

More testimony heard at last week's hearing

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It looks like the irrigation allocation for the next five years will be set at 65 inches, the same as the last allocation period.

Board members of the Upper Republican Natural Resources District will take official action on the allocation and other rules and regulation changes Tuesday, April 2.

That's when the board meets for its regular monthly meeting in Imperial. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m.

In addition to setting the allocation, the rules also address several other issues. These include limiting carryforward (CF) use to 7.5 inches, limiting the amount of CF that can be brought into a new pool to 39 inches and restrictions on borrowing into a new allocation period.

Second hearing held

The board convened a hearing Thursday afternoon, March 21, to take additional testimony on the proposed changes.

This marks the second hearing held by the board on the proposals.

The board forwarded the present proposal after getting significant opposition during a hearing on their initial proposal. That proposal called for a five-year allocation of 62.5 inches with the use of carryforward limited to five inches over allocation period.

Six people testified on the proposal during last week's hearing.

The only opposition to the proposal came from the Bureau of Reclamation, who manages most of the dams in the Republican River Basin.

Aaron Thompson, manager for the Nebraska-Kansas area Bureau office, said the Bureau has concerns about the present proposal and asked the board to reconsider.

He said the proposed allocation would deplete stream flows which "directly impacts the water supplies for several federal projects located downstream."

He also said the level of groundwater pumping would not allow the district to be in compliance with the compact settlement or their own integrated management plan.

Thompson said their analysis showed for the URNRD to meet its target of reducing pumping by 25 percent by 2015, the district would have to pump less than nine inches each of the next three years.

URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning asked Thompson if the Bureau has done an analysis of the proposed allocation, and if so, what information was used to conduct that analysis.

Thompson said they were using information released by Nebraska's Department of Natural Resources.

Thompson said later that the pumping numbers for 2012 were based on power records, not on actual meter readings.

When challenged by Fanning on what the specific pumping number should be, Thompson said that's not a simple answer. He said rainfall and weather conditions are the unknown factor.

Terry Brown, a resident of Colorado who owns irrigated ground in Dundy County, commended the board for their efforts. He also urged irrigators to do away with pivot end guns and make other improvements to save water.

Bob Ahrens of Champion said increasing the allocation to 65 inches, versus 62.5 inches in the first proposal, gives irrigators who overuse another 2.5 inches water.

He said he doesn't like the 2-for-1 penalty imposed if an irrigator uses more than 7.5 inches of CF during an allocation period.

He said irrigators who have saved water to build up CF should be able to use that water.

In previous meetings, Fanning has said unlimited use of CF would not enable the district to stay in compliance with pumping targets.

Bob Stamm of Benkelman said the Bureau should not have a say in what the URNRD does.

Board President Terry Martin responded, "He has his responsibilities; we have ours."

Martin did note both entities can work together to help address water issues in the basin.

Kurt Bernhardt of Cham-pion praised the board for their efforts on augmentation.

He also said the current proposal is fair and equitable, with the opportunity to raise productive crops.

He especially liked the penalty for borrowing into a future allocation period.

In that instance, the irrigator is charged double for borrowing, leaving them with less water over the allocation period.

Eric German of Imperial said he was glad to see a proposal that he believes is workable. He said it also will help maintain the area's ag economy, of which water is a big part.