Allocation at 13 inches, carryforward use at 7.5 inches.

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The Imperial Republican

Last week's regular board meeting for the Upper Republican Natural Resources District turned into a marathon session, lasting nearly eight hours on Feb. 12.

Starting at 1 p.m., board members spent nearly 3.5 hours hashing out possible changes to the proposed allocations and carryforward cap presented at a public hearing Tuesday morning.

When it came to a vote to leave the annual allocation at 12.5 inches but increase the amount of carryforward available from five to 7.5 inches, the motion failed 4-6.

Board members voting for the measure included Dean Large, Terry Martin, Tom Terryberry and Tom Gaschler. Voting against were Jeff Wallin, Jason Kunkel, Loren Jessen, Kerry Bernhardt, Tom Schroder and Brett Bullock.

Board members decided to move on with other agenda items and revisit the proposals at a later date.

However, at the end of the agenda items, board members made another attempt to reach some type of compromise on the proposal.

On a vote of 6-4, the board approved sending a new proposal to hearing–an allocation of 13 inches and carryforward use with no penalty of up to 7.5 inches during the five-year allocation period.

Board members voting for the new proposal included Wallin, Jessen, Bernhardt, Bullock, Gaschler and Martin. Those opposed included Terryberry, Schroder, Kunkel and Large.

A public hearing on the new proposal has been set for Thursday, March 21.

Details of Proposal

The allocation for the next five-year period would be left at the same level as the present allocation–13 inches.

The amount of carryforward that can be used without penalty during the allocation period would be 7.5 inches. Use of additional carryforward will be permitted, but any amount over the 7.5 inches will be charged at a 2:1 ratio.

Irrigators who conserve water and use under their allocation can preserve that savings as carryforward. If carryforward is not used during the period, it remains with the tract and is not lost.

The proposal does allow for any carryforward lost due to the penalty to be recouped. If water use is reduced by a like amount in the next five-year allocation period, then the irrigator will get those penalized carryforward inches back.

The proposal will also penalize the overuse of water on tracts where there is no carryforward or may be in a negative balance.

If a tract has no carryforward, an irrigator will be allowed to borrow into the next allocation period but that will come with a price.

For every inch borrowed, an additional one-inch penalty will be applied when the new allocation period begins.

For instance, if a tract has only 12 inches of allocation remaining in the fifth year of the period, the proposal allows the irrigator to borrow into the new allocation.

If the irrigator borrows 10 inches from the next period, it will be charged at a 2:1 ratio or 20 inches. As a result, the irrigator would start the next allocation period with 20 inches less water.

Because of the possibility of increased water use during a drought year, such as experienced in the summer of 2012, the board reserved the right to review the rules on an annual basis.

The hearing March 21 will seek additional input from irrigators on the new proposal.

If approved by the URNRD board, it would go into effect 30 days after approval.