The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District approved an operating budget for the 2012 fiscal year at Monday's monthly board meeting.

The budget, which goes into effect on Jan. 1, anticipates total revenues of $23.94 million, including $16.89 million from the sale of hydroelectric power, $3.27 million from irrigation delivery service, and $3.78 million from other sources.

Included in the budget was a 50-cent per acre increase in irrigation rates for the 2012 season, bringing the base rate to $29.85 per acre. Under Central's Incremental Pricing Program (IPP), the rate for deliveries above nine acre-inches, and up to 18 acre-inches, will be $1.05 per acre.

For customers not enrolled in the IPP, the rates are $33.00/acre for 12-inch contracts and $39.30/acre for 18-inch contracts.

Also at Monday's board meeting:

Marcia Trompke, Central's conservation director, presented information about water conservation activity during 2011. Included was information that there are now 380 pivots taking deliveries from Central's irrigation system, covering approximately 40 percent of the irrigated acres. Sixteen of the pivots have been installed with assistance from the federal AWEP program. Trompke also reported on three ongoing sub-surface drip irrigation (SDI) demonstration sites within Central's area, including next year's plans to study an alternative filtration system and apply fertilizer through the buried drip tape.

Civil engineer Cory Steinke said that he expects Lake McConaughy to remain near its current elevation of 3256.0 feet over the next several weeks as ice conditions affect flows along the Platte River and into Central's Supply Canal. For the time being, he said, inflows are matching outflows at the reservoir.

Ron Fowler, representing the Johnson Lake Trails Committee, summarized the results of a

recent survey of lake residents regarding opportunities to extend the trail system.

Fowler said the survey measured responses to 19 options along 11 trail segments. The trails committee will analyze the responses to each proposed segment and conduct public meetings next spring to review the proposed corridors. The committee hopes to present a master plan for trail expansion to Central next summer in anticipation of the next construction phase.

Irrigation water management specialist Curtis Scheele presented a report on his activities in 2011. Among his duties, Scheele works with Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and the Nebraska Agricultural Water Management Demonstration Network (NAWMDN).

In those areas, he reported that 55 EQIP contracts were funded in the Tri-Basin NRD in 2011, distributing $1.5 million for improvement projects on 10,305 acres. Of the 55 contracts, 29 were for water conservation-related improvements. In addition, four AWEP contracts were approved for Central irrigation customers who installed pivots with cost-share dollars and another to assist with installation of a sub-surface drip irrigation system. Scheele said the amount of water conserved as a result of the programs in the three-county area is estimated at more than 4,100 acre-fee per year.

Scheele also reported on the NAWMDN sites in Nebraska, which include 14 sites in Phelps, Kearney and Gosper counties. The sites provide crop water-use data to assist producers with irrigation decisions. The data is available on Central's web site and a University of Nebraska-Lincoln web site.

The IWMS position is cooperatively funded by Central, Tri-Basin Natural Resources District, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Kevin Breece, the NRCS district conservationist in Holdrege, said cooperation among the three entities is a primary reason why he considers the three-county area one of the nation's best in terms of irrigated crop production.