By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

Following more than four months of discussion, the board of the Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD) board forwarded transfer rules for a public hearing.

The public hearing on the clarifications added to the rules will likely occur in May.

The board took their action during their regular meeting earlier this month.

The board's action adds two subsections to the rule dealing with transfers.

The first section says: "Transfer of acres or ground water allocation is limited to transfers within a township or floating township."

The second section states that carryforward allocation associated with transferred certified irrigated acres will be capped at three (3) years of annual allocation.

The board has been discussing the transfer issue since late 2008.

They took public input on the potential rule change, with many favoring the limit of transfers to within a township or floating township.

Under a floating township scenario, water allocation can be transferred no more than six miles from the original well location.

The second section allows carryforward to be transferred equal to three year's allocation or 39 inches, or whatever remains on the acres, whichever is less.

The motion to send the rule change to public hearing passed on a 9-1 vote with Jeff Wallin casting the dissenting vote.

Retirement program approved

Board members also approved a retirement program for those landowners who do not wish to have the occupation tax assessed against their irrigated acres.

The program carries no compensation other than removing it from the occupation tax rolls.

To be eligible, the property must not be enrolled in any other irrigation retirement program.

The acres will remain in retirement until the landowner files notice to the NRD to take the acres out of retirement.

Enrolled acres cannot be irrigated while in retirement status, no allocation will be received nor can the acres be included in a pooling contract.

Carryforward is frozen at the level when enrollment occurs, which must occur no later than May 1 each year.

URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning said this type of retirement program, which offers no compensation, may not draw much interest but it does offer a way to escape the occupation tax if a landowner isn't irrigating.

District Conservationist Nadine Bishop of Imperial told the board that a federal retirement program may be funded this year.

It would allow farmers to receive an annual payment over five years to retire irrigated acres.

In addition, the NRD would also receive funds to offer a one-time payment in addition to the five-year payments as an incentive to retire ground.

Bishop will work with the URNRD on submitting an application to retire as many as 12,000 acres in the district.

Fanning said the goal would be to reflect the market value of irrigation in the payments. One advantage is the land could still be farmed under dryland conditions.

Bishop added that money for vegetation and invasive species control will also be available through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program this year.

However, a sign-up date has not yet been announced.