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The Imperial Republican

Flooding on the South Platte River two of the last three years has generated renewed interest in the feasibility of transferring some of that excess water into the Republican River Basin.

That renewed interest was evident at the July 7 board meeting of the Upper Republican Natural Resources Board (URNRD).

Board members approved a line item in the proposed budget to set aside \$2.5 million to study the feasibility of moving unappropriated flood into the Republican Basin.

1989 Bureau study

URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning said some of the work was already done in a 1989 study completed by the Bureau of Reclamation.

That particular study looked at drawing flood water from various points on the South Platte from Fort Morgan, Colo., to Big Springs, Neb.

The study arrived at four possible alternatives. One called for withdrawing water at Sterling, Colo., while three other alternatives drew water at Julesburg, Colo.

The Sterling option would have pumped water nine miles through a pipeline and then discharged in the upper reaches of the Frenchman and Wildhorse Creeks.

The seepage would recharge the aquifer, with some of the water eventually reaching Enders Lake.

The three Julesburg alternatives called for pumping water into series of canals and recharge ponds.

The canals ranged in length from 105 miles in Phillips and Sedgwick Counties in Colorado to 186 miles of canals. The longer canals also included Yuma County in Colorado and Perkins and Chase Counties in Nebraska.

Two prior proposals

In 1978, the Colorado's Water Court approved a decree for the South Platte-Frenchman project. This would have transferred South Platte water into the Frenchman Creek drainage area.

In 1984, the Water Court cancelled the decree because the parties involved had not diligently pursued implementing the decree. That action was upheld by the Colorado Supreme Court in 1987.

A second proposal in 1980, sponsored by several Republican Basin irrigation districts, sought to divert South Platte water near Big Springs. Water would have been delivered upstream of Enders Lake.

In November 1984, Michael Jess, the director of water resources for Nebraska, denied their application for the water rights to complete the project. That action was upheld in the Nebraska Supreme Court in 1987.

Long ways to go

Fanning said determining the feasibility of such a transfer project would be the first step. Then

the long process of permitting and engineering would follow.

He said such a project would only be able to operate when the South Platte was flooding. That's happened two of the last three years.

In non-flood years, non-appropriated water would not be available.

One benefit from such a project would be flood relief downstream. That factor would have to be figured in when determining the feasibility and benefits of a project.

Fanning said the URNRD has been reaching out to both public and private partners for commitments to join in and help fund the study.