

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING:**

### **SMALL TRACT IRRIGATION**

#### **Is there a difference between a small tract irrigator and a flat rater?**

No, these two terms are used interchangeably and describe an EBID constituent with water rights to irrigate an area that is less than two acres in size. The term flat rater is due to the incremental tax assessment (or flat tax rate) for small tracts based on the size of the parcel. The tax assessed for flat rates (and farm rates) has remained the same since 2008.

#### **How is the Small Tract Irrigation Schedule determined?**

Water release from the dams and delivery to irrigators must be coordinated to maximize the beneficial use of the water resource available to EBID constituents. Each year we wait until there are sufficient farm tract orders placed to deliver water at a responsible efficient rate before releasing water from the dams. Our small tract constituents do not constitute adequate ordering acreage, being only about four percent of the District's acreage; therefore, it has been our practice to wet up and flush the system before scheduling the first small tract irrigation weekend. During the current period of unpredictability and uncertainty of our water supply due to the reoccurring drought that came home to roost in 2003, the District has used the first large irrigation runs of our farm tract constituents to accomplish the start-up, following on with our initial small tract irrigations. The District will continue this approach while we remain in the current drought cycle or until the reservoir fills up. This makes the most water possible available to all of our water users.

At the beginning of each irrigation season, the Bureau of Reclamation will determine the amount of water available in the Elephant Butte Reservoir and allocate a portion of the water to EBID according to the Rio Grande Compact. The allocation may be increased once the spring run-off shows itself and EBID will allot additional equitable small tract irrigations accordingly. Remember that EBID constituents enjoyed 23 years of full 3ac/ft supply starting 1980 and ending in 2003 with the hard-hitting drought. During those years, small tract irrigators received 9 irrigations or even more, but those days are over and the District now needs to be much more conservative. This is why the District over the last few years began a measurement program to determine the irrigation flow for actual measured deliveries rather than use the Bureau of Reclamation standard formula water charges that were not as precise as real-time data.

#### **Who has authority to increase the number of small tract irrigations and/or change the delivery schedule?**

The decision for the timing and number of small tract irrigations is determined by the EBID Board of Directors. Water experts and professionals are consulted and provide presentations at Board Meetings. Board members deliberate after reviewing and discussing precipitation and allocation forecasts. Finally, a motion is put forth by a Board Member, is voted on, and approved by a majority of Board Members. Any and all constituents are welcome to come before the regular Board of Director's monthly meeting (usually the second Wednesday of each month) and state their case for any changes to the Small Tract Irrigation Schedule.

#### **Why would flat raters only be scheduled for three irrigations when sometimes the newspaper reports that we can expect a full supply year?**

EBID can only release water that is currently in storage at Elephant Butte Reservoir and allocated to EBID by the Bureau of Reclamation. Based on the spring allocation, we will announce an equivalent allotment to the District water users at the beginning of the season. It is not possible to predict what the final volume of water will be until after spring runoff occurs and it is measured at the San Marcial river gage flowing into the reservoir. This usually starts at the end of April and continues to the end of June when spring runoff is completed. Once we have been allocated the additional water in storage, the Board will make another announcement hopefully to increase the allotment again, but we cannot make it based on expectations. However, when runoff water is confirmed by actual storage, then in all probability it will in turn add additional small tract irrigations to the irrigation season.

## **Why is the first water delivery to small tract irrigators scheduled so late in the season?**

It is a waste of a precious water resource to release a very small amount of water too early if you consider the small amount of acreage that small tracts cover valley wide, the small water order to release, the length of dry river miles to wet up, and the fact we are in a drought. Therefore, small tract irrigations will not be scheduled until the farmers have ordered a large volume of water to begin the irrigation season based on crop demand. If there is a less than 12" annual allotment, the available water supply may not be released until the really hot months of the irrigation season. Changes to the number of irrigations and/or dates scheduled for water delivery are not any attempt to reduce the small tract user's allotment permanently but simply reflect the conditions of the current year's irrigation season.

## **How did EBID derive the 6-inch water charge for each irrigation delivery to small tracts?**

The charge of 6" per flat rate irrigation is by no means an attempt to target small tract irrigators. In fact, it is an effort to be consistent with our farm tract irrigators who often claim that the District is targeting them with excessive water charges. Something important to remember is that water flow measurement begins when you open the head gate and not when it gets to the field or yard. Beginning in 2002, EBID began transitioning from Bureau of Reclamation standard formula charges for farm rate irrigations to charges based on actually measured deliveries. We found that in many cases, the standard charges developed by the Bureau in the 1920's were significantly lower than what the measured charges were, and we now take the measured charge as our basis. We are not targeting anyone, we are simply basing our charges on the reality of measured flow. Accurate measurement of water ensures that the available water supply is equitably distributed to all of our water rights owners.

