

DNR to brief URNRD patrons at Oct. 22 meeting

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Irrigators in the Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD) could face allocations of a mere 5.9 inches per year or see up to 44,000 acres shut down under a plan proposed by the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The plan was expected after DNR held a Holdrege meeting in September to say how they would deal with water-short years to stay in compliance with the 2002 compact settlement with Kansas.

The URNRD will get their formal briefing of the proposal next Thursday, Oct. 22, beginning at 7:30 at the URNRD headquarters.

The Lower and Middle Republican NRDs have already been briefed on the proposal.

URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning said DNR's proposal represents the worst case scenario if the basin cannot find funding for augmentation, surface water leases or other projects to keep the state in compliance with Kansas.

Fanning said DNR has presented three different options for NRD boards to consider.

- Option 1 would permanently cut groundwater allocations by 60 percent. Surface water would only be curtailed to ensure compliance in water-short years.

Under such a scenario, irrigators in the URNRD would receive a permanent allocation of 5.9 inches per acre.

The MRNRD irrigators would get 4.8 inches per acre and LRNRD would get 3.6 inches per acre.

- Option 2 would shut down all wells in an area defined by DNR as the 10%–5-Year Rapid Response Area.

What this means is the amount of water pumped by these wells over a 5-year period would cause a 10 percent reduction to stream flow, Fanning explained.

Under this option, 44,500 acres of ground in this designation would be shut down in the URNRD. In the entire basin, it would amount to 190,100 acres.

- Option 3 would shut down all wells in a somewhat smaller area defined by DNR as the 10%–2-Year Rapid Response Area.

This means the amount of water pumped by these wells over a 2-year period would cause a 10 percent reduction to stream flow.

This would shut down 22,700 acres in the URNRD. In the entire basin, it would shut down 110,000 acres.

Under Option 2 or 3, the landowner would receive no compensation for shutting down wells.