

SENATOR SCHROCK: Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, Senator Beutler, Senator Wesely, Senator Morrissey, a year ago about this time massive amounts of water were ordered released from Kingsley Dam by the Federal Energy Regulatory Relicensing Commission. I live in the area that depends on irrigation water for our crops and for our livelihood. Everyone that crossed the Platte River wanted to know what are we doing sending all that water down the river when we're in the middle of a drought? Those dams are there to store irrigation water and water for people. Yes, the municipal well field in Grand Island depends on water from the Platte River, and without the dam system we have in Nebraska and Wyoming, the Platte River would be dry in the summertime. I think what we're trying to say here is that farmers have water rights. Some of those water rights go back 100 years and the federal government completely ignored the water rights of those farmers when they released that water last spring. Now, Senator Landis said, is there going to be enough water for the birds? And I think that's a large concern for everyone here in eastern Nebraska and tourism in central Nebraska really picks up in the spring now. It's amazing to me how many out-of-state cars you see in Grand Island and Kearney this time of the year in March and April and the spectacle of the Sandhill crane is tremendous, but let me tell you what has happened to the Sandhill cranes in the past 50 years. The Sandhill crane is the largest specie of crane in the world. There is over 500,000 of them in our flyway and that number has doubled since Kingsley Dam was built. Why has it doubled? Because the Sandhill crane spends 70 percent of his time in the irrigated cornfields. They eat 500 tons of corn every year and they can have all the corn in my cornfield they want, but we need water to produce corn. We need water for our economy. We need water...we need the dams to stabilize the river. Now, yes, I think in a compromise in a settlement they will use more water for instream flows. There will be less water for irrigation, but I do think there's enough water for both sides. And the piping plover is an endangered species, the least tern is an endangered species. Well, what happens when the Game and Parks Commission goes out to study them? They find that their numbers are increasing on the Platte River because of a stabilized stream flow. We have the river otter that has been released in the Platte River. The river otter depends on fish for its food. What would the river otter do if the river dried up in the summertime? There would be no food for the river otter. We can forget the river otter in Nebraska then. I guess what I'm