

Central's irrigators get a full season in 2010

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Irrigators using water from the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District will receive a full irrigation season in 2010 for the first time in six years.

Central's board of directors approved two resolutions at Monday's monthly board meeting pertaining to the 2010 irrigation season.

The directors passed the first resolution on a 13-0 vote (two members were absent) to schedule a full irrigation season for the first time since 2004.

Improvements in storage conditions at Lake McConaughy and staff projections that the lake is likely to contain more than 1.3 million acre-feet of water by late next spring allowed Central to schedule a 12-week irrigation season with a limit of 18 inches of water per acre.

Central's irrigation customers have been limited to either 6.7 or 8.4 inches of water over 8- or 10-week seasons in each of the last five years.

The second resolution, also passed 13-0, amended Central's rate structure and delivery schedule.

The revisions establish a base rate for nine acre-inches of water. Each additional acre-inch above the base will cost \$1 per acre, establishing a financial incentive to use less than the 18-inch allotment of water.

As part of the pricing program, irrigation customers will have the option of taking deliveries over a 7-day or 14-day period.

In the past, all deliveries were made according to a 14-day rotational schedule. The new scheduling option will add flexibility to producers' irrigation operations and enhance

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opportunities for water conservation.

“Advances in agricultural and irrigation practices, as well as district operations, make it possible to make these modifications,” said general manager Don Kraus. “Water-use efficiency continues to improve and the new rate structure and delivery schedules encourage Central and its customers to continue to incorporate conservation practices into our operations.”

Letters explaining the new rate and schedule structures in detail will be mailed to irrigation customers this week.

Also at Monday's meeting:

Natural resources manager Mike Drain reported that an updated Land and Shoreline Management Plan, approved at a special board meeting on Nov. 30, is expected to be filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission this week. The plan will be posted on Central's web site after it has been filed with the FERC. The plan, Drain said, is the product of a multi-year process and Central appreciates the input and assistance in its development from the public, stakeholders, and resource agencies.

Irrigation water management specialist Curtis Scheele of the Natural Resources Conservation Service presented a report on 2009 activities, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and the Nebraska Agricultural Water Management Demonstration Network (NAWMDN).

Scheele said that 50 approved EQIP applications in the Tri-Basin Natural Resources District received more than \$1.2 million in funding. Of that total, he said, \$750,144 went to irrigation-related projects, saving an estimated 3,300 acre-feet of water per year.

He said the NRCS office received 123 applications for AWEP funding, of which 79 were eligible and nine were funded. As a result, Central irrigation customers will add nine new pivots and a sub-surface drip system to Central's system by next season. Over the next five years, Central customers are eligible for \$1.55 million for improvements to irrigation operations on a cost-share

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basis.

Scheele reported that there were 225 NAWMDN sites in 36 Nebraska counties in 2009, including 13 in Central's service area. Crop-water use data is recorded at each of the sites and made available on UNL Extension's and Central's web sites to assist producers and crop consultants with irrigation decisions.

The board voted 13-0 to approve a budget for the 2010 fiscal year that anticipates total revenues of \$17.9 million, including \$10.5 million from the sale of hydroelectric power, \$3.3 million from irrigation delivery service, and \$4.1 million from other sources.

The board approved a resolution to name the new section of the hike/bike trail on the west side of Johnson Lake in honor of the late Paul Matson. Matson, a resident at Johnson Lake who died in October, was instrumental in the effort to build the trail.

Cory Steinke, Central's civil engineer, reported that Lake McConaughy was at elevation 3236.9 feet (1,019,300 acre-feet) on Monday, 58.5 percent of operating capacity and more than 300,000 acre-feet more than at this time last year. Inflows, he reported, were around 1,000 cubic feet per second, which is about 75 percent of normal.

Steinke also reported that ice and slush from the recent onset of cold weather are causing minor lowland flooding problems at some locations along the North Platte and Platte Rivers.