

PUMPING FROM AUGMENTATION PROJECTS ALREADY UNDERWAY

BY RUSS PANKONIN THE IMPERIAL REPUBLICAN

Water's flowing from the Upper Republican Natural Resources District's (URNRD) Rock Creek augmentation project and the N-CORPE project in Lincoln County.

Upper Republican NRD Jasper Fanning told his board at their regular meeting last week that pumping of the projects could run until early May.

The purpose of the pumping this spring is to get water into the Republican River which can be used towards compliance purposes for both 2016 and 2017.

Right now, compliance is figured under a two-year average, based on the amount of water in Harlan County Dam.

All of the pumping from the two projects counts 100 percent towards compact compliance with Kansas.

Fanning said about 5,000 acre feet will be pumped from Rock Creek. The district's share from N-CORPE will amount to the other 5,000 acre feet (AF).

Last year, Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado signed a historic water agreement to work together on Republican River Basin compact compliance.

As part of that agreement, Nebraska has agreed to make 20,000 acre feet of water in Harlan County Dam available to Kansas by June 1.

This pumping will help meet that mark.

Kansas can call for up to 38,000 AF based on the compact. However, they have agreed to only call for what they can use in 2017, which is expected to be around 20,000 AF.

The 18,000 AF balance will be held in Harlan or delivered there at a later date. Without an agreement in place, Nebraska would have been required to release the water downstream, regardless of whether or not it would benefit Kansas users.

The agreement protects both Nebraska and Kansas and makes water use and release more timely and efficient.

Wind farm on N-CORPE?

Fanning said N-CORPE, the interlocal agency that owns and operates the Lincoln County augmentation project, has been approached by a developer interested in building a wind farm on the project's 19,000+ acres.

Fanning said wind data has been captured about 10 miles from the N-CORPE site. That data indicates the site would be a prime location for a wind farm.

Fanning said preliminary plans project a wind farm with a capacity of up to 400 megawatts.

Fanning said the land could be leased to the developer, with those payments being used to retire bond debt taken on to buy and develop the augmentation project.

In addition, the property taxes on the wind generation towers could restore some tax revenue to local government entities and schools.

Fanning said such a development would provide a much better solution than LB 218 in the Legislature.

That bill, introduced by Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, would require N-CORPE to sell off the property while retaining the groundwater rights.

The bill remains in the Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Venango Senator Dan Hughes.

Fanning told the board that had the N-CORPE project not been developed, there would have been no irrigation in the Middle Republican NRD for the last four years.

Their rules require that if any quick response acres are shut down for compliance purposes, all irrigation in the district must be shut down.

That would have impacted the region far more than the \$13 million in property taxes that the N-CORPE property previously generated under private ownership.