

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

Tuesday, Feb. 12 marks an important date for irrigators in the Upper Republican Natural Resources District. Next week, the URNRD board will hold a public hearing on new rules and regulations that address allocations for the next five years, use of carryforward and pooling issues.

After considerable discussion by board members in January, the board forwarded a proposal of a 12.5-inch annual irrigation allocation for the next five years.

They also addressed carryforward in the proposal, limiting the total carryforward use to five inches over the allocation period. Irrigators can use additional carryforward if they need to but any use over the five inches will be charged off at a 2:1 ratio. For instance, if 10 total inches of carryforward are used, the second five inches will reduce the irrigator's amount of carryforward by 10 inches, a 2:1 ration.

Proposed changes in pooling call for the allocation on each tract to be averaged across all tracts in the pool, which can be of not greater size than a township or floating township (six square miles).

In addition, tracts added to a pool can only bring in carryforward equal to three years of annual-ized allocation.

It's important to note those proposals advanced to the public hearing stage on a split vote by the board.

The URNRD is bound to meeting the pumping guidelines for the district outlined in their integrated management plan. That plan also outlines how the district will stay in compliance with the Republican Basin compact settlement made with Kansas.

Neither of these becomes an easy task after a summer like last year, when extreme drought conditions brought back memories of similar conditions in 2005-2006. That's when Nebraska fell out of compliance with Kansas and has been in court since.

Fortunately, the URNRD has been aggressively pursuing other projects, such as acreage retirement and stream flow augmentation, to meet compliance obligations. These efforts also serve to sustain a vibrant ag economy in this region.

Next Tuesday, irrigators will get the opportunity to offer their input to the URNRD board on how they feel about the proposed changes. Input will be taken during an official public hearing on the proposals. This is the time for people to express their opinion with oral or written testimony.

This is part of the democratic process whenever the URNRD proposes changes to their rules and regulations.

In so many words, it's the irrigators chance to "speak now or forever hold your peace."

Testimony will be weighed by the board as they consider whether to make further changes or approve the proposals as presented at the hearing.

It's also key to remember that each voter in each NRD subdistrict voted to elect a board member to represent their subdistrict. Again, that's just part of the democratic process.

If people feel they have better solutions than the ones proposed, then they need to offer those alternatives at Tuesday's hearing. People who fail to participate in the process then have no right to complain about the outcome later.

