

2012 not projected to be water-short year either.

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While it won't be official until the beginning of next year, 2011 will not be declared a water-short year (WSY) for compliance purposes.

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) made the preliminary forecast Nov. 17 during a meeting of the Republican River Management Districts Association.

DNR went as far as saying that 2012 will not likely be a WSY either.

That's great news to farmers in the basin as it gives them at least two years of planning for crop rotation purposes.

It also means that irrigators in the Rapid Response Areas (RRA) will not be facing a possible shut down during the same time frame.

The RRAs represent irrigated ground that has been modeled by DNR to have the most impact on stream flow depletions. This land is within approximately 2.5 miles of rivers, streams and tributaries in the basin.

The most recent integrated management plan approved by the Upper Republican Natural Resources Board give the NRD the authority to shut down these acres for compliance purposes if necessary.

Positive Balance for 2010

According to DNR's preliminary figures, the Republican Basin will complete 2010 with a positive balance of more than 107,000 acre feet (AF) for compliance purposes.

Wet weather during the past two years has reduced overall consumptive use in the basin and has filled Harlan County Dam to near capacity.

The amount of water in Harlan represents a key factor in determining a WSY, with a storage level below 119,000 AF being the trigger.

DNR also calculated a worst-case scenario where the basin would receive only 20 percent of normal rainfall in 2011.

Because of the large balance at the end of 2010, the basin could increase consumptive use to replace the lost rainfall and still be in compliance for 2011 by more than 44,000 AF.

At normal consumptive use levels for 2011, DNR believes that 2012 will not be a water short year.

In non-WSYs, the basin can use a five-year rolling average of consumptive use to determine whether Kansas has received its full share of water.

In WSYs, compliance is figured on a two-year rolling average.

Each year since 2007, the basin has shown a positive balance, thus staying in compliance with the compact settlement with Kansas.

Based on two-year averages, the URNRD has shown a positive balance in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Neither the Lower Republican NRD nor the Middle Republican NRD were in compliance in 2007 for the two-year average.

The URNRD was the only basin NRD in compliance for the five-year rolling average calculated in 2008.