

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reached a tentative agreement with the Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District Monday to halt water releases from Harlan County Reservoir.

On May 1, DNR began the release of approximately 20,000 acre-feet of water from Harlan Co. Reservoir as part of Nebraska's ongoing efforts to comply with the three-state Republican River Compact.

That action followed a failed attempt to get Kansas to allow Nebraska to store the water for use by Kansas irrigators at a later date.

Nebraska asked Kansas for a hold harmless agreement in terms of compact compliance for the amount of water held in storage in Harlan.

Because the water stored would be in Harlan and not cross into Kansas, Nebraska wanted assurances from Kansas they would not challenge compact accounting for 2013 over the 20,000 acre-feet of stored water.

Jim Schnieder, deputy DNR director, said Kansas refused so Nebraska made the decision to begin delivering the water.

As part of Monday's agreement, DNR received a commitment from Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District that their use of the water will not harm Nebraska's efforts to comply with the Republican River Compact.

The agreement between DNR and Kansas Bostwick is to be drafted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which manages the water in Harlan.

If the agreement is not finalized by the close of business Friday, DNR will begin to release water again.

"We are very pleased that Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District approached us willing to implement, what we have felt all along, is a very practical solution," DNR Director Brian Dunnigan said this week.

He said the agreement reached will at least put off the releases of water from Harlan County. The water can then be used by Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District to supplement current irrigation water supplies or until after the 2013 irrigation season has ended.

Dunnigan said he didn't think it would take this long to reach an agreement on the stored water. "I hope this is the start of finding common ground on water management solutions in the Republican River Basin so all water users in the basin may benefit."

Compact call made by DNR

At the beginning of this year DNR officials determined additional water would need to flow into Kansas for compact compliance.

To carry out these efforts, DNR issued a "compact call" on surface water in the Republican Basin. This call required surface water irrigation districts in the basin to release all stored water that came in to storage reservoirs after Jan. 1. Those reservoirs included Enders, Swanson, Red Willow and Medicine Creek.

The stored water amounted to more than 13,000 acre-feet, which was released from the reservoirs to flow downstream into Harlan County Lake.

