

New integrated management plan being developed 

**By Russ Pankonin**

**The Imperial Republican**

Water management in the Republican River Basin looks a whole lot better today than it did in 2009.

Natural resources districts (NRDs) in the Republican Basin are preparing to revise their integrated management plans (IMPs) for water use in the districts.

The positive changes have come as a result of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, along with new agreements with Kansas. The Supreme Court ruling changed the methods on accounting for groundwater depletions in the basin.

Recent agreements with Kansas provide for 100 percent augmentation crediting and more flexible delivery of water to surface water irrigators in Kansas.

With these changes, the basin NRDs and the Department of Natural Resources have been working on revised IMPs.

#### **Augmentation key tool**

DNR Programs Director Jesse Bradley of Lincoln presented the joint plan to the Upper Republican NRD board Monday night during one of three stakeholder meetings being held in the basin.

"I'm here to bring good news," Bradley said. The situation is much better than in 2009 when it looked like draconian measures would need to be adopted to keep Nebraska in compliance with Kansas.

The goal of reducing pumping 20 percent from the 1998-2002 baseline pumping still remains in place in the new IMP.

However, the augmentation programs put in place by the URNRD and NCORPE give DNR much better control of remaining in compliance with Kansas.

In the present IMP, the URNRD could have faced the possible shut down of irrigators in the Rapid Response Areas along creeks and rivers in the district. Fortunately, augmentation projects came on line so that action never had to be taken.

Under the worst case scenario in the proposed IMP, pumping would still need to be curtailed in areas where a 10 percent decline in stream flow over a five-year period is forecast.

Bradley said the court ruling and new agreements with Kansas allow better management of depletions by being able to make up the difference with augmentations.

One of the key elements of the Kansas agreement requires Nebraska to be able to have 40,000 acre feet in Harlan County Reservoir by June 1 for delivery to the Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District each season.

By being able to better time the delivery and storage of water, Bradley said the requirement will be achievable.

Bradley said they will be measuring actual groundwater pumping in October to determine the amount of streamflow depletions.

When a shortfall occurs, augmentation pumping could begin as early as October and could run through April 1. If further pumping is needed, it could continue until the end of that year and still count toward compliance.

Bradley said the agreements with Kansas going forward could mean that the stipulations in the 2002 Final Settlement with Kansas would never be a factor in the future.

"This is a really big step with Kansas" in terms of water management for both states, he said.

Bradley said he never dreamed such agreements would ever occur during his career. Instead, it all played out over 16-18 months.

The latest agreement with Kansas remains contingent upon the Nebraska and the Kansas Bostwick Irrigation Districts, working with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, to reach agreement on modifications of certain contract provisions contained in their working agreement adopted last year.

The manager of the Nebraska Bostwick District was present at Monday's meeting. He said the two irrigation districts are still working on resolving the issue.

#### **URNRD to review next week**

The URNRD will review the proposed IMP at their regular meeting Tuesday, Oct. 13, in Imperial.

If they approve it, a hearing on the proposal will be held in November, with possible adoption in December.

Bradley was meeting with the other two Republican Basin NRDs this week, as well. He's hopeful they will adopt a similar timeline so the process can be completed by the first of the year.