

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE, STATE OFFICES,
Laramie, Wyo., December 11, 1967.

HON. CLINTON ANDERSON,
Chairman, Water and Power Resources Subcommittee of Committee on Interior
and Insular Affairs, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I attended the recent hearing on the Riverton Project held by your committee. My testimony came late in the afternoon, so there was no opportunity to answer questions that I thought were not fully answered for you earlier such as those questions you were probing on points Senator Simpson made in 1963 and in 1964. Also, I felt there was some concern from the committee in reconciling the mass exodus of people from the Third Division in 1964 with the recommendation being made now, that Third Division be put back in private ownership for continued irrigation.

My comments that follow relate back primarily to my experience as chairman of the Reclamation Projects Survey Team that reported on Riverton to the Secretary of Interior in 1963.

The difficult part of this proposition relates to understanding that a very small group of Third Division settlers with sensational outside press support, legal aid, etc. were able to obscure the total situation and effectively seal off reasonable voices. This emotional build-up took place over the period 1960-1963. After numerous meetings and interviews on the local scene in late 1962 held by the Survey Team, it appeared clear to us that the situation being presented nationally was related to a very fringe portion of the total Riverton project.

This small group of Third Division settlers advocated the idea of the government paying for what they identified as misrepresentation of lands and an additional payment for years they had been on the lands. It appeared to the Survey Team in late 1962 that the national attention this group had received with their claims had overwhelmed the vast majority in the Riverton community and that the views that related to the real long-range needs were not being presented for proper balance in the decision making process.

As the proposition of this small group evolved between 1960 and 1963, and circumstances seemed to be favoring the advocates of some form of damage payment, the initial group gained some followers that appeared willing to be in a position to take the best opportunity either way this developed. Many, and perhaps a majority, had no intention of leaving when the land appraisals were started in 1964. These appraisals were at a relatively high price and, of course, the original advocates, along with a number of waverers, accepted the government offer.

At that point everyone else seemed to realize they would be left with O & M costs for the whole project and with fewer people, so everyone capitulated in selling at these appraisal values. The overriding reasons for the exodus, while partially related to physical resource problems, appeared more clearly associated with the past emotional controversy locally and the uncertainty of the future with fewer people left on the project.

Personally I concurred with Senator Simpson when in 1963 and 1964 he testified to errors made on the project. There were a long series of errors in handling a tough problem and the later build-up of publicity and the clamor, obscured facts from almost all except those on the local scene. By the time the proposition of this small group had been aired nationally and had smoldered locally from 1960 to 1962, it came before Congress in the hearings of 1963; I believe there was no alternative left but to follow the course provided in PL-88-278. I believe that Senator Simpson realized that with this legislation the resource could be adjusted without the emotional entanglement.

PL-88-278 wiped the slate clean so that the good in the physical resource could be soundly reallocated for economic units and put back into use with no additional costs.

One of the basic problems the Survey Team recognized in their study was that the Third Division units were too small when settled in 1950. With the loss of some land to salt and seepage on each unit, this key factor of unit size became an ever-increasing weakness. Now, since enactment of PL 88-278 and with no people on this project, units can be soundly redefined with adequate acreage of lands already protected with drains and of the type of soil now known to be suited to irrigation.

The fringe problems of Third Division have most unfortunately clouded the more important part of the Riverton resource, namely the First and Second Di-