The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District

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News Release

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(HOLDREGE, Neb.) – The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors approved an agreement during Monday's monthly meeting to accept a grant award from the Nebraska Water Sustainability Fund and to move forward on a project to install a new siphon on the E-65 Canal to convey water into Elwood Reservoir.

A new siphon alignment has been designed to replace the original infrastructure at an estimated cost of $16 million. Central sought funding assistance from the state's Water Sustainability Fund, and was awarded a grant in the amount of $8,982,946. Central will be responsible for the balance of the cost.

The Nebraska Natural Resources Commission oversees the Water Sustainability Fund, including application review, scoring and ranking and awarding funding to successful applicants. The Department of Natural Resources administers the fund by initially reviewing applications and forwarding those that meet the requirements to the NRC. At their December meeting, the NRC selected Central's project as one of this year's grant winners

The current three siphons, part of the original project construction in the late 1930s, have been in service since 1941. They are essential to conveying water to 150 irrigation customers at 414 separate turn-out points serving more than 42,000 acres. After 80 years of service, the existing siphons are in deteriorating condition, requiring numerous expensive repairs.

The new siphon will be approximately 5,400 feet long and would consist of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe. Another approximately 5,300 feet of open canal sections will be part of the project. Installation of this new siphon will secure uninterrupted long-term delivery of water in the E-65 system and ensure that irrigation, recharge, recreation and wildlife benefits are sustained in the future. The new siphon will also eliminate the need for costly pumping into Elwood Reservoir.

Central General Manager Devin Brundage told the board, "This project is one major piece of a thoughtful, progressive approach to continuing to maintain and develop the infrastructure necessary for our district to maximize all the benefits we provide, not only today but into the future. By moving forward, this board has shown dedication to working proactively to preserve the regional economic vitality supported by the 42,000 irrigated acres within the E-65 Canal area as well as the significant benefits of ground water recharge and recreation."

Timeline of the project begins right away with land owner discussions and the selection of engineering firms. It is expected that the bidding will be completed this year with construction finished the following year.

Also at Monday's meeting:

- The directors approved an agreement with HDR Engineering of Omaha to develop a Section 404 Clean Water Act permit application. The permit is necessary to assist in maintenance dredging at Central's diversion dam.

- The board awarded bids to Murphy Tractor of North Platte to furnish a 2020 John Deere track loader for $288,437; and to Road Builders of Grand Island to furnish a new Crawler dozer for $365,880.

- Hydraulic Project Operations Manager Cory Steinke told the board that painting of the outlet structures at Lake McConaughy will be wrapping up for the winter this week and traffic control will be removed. He expects workers to return late February or early March to complete the project.

- The board approved the inclusion of 1,157 acres in the 2022 Water Leasing Program. In exchange for payment of $100/acre, irrigation customers who submit acres for the program agree to not irrigate the acres. Instead, the Platte River Recovery Program leases the water which is added to the Environmental Account in Lake McConaughy and is available to benefit wildlife habitat along the Platte River

- Civil engineer Tyler Thulin reported that Lake McConaughy's elevation as of Monday morning was 3239.7 feet (1.08 million acre-feet and 62 percent capacity) which is up one foot the last month. Current releases were about 420 cubic feet per second (cfs) with inflow readings unavailable due to frozen river gauges. He added that snowpack accumulation in the South Platte River Basin was about 108 percent of average, the Upper North Platte River Basin was 115 percent of average; 54 percent in the Lower North Platte Basin; and 107 percent in the Laramie Basin. Snowmelt runoff in these basins is an important part of the water supply for Central's hydro-irrigation project.

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