

A few days ago, I received a text with an article written by Dawson Public Power District General Manager Gwen Kautz with her perspective on the failed merger of DPPD and Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation. In the article, she touts the “transparency” of the Central and Dawson boards throughout the process. Transparency would have been issuing a press release after signing a consolidation agreement on Sept. 12, 2022. Although the boards had worked for years on the consolidation, they didn’t decide on the new board representation plan until Oct. 3, 2022. Transparency would have been announcing the board representation plan and giving constituents time to understand it before voting to merge just three weeks later in Elwood during the middle of harvest. Do these actions sound like transparency?

Both boards and general managers knew that the Tri-County chartered area would not support this board arrangement and moving the management staff out of the district, so they tried to steamroll us. They tried to slip it past us at the Power Review Board at its Dec. 17 meeting before we could protest.

Central is a massive economic development project for the Tri-County area watering 585,000 acres either directly or through recharge, and the delivery system provides hydropower and recreation from Lake Mac to Johnson Lake and Elwood Reservoir.

Gwen went on to discuss how Dawson and Central are considering “ways to collaborate.” A chastising article seems like an odd way to begin a collaboration. At Central’s October meeting, CNPPID General Manager Devin Brundage alluded to selling power from the Jeffery Power Plant to a “local company.” A sales agreement to sell power between Central and Dawson always made sense and would have saved a lot of staff time and legal expenses.

Gwen accused the Tri-County constituents of “using escalated tactics” and “intimidating behavior.” How do you think we felt when not once, but twice, the Central board made us argue for “standing” to even present our side of the case? That is what escalated the entire situation.

The July 28 meeting is recorded, so listen to Central Director Dave Nelson’s motion before the vote. He requested delaying the vote for 30 to 60 days to have a meeting in Kearney County to help his constituents understand the merger. Sounds familiar like 10-12 constituents back in October 2022 asking for the two boards to postpone the merger vote for 60 to 90 days to further understand the plan. The boards ignored that request, too.

I want to be clear the current water service agreement allows Central to cancel water delivery with a 10-year notice, and the irrigators were not interested in merging into a company where we didn’t have majority board control overseeing our water.

Gary Robison,

Tri-County Irrigator