



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb) - An engineering firm that studied an alternative of relocating the proposed J-2 Regulating Reservoirs Project to an island on the Platte River told The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors on Monday that he would not recommend the relocation.

During a series of public hearings last month about the proposed project, Central representatives heard several comments that placing the reservoirs on Jeffrey Island should be considered as an alternative to acquiring land south of the river on which to build the impoundments. Central is nearing the end of a 17-year lease-to-own arrangement for Jeffrey Island, which is being managed for wildlife habitat benefits, and will own the land in 2016.

Robert Huzjak of RJH Consultants, of Englewood, Colo., said that, while technically feasible, a host of design complications would more than double the cost (to \$195 million in 2012 dollars) of building the reservoirs on the island, rather than at the currently proposed site.

Huzjak said the same criteria were used to evaluate the island site as was used in earlier studies that led to selection of the current site, including the ability to provide the same regulating capacity to meet the needs of the project, the need for two cells to provide flexibility during both irrigation and non-irrigation seasons, and ability to convey at least 2,000 cubic feet per second of water from the cells to the river to successfully retime flows.

Among the obstacles to moving the reservoirs to the middle of the Platte River was the need for suitable soils from which to build the berm cores and liner.

"We need low-permeability soils to manage seepage; the soils on site are highly permeable and highly erodible," Huzjak said. "We would have to find a suitable borrow pit - approximately 500 acres of land -- nearby from which to transport the material needed for the reservoirs. The embankment core and liner alone would require 3.9 million cubic yards of fine-grained material."

The engineering firm also considered a geosynthetic liner or bentonite for the liner, but found those to be more expensive.

The island site would also require construction of a large siphon to transfer sufficient quantities of water back and forth between to the reservoirs and the canal. The engineers also considered an aqueduct, but dismissed that after determining that it would be even more expensive than the siphon because of the weight of the water it would have to carry.

Other limiting factors included a need to provide streambank protection at several locations, the cost of a longer overall embankment length than the current design, the loss of flexibility to use the reservoirs one at a time when needed for maintenance purposes, risks of building the reservoirs on an island itself in terms of dam and reservoir safety issues, the ability to secure the necessary state and federal permits to build such a reservoir, and the cost of replacing the land currently used for wildlife habitat purposes as required by Central's federal hydropower license.

As a result of the analysis, Huzjak said that he recommends against further consideration of the on-island alternative, and instead continue forward with the project at the current proposed location. A written report is expected to be finalized sometime in January.

Natural Resources Manager Mike Drain said that Central management also recommends in favor of continuing with the project in its current location. He also reminded the board that other comments received at the J-2 Project land hearings held in November are posted on Central's website and are available for review and consideration.

Also at Monday's meeting:

-- The board approved a series of water service agreements with various entities to provide benefits from excess flows (flows above certain target levels) that periodically occur in the Platte River.

An agreement with the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (Program) and a separate agreement with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR) will provide benefits for stream flows via groundwater recharge. The Program will receive 50 percent of the flows diverted into Central's Phelps Canal during the non-irrigation season up to a total of 4,000 acre-feet, then 100 percent of any flows that exceed 4,000 acre-feet. The agreement expires on Dec. 31, 2015.

NDNR will receive 50 percent of excess flows diverted into the Phelps Canal during the non-irrigation season, up to a total of 4,000 acre-feet. The term of this agreement is also for one year.

The board also authorized a multi-year agreement with the Program in which Central would divert excess flows into the Phelps Canal and the Program will receive groundwater recharge to augment stream flows equal to 75 percent of the total amount diverted. The agreement runs through 2019. The Program will consider the agreement at this week's Governance Committee meeting in Denver.

Finally, the board gave authorization for a fourth water service agreement, subject to legal review, with NDNR and the Tri-Basin Natural Resources District. Central will provide intentional groundwater recharge for the purposes of studying groundwater recharge, sustaining groundwater levels in the Tri-Basin NRD area, and for implementing the NDNR/Tri-Basin NRD integrated management plan.

NDNR and Tri-Basin NRD will receive 25 percent of the total amount diverted into the Phelps Canal during the non-irrigation season, subject to a reservation notice by either or both entities, up to a total of 7,500 acre-feet through 2019.

-- The board approved an operating budget for the 2015 fiscal year. The budget, which goes into effect on Jan. 1, anticipates total revenues of \$19.87 million, including \$7.39 million from the sale of hydroelectric power, \$3.55 million from irrigation delivery service, and \$8.93 million from other sources.

-- The board set irrigation delivery service rates for 2015 at \$32.62 per acre for base deliveries of nine acre-inches. Under Central's Incremental Pricing Program, the rate for deliveries above 9 acre-inches will be an additional \$1.14 per acre-inch; previous board action will limit deliveries during the 2015 irrigation season to 12 acre-inches.

-- Irrigation Water Management Specialist Curtis Scheele of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Central's Conservation Director Marcia Trompke reviewed water conservation measures in the area over the past year. Highlights from Scheele's presentation included \$1.8 million in cost-share funds made available to area producers. The dollars were spread over 55 contracts and involved conservation practices on 10,490 acres.

Trompke presented inventory data about Central's delivery system, results of a study of pivot swing arms to assess application uniformity, and plans for next season. She also said that 532 pivots delivered water to 60,143 acres (55 percent of contract acres) on Central's system in 2014, with more planned for installation next year. In addition, 17 sub-surface drip systems covering 593 acres are delivering water from Central.

-- The board approved revised guidelines for determining hardship relief for certain residents at Johnson Lake/Plum Creek Canyon and Lake McConaughy. The new guidelines are based on provisions similar to Nebraska's Homestead Exemption program for determining tax relief.

-- The directors approved the selection of NebraskaLand National Bank of North Platte, Gothenburg State Bank, and Pinnacle Bank of Omaha to provide banking services related to Central's business operations.

-- The board approved payment of \$50,000.00 to Sky Copters of Ulysses, Kan., for chemical control of phragmites along the Supply Canal, salt cedar at Lake McConaughy and certain areas of the beaches at Lake McConaughy. Both are highly invasive species. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has agreed to reimburse Central \$10,000 for spraying that occurred on the beaches of Lake McConaughy's in October.

-- The directors approved a work order for the purchase of computer software for use by the Irrigation Division and accounting department to track irrigation deliveries and provide reporting and billing capabilities. Total cost of the software, including professional services to implement and customize the software, training, license and annual support, is \$76,573.

-- Civil engineer Cory Steinke reported that Lake McConaughy is currently rising at a rate of about one-half foot per week. The reservoir was at elevation 3246.3 on Monday (1.23 million acre feet or 71 percent of operating capacity). Inflows are slightly below normal for this time of year at 1,200 cubic feet per second with only minimal releases to meet downstream demand.

-- "We're currently seeing a lot of water coming down the South Platte River," he said. "That doesn't help us much in terms of storage at Lake McConaughy now when releases are already relatively low, but it could have an impact down the road if we need to release more water and could rely instead on South Platte flows."

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