By Russ Pankonin
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Two surface water irrigation districts filed suit in U.S. District Court late last week in an effort to stop four natural resource districts from using augmentation projects for compliance purposes.

The Frenchman Cambridge Irrigation District (FCID), headquartered in Cambridge, and the Nebraska Bostwick Irrigation District (NBID), headquartered in Red Cloud, filed the suit. They were joined by three board members of FCID.

The suit, which asks for injunctive and declaratory relief, said the projects interfere with stream flow and keep the districts from obtaining the water outlined in contracts with the U.S. government.

In addition to the Upper Republican Natural Resources District, the suits also names Gov. Dave Heineman, Department of Natural Resources Director Brain Dunnigan, N-COPRE, which includes four Nebraska NRDs, and five federal agencies and officials.

The URNRD is nearing completion of a 10,000 acre-foot augmentation project in southwest Dundy County to aid the district in compact compliance efforts with Kansas.

Expansion of the project to 15,000 acre-feet has already been approved by the URNRD board.

N-CORPE is an interlocal cooperative formed by the Upper, Middle, Lower Republican NRDs and the Twin Platte NRD.

N-CORPE has purchased a large tract of irrigated land in Lincoln County for $83 million, with the purpose of retiring irrigation and use groundwater for compliance purposes.

The suit seeks an injunction from the court to stop the use of the augmentation projects.

The surface water districts claim the augmentation projects will deprive them of entitled inflows to streams, rivers and federal lakes.

In addition, they say the groundwater pumping for these projects will further reduce future stream flows.

The two districts are also suing the federal Department of Interior’s Bureau of Reclamation and several officials.

They claim the Bureau of Reclamation has not protected the surface water the two districts are entitled to under federal contracts.