

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Pumping on the Upper Republican Natural Resources District's Rock Creek augmentation project has passed the 25 percent mark en route to its target.

At last Tuesday's regular URNRD meeting June 11, the board learned that around 7,000 acre-feet (AF) of water have been pumped from the project into the Republican River.

The purpose of the project is to offset over-pumping that occurred in the district last year due to drought conditions.

The augmentation pumping will also aid Nebraska in its effort to stay in compliance with Kansas on Republican River water use.

The URNRD needs to offset 10,680 AF for last year's overuse. The district gets 69 percent credit for every acre-foot pumped.

To reach the 10,680 AF mark, the district will have to pump a total of about 16,000 AF this year.

Not Everyone Pleased

While the board is pleased with the results of the project, not everyone is.

Mark McVey of Haigler addressed the board about his dissatisfaction with the project and the amount of water being pumped.

"Most people along the river are really sick about this," he told the board.

In addition, he submitted a bill to the board for loss of property value, labor and mileage totalling \$48,000 for the damage he figures he's suffered as a result of the project.

He said concentrating all the wells on the north end of the property purchased for the project will damage the aquifer in that area. "Do you have any idea of the divot that takes?" he asked the board.

Board chair Terry Martin reminded McVey the URNRD is not pumping any more water than what would have been pumped had the ground not been retired.

He said by locating at the north end of the property, the URNRD could get more credit for the water pumped.

Martin said engineering studies showed the pumping should not affect neighboring irrigation wells.

The board took no action on the bill received from McVey.

In a related matter, the Dundy County Board of Commissioners denied a request by the URNRD to recognize the Rock Creek project as land purchased for a public use.

By doing so, the board indicated they plan to tax the property.

URNRD Manager Jasper Fanning said he has appealed the decision to the state's Tax Equalization and Review Committee.

Board member Tom Terryberry said it's unfortunate the possible loss of tax revenue is all borne by Dundy County.

Regardless of the TERC ruling, he said he would like to see the board work with Dundy County on the issue.

Fanning said no current statute exists that would give NRDs the ability to make any type of reimbursement to Dundy County.

Creating such legislation should be the focus rather than going to the appeal process.

Fanning also said the interlocal agency that purchased Lincoln County ground for another

augmentation project is pursuing long-term financing for the \$85 million land purchase.

Irrigation on the tract has been retired and seeding of the land under the more than 100 pivots is underway. Some irrigation will be used, he said, to establish cover vegetation.