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## Area NRDs moving forward with Platte diversion plan

Andy Raun Nov 17, 2015

ALMA — Beginning as soon as next spring, excess Platte River flows may be diverted south into the Republican River Basin, helping to ease hydrological deficits that endanger Nebraska's ability to comply with an interstate river compact.

That was the word here last week as the Lower Republican Natural Resources District board of directors approved an interlocal cooperation agreement with the neighboring Tri-Basin NRD.

The agreement provides the organizational and administrative structure for the high-flow diversion project, which would carry water to the Republican River via Turkey Creek.



The Tri-Basin district board approved the arrangement at its monthly meeting in Holdrege on Tuesday. The Lower Republican board followed suit Thursday in Alma.

The interlocal agreement creates the Platte to Republican Basin High Flow Diversion Project, or PRD Project, which will be its own entity and will be overseen by a board of directors that includes representatives from both the TBNRD and LRNRD.

The four-person board will include two representatives of each NRD, with three members required for a meeting quorum. But each NRD will have only one vote, and a unanimous vote is required for the issuance of any bonds of the acquisition of water rights.

Mike Clements, LRNRD general manager, and John Thorburn, his Tri-Basin counterpart, said they hope to be prepared to divert water by summer 2016. Clements said easement requests and a draft request for proposals are in the works.

"I really appreciate Tri-Basin's, and particularly John's, partnership on this," Clements said. "I think it's going to be a tremendous project."

The NRD managers met two weeks ago with officials of the Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, which diverts Platte river water for hydroelectricity generation at Lake McConaughy in western Nebraska and for surface irrigation through canals in Kearney, Phelps and Gosper counties.

Thorburn said water will be diverted from Central's E-65 Canal into the east branch of Turkey Creek between Elwood and Smithfield.

Turkey Creek flows into the Republican near Oxford, roughly 26 miles to the south. Clements said that with twists and turns in the channel, the water may be flowing around 30 miles to reach the river.

Water will be moved about 600 feet from the canal to the creek in a pipeline 24 inches in diameter, with a flow capacity of 40 cubic feet per second.

A 24-inch diameter pipe will carry the water to the creek, with a maximum flow capacity of 40 cubic feet per second.

"That's about all the capacity we can get out of Turkey Creek," Clements said, noting the importance of protecting stream banks and preventing flooding onto adjacent property.

The diversion pipeline will run beneath a road and some railroad tracks. The price tag for installing the pipeline, including the necessary boring and excavation, is expected to be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$104,000.

“That’s a very rudimentary estimate, but it’s something we can go by,” Clements said

Thorburn said he had been talking to landowners along the diversion route and had received favorable responses. He also said the NRDs had found a helpful partner in CNPPID, and that Turkey Creek could be just the first of multiple diversion points along Central’s E-65 Canal.

“We’re anticipating this as the first phase,” he said.



The diversion project will require two permits: One for diversion of excess flow, and the other for a transbasin diversion. Central will hold the excess flow permit in its own name.

Flows in the Republican River Basin are the subject of long-running controversy. Kansas twice has sued Nebraska, alleging that Nebraska irrigators overuse their rightful share of the basin’s waters and thereby short their downstream neighbors of flows in the stream, violating the Republican River Compact of 1943.

Ruling in the most recent lawsuit, the U.S. Supreme Court held that Nebraska had violated the compact and ordered the state to pay \$5.5 million in damages, while at the same time favoring Nebraska on some key points in the dispute.

Meanwhile, Nebraska surface water irrigators and irrigation districts complain that they bear an undue share of the burden when the state takes compact compliance steps, being denied river water deliveries while groundwater irrigators are not forced to cut back more on their pumpage.

To augment surface flows and help with compact compliance, well farms in Dundy and Lincoln counties are used to send groundwater to the river. The diverted Platte River water would serve the same purpose.

While visions of this type of Platte diversion project developed in the aftermath of flooding along that river over the last couple of years, Clements said diversions would be able to occur anytime water flowing in the channel is not appropriated for some agency or purpose downstream.

“It’s not necessarily just high floodwaters,” he said.



The advertisement features a red background with a subtle geometric pattern. On the left, there is a headshot of Scott Norlen, a man with short blonde hair wearing a suit and tie. Below the photo, his name and address are listed: "Scott Norlen, Agent", "1017 W. 2nd Street", and "Hastings, NE 68901". A "Contact Me" button with a right-pointing arrow is positioned below the address. To the right of the photo, the text "I EXIST — TO — ASSIST" is displayed in large, white, bold letters. Below this, it says "Call me for great coverage and savings." At the bottom left is the NBA logo, and at the bottom right is the State Farm logo, which consists of three interlocking ovals followed by the text "State Farm®".

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