



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) - The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors gave approval for staff to prepare applications to the Water Sustainability Fund for two groundwater recharge projects within its service area.

One would include expanded infrastructure in five wetlands areas within the Rainwater Basin, including the Funk Waterfowl Production Area. Partners in the project would include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tri-Basin Natural Resources District and Ducks Unlimited.

The second project would include construction of a pipeline from the Phelps Canal to an area managed by the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program that would enhance groundwater returns to the Platte River.

Both projects would use excess flows from the Platte River when available during non-irrigation season and would require new water appropriations for groundwater recharge from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources. Both are also subject to additional approval by, and agreements with, the respective partners.

The Water Sustainability Fund (WSF) is a source of financial support to help Nebraska achieve the goals adopted by the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission (NRC) which oversees Fund operations, including selecting successful applications, and the Department of Natural Resources, which oversees administration. If approved by the NRC, project sponsors must provide 40 percent of the project's cost, which is matched by funds from the WSF.

Also at Monday's meeting:

- Civil engineer Cory Steinke reported that Lake McConaughy has been slowly rising over the past several days as inflows have exceeded 4,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). The reservoir's elevation was 3,256.5 feet above mean sea level (1.49 million acre-feet; 86 percent of capacity) on Monday with the potential for another foot or two increase in the near future. Inflows could exceed 5,000 cfs in the coming days. Central's hydro-irrigation system has also benefited from higher than normal flows in the South Platte River, although those flows are beginning to decline.

Steinke also reminded the directors – as well as cabin-owners at Johnson Lake – that it may become necessary to utilize the flow attenuation plan at the lake.

The flow attenuation plan, or “spike-flow plan,” is a condition within Central's Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license and was developed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. It is intended to help attenuate (reduce) flows on the Platte River below the Overton measuring gauge during the least tern and piping plover nesting seasons.

The plan is designed to keep Platte River levels at lower levels, thus reducing the chances of flooding nests located on sandbars. The plan requires Central to use Elwood Reservoir and up to 2,500 acre-feet of space in Johnson Lake and immediately above the J-2 Hydroplant to help attenuate river flows. It enables Central to respond to large rain events during the irrigation season and reduce the release of rejected irrigation water to the river.

To have 2,500 acre-feet of space in Johnson Lake to hold rain and rejected irrigation water, the lake must be kept at the lower end of normal levels. From June 1 to Aug. 15 each year, Johnson Lake will be operated near the low end of the normal operation range so that space is available if attenuation is required.

The plan was suspended in each of the past two years because high flows in the Platte River prevented least terns and piping plovers from nesting at lower elevations along the river, but as flows in the river begin to recede, it may become necessary to implement the plan, Steinke said.

- Irrigation Division Manager Dave Ford reported that the first week of a 12-week irrigation delivery schedule began today, although some early deliveries have been made to customers for pivot applications.
- The directors approved – for the purpose of continued discussions and negotiations – modifications to existing language in a policy that concerns transfer and renewal of lot leases at Johnson Lake and Plum Creek Canyon Lake. The new language is intended to clarify existing language about the term of the lease as well as lease transfers and renewals.
- The board approved a \$40,900 revision to the current annual budget. The action adds \$18,900 for the purchase of a road groomer for use on roads at Johnson Lake and \$22,000 for installation of a new heating, venting and air conditioning system at the Gothenburg Office.
- The directors approved a statement of service for \$50,620 payable to Ellicott Dredge Technologies for a second month's lease of a dredge and float pipe. The dredge is currently being used for a sediment removal project at Jeffrey Lake.
- The board approved an easement agreement with Dawson County for the Johnson Lake Hike/Bike Trail and authorized the general manager to approve future easements required for completion of the trail.
- The board approved a change of date for the November committee meeting of the board. The new date will be Wed., Nov. 22 at 9 a.m., in at the Holdrege administration office.

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