

Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado continue cooperation with water agreement

Friday, March 6, 2015

Republican River Compact Administration news release

MANHATTAN, Kan. -- Today, reflecting the continued spirit of cooperation, Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska, along with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, have reached an agreement that will ensure more certainty to the basin's water users in both Nebraska and Kansas. The agreement, signed through the Republican River Compact Administration (RRCA), was achieved through collaborative negotiations that began in January 2015 and will provide timely access to water for the 2015 irrigation season.

The agreement provides additional flexibility for Nebraska to achieve its Compact obligations while ensuring Kansas water users' interests are also protected. The additional flexibility allowed the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to open Nebraska reservoirs and water user's rights that were initially limited in 2015. Opening the Nebraska water rights allowed the Bureau of Reclamation to agree to modify certain contract provisions for its irrigation districts, ensuring the availability of the water that was pumped from Nebraska augmentation projects for Compact compliance.

Additionally, the agreement allows for the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to ensure no additional regulatory water supply reductions for Nebraska surface water irrigation user's water supplies for the 2015 irrigation season.

Current RRCA Chairman Jim Schneider, Acting Director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, said, "This is a significant step forward for the states and our water users. Our collaborative work and this agreement further demonstrate the benefits of the recent cooperation that the states have been able to achieve. I am optimistic that the states and Bureau of Reclamation can work toward ensuring these types of arrangements can be in place each year so that both Nebraska and Kansas water users will secure the benefits of having more certainty in their water supplies."

Kansas Commissioner David Barfield said, "Today's agreement continues to move us forward toward a longer-term solution benefiting the basin's water users. I appreciate not only Nebraska's continued willingness to work through these issues, but also the Bureau of Reclamation and its irrigation districts for their part in reaching today's agreement."

Colorado Commissioner Dick Wolfe said, "These recent agreements are emblematic of the new cooperation among the states and the federal government. I hope it continues to be a model for cooperation and successful settlement of the remaining issues within the basin."

At the Nov. 19, 2014, meeting in Manhattan, Kansas, the states reached an agreement that provided Nebraska with 100% credit for water delivered from augmentation projects to Harlan County Lake prior to June 1, 2015, and dedicated that water to be used exclusively by Kansas irrigators.

The RRCA is comprised of one member each from the States of Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska. The purpose of the RRCA is to administer the Republican River Compact. This Compact allocates the waters of the Republican River among the three states. The next RRCA meeting is scheduled for August to be hosted in Lincoln, Nebraska.