



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) -- Conservation and irrigation water management activities and achievements during 2015 were reviewed during Monday's monthly meeting of The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors.

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 \$9.8 million in cost-share funds made available to area producers as part of the Conservation Stewardship Program. The dollars were spread over 125,506 acres within the Tri-Basin Natural Resources District. In addition, five contracts worth \$169,031 were implemented with area producers for installation of pivots, sub-surface drip irrigation systems and soil moisture sensors.

Scheele also reported that the area's participation in the Nebraska Agricultural Water Management Network provided crop-water use data from 17 sites scattered throughout the TBNRD that growers can use to make irrigation management decisions. The NRCS partners with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Phelps-Gosper Extension, TBNRD and Central to create a network that Scheele said is unique in the United States in terms of making water-use data available to producers.

Trompke presented inventory data about Central's delivery system that showed 545 pivots and 18 sub-surface drip systems on Central's surface water delivery system in 2015. Average deliveries to irrigation customers were 6.9 inches/acre over 109,152 acres during a season in which a 12-inch/acre allocation was in place.

Trompke said a significant accomplishment last year included establishment of the E67 Telemetry Project. The project provides near real-time data to irrigation customers that enables data collection to facilitate precision irrigation management to conserve water. The system utilizes UHF radios, digitized flowmeters, rain gauges, solar panels and two automated weather stations to provide data to optimize water management and irrigation efficiency. Field data and graphs can be accessed on any device with an internet connection.

The project is a partnership among Central, McCrometer, Inc., the Nebraska Environmental Trust, and UNL Extension. Over the next two years, telemetry equipment will be installed at 50 more field sites.

Also at Monday's monthly meeting:

- The board approved work orders to replace an open lateral northeast of Smithfield with a pipeline and to close the associated lateral at a total cost of \$194,367. The directors also approved the purchase of PVC pipe for pipeline projects for \$134,574.
 - The board approved the enrollment of 1,037 acres into the Water Leasing Pilot Program for 2016. Central will pay irrigation customers \$220/acre with funding provided by the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) upon confirmation that the acres were not irrigated with surface water or groundwater in 2016. The conserved water will then be made available to the PRRIP. The majority of the acres enrolled in the program, according to Irrigation Division Manager Dave Ford, are pivot corners, odd-shaped tracts, or fields that are difficult to irrigate.
 - The board approved the sale of a leasehold interest for a vacant lot at Johnson Lake, and modifications to tier classifications on several lots in the Mallard Cove area at the lake that are affected by an access road.
 - The directors approved the purchase of a low boy trailer for \$71,500 and a front-end loader for \$153,000, both of which will be used within the Gothenburg Division.
 - A motion to move the March 7 regular monthly meeting to the Super 8 Motel in Holdrege was approved. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m., as usual and the annual meeting of the Central District Water Users will follow at the same location. Jeff Fassett, director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources will be the keynote speaker at the water users' meeting.
 - Chad Adams, representing the Nebraska Water Center Foundation, gave a presentation to the board about the planned expansion of the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center. The expansion will add 1,900 sq. ft. to the conference room, enough space to accommodate about 275 people. The existing conference room is sufficient for about 30 people. Adams said fundraising efforts to date have secured more than half of the estimated \$653,000 cost of the expansion. Efforts to raise the remaining funds will continue in 2016 with the goal of having the construction completed by the summer of 2017.
- The expanded room will be available for public and private events and will also function as an Emergency Center for the surrounding area, Adams said.
- Cory Steinke, civil engineer, gave an update for the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs Project. Steinke said current efforts by Central and its consultants are focused on project design work to produce a single reservoir, rather than the two cells as originally proposed; amending the water service agreement with the Platte River Program to reflect the smaller size of the project; and resuming negotiations with landowners in the project area.
 - Steinke reported that Lake McConaughy was at elevation 3254.9 as of Monday morning (1.45 million acre-feet; 83.2 percent of capacity). He said the reservoir will be operated to maintain that elevation in the coming weeks, with releases approximately equal to inflows. Inflows to the reservoir are estimated at 800 and 1,200 cubic feet per second, with ice in the river making accurate gauge readings difficult to obtain. Snowpack accumulation in the Platte Basin is near normal, but Steinke reminded directors that it's still very early in the season.

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