



Perkins Chase and
Dundy Counties
Headquarters in Imperial

Retirement Program Aims to Increase Streamflow

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IMPERIAL, NE – More than 1,300 acres of farmland where irrigation has significant and relatively immediate effects on Republican River stream flow will be permanently retired from irrigation following successful first-year completion of a program jointly administered by the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Upper Republican Natural Resources District.

The Ogallala Aquifer and Republican River Basin Recharge and Enhancement Program aims to increase stream flows and help replenish the Ogallala Aquifer in Dundy, Chase and Perkins counties by paying farmers for conservation easements that bar them from irrigating but allow them to continue dry land farming. The partnership between NRCS and the NRD was one of a handful of projects in the country approved this year under the NRCS' Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP).

NRCS contributed \$1.2 million to the partnership; the Upper Republican NRD \$1.9 million of local tax dollars. In just two months, NRCS and the NRD enrolled the maximum number of acres possible with the available funds. Imperial-based NRCS staff scored and ranked project applicants.

Approximately 1,000 acre feet of water a year that otherwise would have been used for irrigation will wind up in the Republican River due to the acreage retirement.

“This is an essential piece of a multifaceted plan for managing groundwater resources and assisting the state with compact compliance issues,” said Jasper Fanning, manager of the Imperial-based Upper Republican NRD. “Hopefully funding will remain for the project over the coming four years – with similar levels of enrollment as were achieved this year, this program would make up approximately half of the water that history suggests the District needs to help the state stay in compliance during the very driest of years.”

The program partnership between NRCS and the NRD was approved for five years but funding was assured for just this year; federal budgeting will dictate how much, if any, money is available for the next four years.

“This program exemplifies what can be achieved when government entities join hands to pursue a common purpose and conceive programs that ensure objectives are met. Thousands of acre feet of water that otherwise would not have ended up in the Republican River will seep into the river over coming years and farmers will remain whole because of the funding provided by NRCS and the Upper Republican NRD under this program,” said Nadine Bishop, NRCS District Conservationist for Dundy, Chase and Perkins Counties.

A multifaceted payment and scoring formula was used to attract acres into the program that have significant impacts on stream flow. Computer modeling used for compact accounting that identifies the effect groundwater pumping from individual wells throughout the three counties has on stream flow helped identify high-priority acres. Annual pumping data collected from all wells in the district also helped identify acres where significant pumping was likely to occur in the future.

Acres that had been irrigated significantly, and that are in areas where pumping has substantial and immediate effects on stream flow, scored higher in the ranking process. Similar information

was used to calculate payments – the more significant the impacts on stream flow, the higher the payment from the NRD. Payments from the NRCS will be the same for all enrolled acres. The criteria successfully elicited interest from landowners with wells that have high impacts on stream flow: The average, 50-year stream flow depletion factor of the land enrolled in the program is 88%. A stream flow depletion factor is the percentage of groundwater pumped for irrigation that would have otherwise resulted in stream flow.