By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

Irrigators will get the opportunity to comment on a slight reduction in annual allocation and increased limits on carryforward use during a hearing on the issue Tuesday, Feb. 12.

The hearing will begin at 10 a.m. at the Upper Republican Natural Resources District headquarters in Imperial.

The two primary issues in the proposed rules focus on the new allocation for the next five years and carryforward use.

On a split vote, the board is recommending a 12.5-inch allocation for the next five-year period.

The proposal also carries a provision that limits the use of carryforward to a total of five inches during the allocation period.

Additional carryforward can be used but those inches will count double instead of a one-to-one basis.

The previous five-year allocation ending in 2012 was 13 inches per year.

The slight reduction in allocation is proposed to help the URNRD hit its pumping targets outlined in its Integrated Management Plan.

The district's pumping allocation from the state stands at 425,000 acre-feet. The current IMP also calls for a 1 percent reduction in that allotment.

Due to drought conditions last summer, the pumping across the district averaged 18 inches in 2012. This exceeds the district's average pumping of just under 12 inches per year.

The hearing will also address pooling rules.

Pooling allows farmers to put or "pool" tracts together so the combined allocation can be shared amongst all the tracts in the pool.

Presently, the actual use on each tract is charged against a tract.

This allows for more pumping on one tract than another. Even if a tract goes into negative allocation balance, pumping can continue on that tract as long as overall pool average remains positive.

Going forward, the allocation on each tract will be averaged across all tracts in the pool, which can be or no greater size than a township (six miles square) or a floating township.

Tracts being added to a pool can bring in no more than three years of annualized allocation.

Hearing on land acquisition

On Tuesday, Feb. 5, the URNRD will hold a hearing in Benkelman to address the possibility of further land acquisition.

The meeting will be held a the Benkelman Community Center, 908 Huron Street, beginning at 6 p.m.

URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning said the NRD wants to outline the possibility the district acquiring property for the retirement of irrigated acres or to offset pumping by the district.