

DNR likely to declare compact call year due to dry conditions

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

With the likelihood that 2013 will be declared a compact call year, members of the Upper Republican Natural Resources Districts (URNRD) approved the addition of five more wells to the Rock Creek augmentation project.

The action was taken during the board's November meeting held Tuesday, Nov. 13, in Imperial.

On Friday, the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) met with members of the Nebraska Republican River Management Districts Association in Imperial to brief them on water forecasts for 2013.

Members of the association include the four NRDs and three surface water irrigation districts in the basin.

Due to drought conditions experienced in the basin this past summer, DNR projected 2013 will be a compact call year. The official declaration will be made by Jan. 1.

A compact call year occurs when it's likely there will be a shortfall in the amount of water needed to keep Nebraska in compliance with the compact settlement agreement with Kansas.

The measure calls for NRDs to take action to curtail groundwater use. It also curtails surface water districts from storing or using any natural stream flows after Jan. 1, 2013. They are allowed to release any water stored prior to Jan. 1.

Rock Creek to offset use

The URNRD's intent behind developing the Rock Creek augmentation project was to provide water to offset groundwater use in compact call or water-short years.

With the project's five wells, as originally designed, the URNRD could deliver up to 10,000 acre feet of water to offset consumptive use by farmers in the district.

DNR's projections for 2013 show the basin to be short of compliance by as much as 22,000 acre feet.

Of that shortage, the URNRD would be responsible for more than 15,000 acre feet.

The URNRD has other remedies in their integrated management plan to deal with shortages. The most drastic would be the shutdown of wells in the rapid response area. This includes wells near rivers, streams or tributaries in the district.

However, by adding five new wells to the project, engineers believe the URNRD can generate up to 15,000 acre feet or more of water to make up for their deficit.

The pipeline built for the project was designed for extra capacity so that will not be an issue.

What remains at issue is the amount of credit URNRD will get for adding the water to stream flows.

Currently, the URNRD will get credit for 69 percent of the added water. DNR is seeking 100 percent credit but Kansas has not agreed to such.

Without 100 percent credit, the URNRD may still need to take additional action to cover their shortfall.

That's why URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning said it is so important to fast track the Lincoln County augmentation project.

That project could likely cover any additional shortfall for the Upper, Middle and Lower Republican NRDs for 2013.

DNR projects shortfalls of 5,451 acre feet in the Lower Republican NRD and 1,441 acre feet in the Middle Republican NRD.

Bond resolution passed

During last Tuesday's meeting, the board approved a resolution to allow the inter-local agency buying the land for the Lincoln County project to issue bonds.

They also accepted a bid of \$380,000 for the purchase of all the irrigation pivots, pumps, gear heads and motors on the Rock Creek project.

The offer was made by the original seller of the land, who held a right of first refusal on the items.

The board also approved a settlement with Wilder Farms in southwest Dundy County.

It was discovered that a number of pipelines throughout the property connected a number of wells.

This allowed for the unauthorized use of water between different areas of the farm.

The board approved two new pooling contracts for the property to better account for the water being pumped.

Some of the pipelines will be decommissioned while use of some others will still be allowed with respective pools.

The URNRD and Wilder Farms has been working on arriving at a settlement for a number of months.