In 2007, we sampled small tract irrigations in selected areas by measuring deliveries and determined that based on that sampling, small tract irrigators use about 6 inches of water per irrigation. The data from that sampling were collected by our hydrology staff in coordination with Dr. Phil King of NMSU's Civil Engineering Department, and the results were presented to the EBID Board at one of our regular monthly public Board Meetings. Based on that presentation, and consistent with our measured delivery basis for farm tract charges, the Board allocated the equivalent of the farm rate allotment to flat raters at our best estimate of the actual water use by small tract irrigators, which is 6 inches per irrigation.

We continue to evaluate additional small tract irrigations every year and we will adjust our allotment scheme as the results dictate. If you would like to talk to Dr. King about it, you can reach him at [jkking@nmsu.edu](mailto:jkking@nmsu.edu) or 646-5377.

## **Is water theft factored into the charge of 6 inches per small tract irrigation?**

Theft has always been an issue, since so many constituents have need for the water when it's convenient for them and not necessarily when it is scheduled. Both farm rates and flat raters have been caught taking water out of turn. It is very tempting to do when no one is around, but you can't hide wet ground very easily. Our normal response to this action is to first notify, educate, and warn. If it continues then we can double charge and/or contact public Law Enforcement Officers to arrest offenders. By no way do we cast a stone at everyone for the violations of a few. Since we have begun our metering program and can monitor more of the actual water deliveries, we have seen less theft of water because we can concentrate our patrols in those areas. The District will try its best to treat everyone equitably, but it is a daunting task because of the complexity of our system, time length, and lack of personnel to patrol every single irrigation delivery. Unfortunately, we have not been able to completely remedy the theft problem.

## **Is there another way to irrigate a small tract other than following the weekend Small Tract Schedule?**

If you are having difficulty with the schedule, we can work with small tract irrigators to water with neighboring farmers when it can be coordinated. You can contact our Watermaster, Richard Bejarano at 575-526-6671, extension 480 if we need to make such an arrangement for you. Additionally, various policies and procedures have been established which enable Small Tract Irrigators to:

- Place water orders
- Allow better coordination for the conjunctive use of both surface and ground water.
- Purchase Contract Pump Water (only when determined feasible by the Watermaster).

To allow this, the water righted acreage for two, or more, Small Tract accounts can be combined and considered as one account for water delivery purposes. This allows the irrigators to place a water order (the same as a Farm Tract) for the delivery of water instead of being limited to irrigation on Small Tract Weekends. Water can be moved to and from eligible lands owned by members of the combination. EBID also highly recommends that small tract property owners work together and form Ditch Associations. Ditch Associations enable coordination of ditch clean up, maintenance, and water delivery for irrigators on the same ditch system. Ditch associations allow for group participation, purpose, efficient water use, shared cost, and a united voice.

**Types of Combinations:**

1. Flat Rate Combination. Two or more Small Tract accounts totaling at least two, or more, acres are combined for water delivery purposes only
2. Farmer-Flat Rate Combination. At least one, or more Small Tract account(s) and at least one, or more Farm Rate account(s) totaling at least two, or more acres are combined for water delivery purposes only.

**Types of Ditch Associations:**

1. State-approved Community Ditch Association with formal rules
2. Neighborhood Ditch Association with self-determined rules

By forming a combination as described above, water can be moved to and from eligible lands owned by Ditch Association Members.

For details about the above processes, please contact the Water Records Department at 524-8003 for additional information.

**How can I obtain more information, get a question answered, or report an issue regarding Small Tract Irrigations?**

Please contact the head of the Operations Department, Richard Bejarano who is the EBID Watermaster. The Watermaster is responsible for all Operations Department personnel, duties, and water deliveries. Mr. Bejarano may be reached at 575-526-6671, extension 480 or by email at [rbejarano@ebid-nm.org](mailto:rbejarano@ebid-nm.org).

Additionally, a comprehensive description of water delivery processes and other information about EBID water users is also available in a booklet prepared by NMSU-Cooperative Extension Department. The booklet, "Interpreting the Elephant Butte Irrigation District for Water Users" was developed in 2006. You can read and download the document by [clicking on this link](#). You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to read the document. If you need to download this software first, [just click here for the latest version](#).