The weather was perfect, and a great time was had by all. We were fortunate to hold this event at one of America's top 100 public golf courses, Bully Pulpit. The following morning the NDRW executive board and managers met before the retreat officially opened.

The group was greeted by our nation's 26th president and Medora rancher, Theodore Roosevelt. He told of his passion for conservation and commented how great it is to see people continuing to care for our nation's natural resources. Mrs. Roosevelt told of her trip to Theodore's beloved Elkhorn Ranch – the lack of roads and infrastructure led to a wild wagon ride from Medora



Theodore and Mrs. Roosevelt with Kelly Matheson, operations director for the Oklahoma Rural Water Association.





Sam Wade, CEO of National Rural Water.

to the ranch, including many river crossings, careening down one river bank and lurching up the opposite bank. Our attendees were very grateful their own trips to Medora were less adventurous thanks to advances in technology and investments in infrastructure.

We were fortunate to have the CEO of National Rural Water, Sam Wade, in attendance. Wade spoke about the historic level of funding provided by Congress that included \$5.2 billion for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) loans and grants for water and wastewater infrastructure in rural communities under 10,000 population.

“For decades, elected officials from the local county supervisor to the president have placed aging infrastructure as one of the top priorities. These efforts have now come to fruition,” NRWA CEO Sam Wade stated. “Small communities and rural water and wastewater systems are highly encouraged to apply for USDA loans and grants now. Since Congress has clearly recognized the need by providing robust funding levels, we must fully utilize these resources to strengthen rural water.”

Wade later told Rural Water staff that Medora is a gem, unknown by the rest of the country. We are truly fortunate to have such a unique locale in our state.

Mary Massad, CEO and manager of the Southwest Water Authority, gave an update on the Southwest Pipeline Project. Quality water has been an important factor in the growing economy for the western half of North Dakota. Southwest Water Authority is continuing to invest in their infrastructure to provide a valuable service in the southwest region of our state into the future.

Kelly Matheson, operations director for the Oklahoma Rural Water Association, provided a wealth of information

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to all who attended his sessions. He emphasized being an educated and engaged board member. Topics covered included developing policies, planning and conducting meetings, and basic system operations. Properly managing and maintaining assets to achieve the best possible return on a utilities investment was discussed, along with “Murphy’s Law” – when things do break, it is generally at the worst possible time during high demand.

Physical assets, such as valves, pumps, towers, wells, tanks, intakes, and pipes, weren’t the only assets discussed. Matheson emphasized treating employees as the most valuable asset at the utility. North Dakota utility personnel learned utilities in Oklahoma face the same challenges as those in North Dakota – aging infrastructure, along with recruiting and retaining quality employees and board members. Those in attendance appreciated Matheson’s informal, discussion-based approach to educating. The staff at Rural Water are grateful that he was able to travel north and assist with our retreat.

Our attendees didn’t spend all of their time in meetings or on the links. Great meals, a cocktail reception, Medora’s Pitchfork Fondue and the Medora Musical all provided entertainment and opportunities to network and discuss ideas with fellow board members and utility managers.

If you would like to attend the Medora leadership retreat in the future, we would encourage you to get involved with your water utility.