

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

With the water level in Enders Lake remaining somewhat stable over the last several years, it's been easy to take for granted the recreational opportunities available at the lake.

Unlike other reservoirs on the Nebraska side of the Republican River Basin, Enders hasn't seen any irrigation releases since 2003. As a result, the level of the lake has continued to edge up since. In addition, Enders Lake has escaped being used for compact compliance with Kansas—until now.

Beginning May 1, 4,000 acre feet of water will be released from Enders Lake for compliance purposes. This will result in an estimated drop in elevation of the lake of six feet and a drop in storage content from 13,000 acre feet to 9,000 acre feet.

Enders Dam was among a series of dams built in the Republican Basin in the 1950s, first for flood control and second for the development of surface water irrigation downstream. The recreational aspect of the lakes came as an added bonus.

As drought conditions worsened through the mid 2000s, Kansas began making claims that Nebraska hadn't delivered Kansas their share of Republican River water as agreed in the 2003 compact settlement.

Kansas took their case against both Nebraska and Colorado to the U.S. Supreme Court and the three states have been in litigation ever since.

In Colorado, a reservoir on the Republican very similar to Enders, Bonny Reservoir, became a pawn in the compact compliance standoff.

In an effort to achieve compliance, Colorado water officials ordered that all the water in Bonny be released downstream. Today, the lake still stands empty. What a shame! Fortunately, Enders has escaped such a fate but will now play a role in compact compliance.

The two surface water irrigation districts that hold the rights to water stored in Enders accepted an offer to sell off 4,000 acre feet of its water.

The Middle Republican Natural Resources District purchased the water to help offset overuse that occurred during the 2013 irrigation season. As a result, the water will be released from Enders to aid MRNRD's compliance efforts.

Granted, recreational users of Enders Lake will see an immediate impact on the water elevation of the lake. However, it's key to remember the lake will not be sacrificed and drained like Bonny was.

The planned release will lower the lake's elevation to 3082.4 feet above sea level, which is the bottom of the lake's active pool. This is not the first time the lake has been at that level. It was taken down to a similar level in 2003, the last year irrigation water was released from the dam.

Enders won't be quite the same lake as it is today. But fortunately, recreational users will still have a lake to use. We've been blessed Enders hasn't been used as a compliance tool to this point.

I look at the surface water irrigators in the middle and eastern end of the basin. Last year, they lost their water for compact compliance purposes and received no compensation for that loss. They are facing the same situation again this year.

Having less water in Enders seems rather insignificant compared to the economic losses suffered by those surface water irrigators. Until now, users of Enders Lake have avoided sharing in any of the burden to insure there's water to sustain the all-important ag economy in

the basin.

Enders Lake has dodged the compliance bullet until now. We've been fortunate in that respect. But as recreational users of Enders Lake, we too must realize we play a role in keeping Nebraska in compliance. That time has now come.