By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

What started out as a concept more than two years ago turned into reality this week. On Monday, the first water released from the Upper Republican Natural Resources District Dundy County augmentation project flowed into the Rock Creek stream bed.

The release point is less than a mile upstream from the Game & Parks Rock Creek Fish Hatchery.

Water will eventually flow down Rock Creek, through Rock Creek Lake and into the Republican River east of Parks.

In 2010, the URNRD purchased 24 irrigated quarters in southwest Dundy County north of Rock Creek at a price of $10 million.

The URNRD retired the irrigation on 3,261 certified acres after the 2011 crop season.

During 2012, a well field consisting of five wells was developed on the north end of the property, with another five wells added in late 2012.

A 20,000-foot, 24-inch pipeline was laid to carry the water from the wells to the outlet point above the hatchery.

On Monday, water was flowing from just one well that was pumping about 1,200 gallons per minute.

Nate Jenkins, assistant URNRD manager, said they expect to have all 10 wells operating within a week or two.

He said the first well operating is the southernmost well, closest to the end of the pipeline.

More pressure testing of the pipeline was expected this week. Once that is complete, more wells can be brought on line, he said.

Compliance the goal

The goal of the augmentation project is to keep the URNRD and Nebraska in compliance with the compact settlement agreement with Kansas.

With the five initial wells, engineers estimated about 10,000 acre-feet could be delivered by the wells.

The capacity of the pipeline was 15,000 acre-feet, which led the URNRD expanding the number of wells to 10.

Based on usage in 2012 and projected pumping in 2013, the URNRD will be responsible for depletions of 10,680 acre feet.

Pumping the Rock Creek project will allow the NRD to make up that difference.

Presently, Nebraska will receive 69 percent credit towards compliance for each acre-foot of water released into the Republican River. The state is seeking 100 percent credit for the water.

At a 69 percent credit, 15,000 acre feet would equate to 10,350 acre-feet for compliance purposes.

Second Augmentation Project

The URNRD is one of four NRDs in the region that joined forces to purchase 19,000 acres in Lincoln County for $83 million earlier this year.

Plans call for retiring more than 15,000 acres of irrigation and using wells to supplement streamflow in both the Republican and Platte River basins.

Progress on that project halted after two surface water irrigation districts filed suit in an attempt to stop the project.

It was hoped the project could be operational yet this summer to aid compact compliance in the other Republican Basin NRDs. However, that’s unlikely after the lawsuit was filed.