

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Work began last week to convert 19,000 acres of irrigated land in Lincoln County into an augmentation project to enhance streamflows in Republican and Platte River Basins.

Irrigation on the tract will be retired with groundwater being used to augment stream flows first in the Republican Basin, then the Platte Basin.

The \$18 million construction project includes installing about seven miles of pipeline and the reworking of the well field to pump the water.

Merryman Excavation of Woodstock, Ill. won the pipeline contract with a low bid of \$12,416,800.

Nate Jenkins, assistant manager at the Upper Republican Natural Resources District, said pipe will begin arriving next week.

Sargent Irrigation of Grant began work in the well field last week, Jenkins said. Sargent won the well field work with a low bid of \$5,880,254.

Jenkins said contractors must have the project substantially completed by Dec. 31, 2013, and operational by March 2014.

Jenkins said those dates are particularly important if the Department of Natural Resources puts water restrictions in place in the Republican Basin again in 2014.

If that happens, Republican NRDs must submit a plan to DNR by March, outlining how they plan to stay in compliance with the terms of the Republican River Compact Settlement.

The URNRD already owns and operates an augmentation project near Rock Creek north of Parks in Dundey County.

Water presently being pumped there will help offset an overuse by the district in 2012.

Water pumped from the Lincoln County project will aid in keeping three participating NRDs in the Republican Basin in compliance.

Natural Resource Districts in two basins joined forces through an interlocal agreement to initiate the project.

The cooperative effort is known as N-CORPE, (the Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement Project).

Members include the Upper, Middle and Lower Republican Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) in the Republican River Basin and the Twin Platte NRD located in the Platte River Basin.

Fast track construction

Jenkins said N-CORPE paid contractors an additional \$150,000 to fast track construction of the project. Jenkins said it's possible for the project to be fully operational by the end of 2013.

He said Merryman will start concrete work on the discharge area of the pipeline. Water discharged will run into Medicine Creek about a mile north of Hwy. 23. Water will flow in Harry Strunk Lake northwest of Cambridge.

The pipeline is designed for a capacity of 60,000 acre-feet per year.

Sargent Irrigation manager Glenn Taubenheim of Grant said they began pulling turbine pumps from wells last week. These pumps will be replaced with submersible pumps equipped with variable frequency drives.

These drives allow for better control of volume and pressure in the pipeline.

Taubenheim said they will be able to pull about 3-5 pumps per day, with a total of 30 wells being changed out.

Construction to be financed

N-CORPE sold more than \$92 million in bonds in early August to cover the purchase of 19,000 acres in Lincoln County in October, 2012.

They plan to secure bank financing to finance the cost of the pipeline and well field project.