



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) - An abrupt change in the water supply situation took center stage at Monday's monthly meeting of The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors.

Civil engineer Cory Steinke told the board members that a spring that appeared to be below normal in terms of inflows to Lake McConaughy has seen dramatic improvements in recent weeks.

"Runoff from snowpack in the North Platte Basin was projected to amount to about 36 percent of normal this spring," Steinke said. "Then we saw heavy snow and rain in May, which occurred mostly below Pathfinder and Seminoe reservoirs, and caused the unexpected high flows that we're now seeing in the North Platte River."

Steinke said the Laramie River Basin, which normally doesn't contribute much water to the North Platte River, has lately been flowing at about 4,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) when it empties into the North Platte River.

Central officials have been told by Nebraska Department of Natural Resources personnel to expect inflows over the next few weeks to be high and to peak around 8,000 cfs, which would be about seven times greater than normal inflows for this time of year.

Lake McConaughy had appeared to have reached its peak several weeks ago at elevation 3,251.1 feet, but as of Monday morning was at elevation 3,255.1 feet and rising by three or four inches per day. Maximum storage elevation is 3265.0 feet.

"At this rate of inflow," Steinke said, "Lake McConaughy could be full in less than three weeks."

He said Central will continue to monitor the situation closely, store as much water as possible in the reservoir on the North Platte River to help minimize downstream flooding problems that are the result of high flows in the South Platte, and consider asking the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for permission to exceed its maximum storage level by up to two feet if the high South Platte flows continue.

The South Platte River has been experiencing similar high flows as a result of heavy spring precipitation, but those conditions had been expected to occur after good snowpack accumulation in the South Platte Basin and above normal carry-over storage conditions in Colorado's off-stream reservoirs.

"We pretty much expected high flows in the South Platte to continue through June," Steinke said. "We've been running South Platte water through the system and diverting as much as possible for various groundwater recharge projects. At this point, it's not clear how long the high flows will continue; it depends upon how much more rain falls out west."

The National Weather Service's outlook over the next several days shows gradually declining flows in the South Platte River, a trend that could reverse course if additional rainfall occurs.

Although Lake McConaughy is expected to be full, General Manager Don Kraus said that at this point Central will continue to follow plans to deliver 12 inches of water per acre to its irrigation customers because of the difficulty of altering irrigation schedules at such a late date.

Also at Monday's board meeting:

- The board approved the 2015 water right transfer requests amounting to 334.3 acres in the Phelps, E65, E67 and Supply Canal areas. Unused or cancelled water rights were transferred to other acres to fulfill the requests.
- The board approved an amendment to the annual budget, adding \$25,000 to complete a corporate network upgrade to Central's microwave communication system. Total cost of the project will be \$90,000.
- Conservation Director Marcia Trompke reported that all of the equipment - including radios, remote terminal units (mini-computers that relay data), and weather stations - has been installed for an irrigation management project on the E67 Canal system.

This project's objective is to gather irrigation water use and environmental data to support Central's irrigation water management, water conservation and water quality goals. The project will enlist the cooperation of Central's customers irrigating about 5,800 acres in the E67 area north of Elwood and Smithfield.

The project will collect irrigation water use data from irrigation flow meters and weather monitoring sensors crucial to irrigation management. Data will be available in real time to Central and individual irrigators through digital applications to help customers make sound irrigation management decisions.

The project is partially funded by a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund and includes partnerships with UNL Extension for educational services and the McCrometer Co., which is providing flow meters, technical expertise and equipment installation training.

- The board approved a 10-year lease agreement, subject to legal review, with Ward David of Lubbock, Tex., the owner of 6.3 acres of land below the Jeffrey Reservoir dam. Under the agreement, Central will lease the land to use for potential placement of material dredged from Jeffrey Lake in an effort to restore capacity lost to siltation over the years.
- Steinke provided a status update on the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs project. Geotechnical studies of the property have been completed and data is being analyzed. In addition, preliminary design work for the reservoirs has begun, as have consultation with federal and state agencies on various aspects of the project. Study plans have also been developed to determine if there are impacts to wetlands, water quality and cultural resources.

Future tasks include application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for an amendment to modify Central's license to include the J-2 project, completion of the land acquisition process, federal and state issuance of the final permits, final reservoir design, and advertising for bids from contractors to construct the reservoirs.

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