

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Reducing the amount of irrigation water pumped in the Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD) remains a key focus of the URNRD board.

During their monthly meeting last week, Manager Jasper Fanning reviewed several options under consideration.

Fanning noted two government programs, EQIP and CREP, can already be utilized to retire acres for a specified period. Irrigators receive reimbursement during the retirement period.

When those acres come out of retirement, he suggested offering a one-time payment to the owners to permanently retire the acres.

For land that is not eligible for those government programs, he offered two other retirement options.

One would take bids from owners on the amount of payment they would need to retire their ground.

Another option would be to get an option or lease from an owner for the right to retire the ground for a year or two during water-short years.

The owners would also submit a bid for the compensation needed in the years when the land

couldn't be irrigated.

Fanning said the board could review the respective bids to determine areas where it would be most beneficial to retire ground.

Some of this ground could be outside of the alluvial or rapid response areas. The groundwater model would be used to determine areas with the most stream flow depletion.

The board's groundwater committee is also taking a closer look at the pooling rules.

They are trying to determine if a change in rules would help keep the pumping in the district within the 425,000 acre-foot allocation granted by the state.

Violation Update

Board attorney Joel Burke said he had met with counsel representing Jack Bond and related parties on settlement options for rules violations.

Burke said they plan to submit a written settlement proposal to the board but has not seen anything yet.

The entities are contesting the settlements handed down by the board for bypassing meters.

In those cases, the NRD issued a "death penalty" on 1,476.4 acres, retiring irrigation on those acres forever. Another 779.4 acres was retired for 10 years, along with the loss of all carryforward.

The board also acted on similar violations found on Wilder Farms property in Dundy County.

The significantly reduced allocation of five wells that had active meter bypass mechanisms installed.

New Assistant Manager

Last week marked the first meeting for Nate Jenkins, who has been hired as an assistant manager.

One of Jenkins' primary duties will be to handle communications and public relations for the district.

He will also work closely with the Republican River Basin Coalition, which includes the URNRD, Middle Republican NRD, and most recently the Tri-Basin NRD.

Jenkins was born in Nebraska but grew up in Goodland, Kan.

After earning a degree in journalism at Kansas State, in 1998, Jenkins worked at the Salina (Kan.) Journal and the Lincoln Journal-Star. In 2006, he joined the Associated Press, based out of Lincoln.

He covered Nebraska statehouse issues for both the Journal-Star and AP, as well as water issues. He said he's developed a keen interest in water issues, which is why he pursued the opportunity with the URNRD.

Jenkins joined the staff Sept. 22.

He and his wife, Emma, have a 16-month-old daughter, Ila.