

*Goal to have project fully operational by end of March*

**By Russ Pankonin**

*The Imperial Republican*

Testing of wells and the delivery pipeline for the Lincoln County augmentation project is underway, with the goal of becoming fully operational by the end of March.

During the Upper Republican Natural Resources District meeting last week, Manager Jasper Fanning said the need for several culverts represents the biggest impediment to making the project fully operational.

“Culverts and tumbleweeds are the only thing that can hold up a multi-million dollar project,” Fanning surmised.

He said they are working with landowners to replace two culverts along Medicine Creek to handle the increased flow on the creek.

He said the pipeline has been pressure tested and two to four wells are operating to flush the pipeline and get water flowing down the creek channel.

The stream bed at the outlet was dry before augmentation water began flowing through it. The delivery point is about a mile north of Hwy. 23.

Water will eventually flow in Harry Strunk Lake northwest of Cambridge.

The project is a joint venture of four NRDs which formed a public agency often referred to as N-CORPE. That stands for Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement Project.

The NRDs include the Upper, Middle and Lower in the Republican Basin and the Twin Platte in the Platte Basin.

### **Arbitration Hearing**

Fanning attended the recent hearing on the arbitration between Kansas and Nebraska over crediting on the N-CORPE project.

Nebraska has asked for 100 percent credit for each acre foot of water pumped from the project for compact compliance and water-short year planning.

Presently, water will flow in Harry Strunk Lake northwest of Cambridge.

As it now stands, any augmentation water pumped from the N-CORPE project will be credited at 54 percent towards compact compliance.

The arbitrator, Jeffrey C. Fereday, was the same who heard a similar dispute between the two states on water credit for the Rock Creek augmentation project.

Nebraska received a favorable decision on that issue, but the final report has not yet been issued on Rock Creek.

Since both arbitrations are non-binding, Kansas can still pursue a direct action with the U.S. Supreme Court on the issues.

Fanning said it would be three to four months before Fereday makes any decisions on the

N-CORPE arbitration.

### **Special Hearing on LB 1074**

Nate Jenkins, assistant manager, said the NRDs are keeping a close eye on legislative bills, especially LB 1074.

The Natural Resources Committee held a special hearing Tuesday on a new amendment tacked on to the bill.

Jenkins, testifying on behalf of the URNRD, was among 17 people who testified in opposition to the bill as amended.

Eight people testified in favor while six testified on a neutral basis, including Sen. Mark Christensen. In his absence due to a family death, Christensen's testimony was read into the record by his legislative aide, Dan Wiles.

Christensen said his district is a loser either way if the bill passes.

If passed, he said it would harm the economy of the Upper Republican and likely force the shutdown of wells.

If it doesn't pass, it hurts surface water users on the east end of his district who have their water taken by the state for compliance purposes without any compensation.

One irrigator in that region said he calculated the loss from losing his surface water last year at more than \$130,000.

Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha introduced the bill and its current amendment. He said if the senators on the committee acknowledge there is a problem with sustainability and aquifer declines, then the bill should be advanced.

Lathrop said the fact that the state has to pay Kansas \$5.5 million for non-compliance serves as proof that the current NRD system for managing water in the basin is not working.

Other controls are needed, which is why he brought the bill, he said. Since he couldn't pass legislation dealing with a specific river basin, impliedly the Republican Basin, the legislation includes all river basins in the state.

The Natural Resources Committee will consider the testimony and vote on whether to advance the bill to the floor.