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The Imperial Republican

Details on an irrigation retirement program proposed by the Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD) will continue to be worked on in the coming weeks. The program received considerable discussion during last week's meeting in Imperial.

In December, the board released details of a proposal to target the retirement of irrigated acres in or near the Rapid Response Areas (RRA). The RRAs have the most direct impact on stream flow depletions.

Stemming stream flow depletions will be a major step in staying in compliance with the 2002 Republican River compact settlement.

At last month's meeting, the board suggested up to \$2,000 per acre foot of benefit be paid to landowners to retire ground in or near the RRA.

During last week's meeting, they discussed raising the number to \$2,500 per acre foot of benefit, taking into account the district's targeted allocation to stay in compliance—11.4 inches.

An acre foot of water is the amount of water needed to cover one acre with water 12 inches deep. Presently, the district's average use stands at 11.9 inches.

The factor of stream flow depletion would also be applied to the base acre-foot price to determine a final value.

For instance, if a piece of ground in the RRA contributed to a 90 percent stream flow depletion and used its full allocation, then the landowner would be offered 90 percent of the \$2,500 base, less the factor between an acre foot and 11.4 inches, which equals 95 percent.

After making a motion to set the base at \$2,500 per acre-foot, board members wrestled with specific details for nearly an hour before withdrawing the motion for further study.

Since the last meeting, board members received input that the proposed \$2,000 base price wasn't enough.

Board member Tom Terryberry said most farmers he talked with were expecting to net \$2,000 per acre foot. In an 80 percent depletion factor area, this would require a base of \$2,500 per acre foot to yield \$2,000.

Terryberry noted retirement is only one of several options to reach compliance.

With augmentation costs running between \$2,500 to \$3,000 per acre foot, he said there's a point when a high per-acre-foot base becomes too costly compared to augmentation.

Chair Greg Pelster said the goal of the various programs is to keep from shutting off irrigators during a water-short year.

Member Kerry Bernhardt said he felt the occupation tax being levied would allow a base of \$2,500 per acre foot.

Member Terry Martin said retiring acres only requires a one-time cost while augmentation projects will result in ongoing costs.

### Augmentation options

Manager Jasper Fanning said augmentation is a more manageable option, compared to retirement.

The threat with retirement comes if it doesn't rain, reducing the amount of water in the stream, reducing the benefit to the district.

He suggested opportunities exist to do augmentation within the district, which would be more cost effective and not be as susceptible to dry years.

The board then went into executive session for about 45 minutes to protect the negotiation nature of such a proposal.

### Adjudication hearing

Efforts to work with parties to set a date for an adjudicatory hearing on violation sanctions has been unsuccessful.

As a result, the board unilaterally set a hearing date for Feb. 8-10.

Attorney Pete Burger of McCook will serve as the hearing officer.

Board members recognized

Three board members who are going off the board received recognition for their service during last week's meeting.

Tim Schilke of Imperial received recognition for six years of service to the board. Schilke did not seek re-election.

Greg Pelster of Elsie served on the board for the past 16 years and served a number of years as chair. He was narrowly defeated in the November election.

Mike Mosel's service to the board totalled 26 years, dating back to 1984.

He served in several capacities, including chair, and was active on the state and national levels as well.

Mosel did not seek re-election to the board.

