U.S. quietly reconsiders water issue

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It came like a flood, unexpected and ominous.
Now the controversy over “water spreading” has quietly receded — again.
The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s chief said Monday that he is “reconsidering” plans to adopt a policy for the West to eliminate unauthorized use of water on federal irrigation projects.
Instead, the bureau is considering giving the issue back to the agency’s regional offices to handle — a suggestion irrigators made when the problem surfaced a year ago.
“We thought we could put together a West-wide policy to deal with this situation,” Reclamation Commissioner Dan Beard told the Herald from his Washington, D.C., office Monday. “It’s become apparent to us that one size doesn’t fit all in this case, as we had initially thought.”
The latest move represents one in a series of decisions that changed the bureau’s course toward resolving the issue, but a welcome one for farmers.
“The bureau is getting more and more reasonable on how to go at this,” said Dick Erickson, manager of the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District in Othello.
“But I would like them to finally make up their minds. The bureau brought this big question up a year ago, and they still haven’t a solid plan in writing,” Erickson added.
Beard’s new plan came to light in a Washington, D.C., meeting last week with Erickson, Pasco farmer Bryan Alford and Shannon McDaniel, manager of the South Columbia Basin Irrigation District in Pasco. Two representatives of the Quincy Irrigation District in Quincy also attended the meeting.
The water-spreading controversy began in earnest last summer, when the bureau claimed some irrigators were using water from federal projects illegally.
In the Columbia Basin Project, the problem stemmed

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