

New rules and regulations pass without fanfare.

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

The Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD) knew it would need to retire more irrigated acres after increasing the number of wells on the Rock Creek augmentation project.

They will accomplish that by purchasing an additional 1,900 acres from Wilder Farms in southwest Dundy County for \$8.25 million.

The tract of Wilder land purchased lies about two miles north of the existing Rock Creek project.

The irrigation on the Wilder tract will be permanently retired and will offset the additional pumping gained by adding new wells to the Rock Creek project. That brings the total number of augmentation wells to 10.

The board approved action to issue up to \$12 million in bonds to pay for the Wilder purchase and refinance the remaining balance on the Rock Creek project.

Several factors played into expanding the pumping on the Rock Creek project from 15,000 acre-feet (AF) to 20,000 AF.

The pipeline carrying water to Rock Creek was initially designed to carry 15,000 AF. After pumping began, engineers determined the pipeline can carry a capacity of up to 20,000 AF annually.

Secondly, it appeared the URNRD may need the higher pumping levels to stay in compliance. And when the Lincoln County augmentation project was delayed due to a lawsuit blocking bond funding, management felt the extra capacity could aid the district in compact compliance efforts with Kansas.

New Rules and Reg Approved

The process of developing new allocations for the next five-year period, along with other rule and regulation changes, came to an end April 2 at the board's regular meeting.

On a unanimous vote, the board approved the new allocations and changes on carryforward use and pooling.

The new allocation will remain at 65 inches for the next five years, with carryforward use limited to 7.5 inches during the period.

The initial proposal of 62.5 inches and a 5-inch limit on carryforward drew significant opposition during a public hearing in February.

The board returned to the table to hammer out an agreement on 65-inch, 7.5-inch proposal.

Patrons Address the Board

During the public input portion of last week's meeting, Mark McVey of Haigler and Tom Roundtree of Parks addressed the board on recent actions.

McVey, who was representing the Haigler Cattlemen's Association, chided the board for developing the Rock Creek augmentation project.

He said it will only drain the aquifer and dry up Rock Creek.

He told the board they need to do long-range planning and allocations—not just five years but 10 and 20 years down the road.

He said they want to see natural flows in the Republican River in the future and the only way that can be achieved is to lower allocations, shut down wells and shut down the augmentation

project.

He added that people in his area “feel like unwanted step-children” by the URNRD. Roundtree, who has surface water rights, said he witnessed water flows decreasing after the development of groundwater irrigation.

Now this year, he said he’s lost his water due to the Department of Natural Resource’s compact call and closing orders.

He said they pay the occupation tax on irrigated acres but questioned what he gets for it.

He also noted his surface water acres will still get charged the occupation tax, even though he will get no surface water.

Manager Jasper Fanning said surface water irrigators can certify those acres won’t be irrigated during a certain year and no occupation tax will be collected. However the deadline for that declaration was March 31.

Roundtree said if he makes that designation and a big rain event occurs and water becomes available, he would still be prohibited from irrigating those acres due to the designation.