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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

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“Middle Republican NRD works with Riverside Irrigation Canal Company to stay in Compliance with the Three-State Compact on the Republican River”

(Curtis, NE) The Riverside Irrigation Company (RIC) has joined efforts with the Middle Republican Natural Resources District (MRNRD) to help the state stay in compliance with the three-state Republican River Compact, meet standards in MRNRD’s integrated management plan, and help protect the local economy. The MRNRD has purchased the surface water rights on 672 acres from shareholders of the RIC and landowners have begun filling in the irrigation canal. Riverside Irrigation Company by corporate resolution has surrendered all of their water rights to the MRNRD and turned over all interest in Riverside Irrigation Company to the NRD. The MRNRD will hold those rights and provide that water to the State of Nebraska to be used for compact compliance when needed. This purchase will free up about 2,400 acre feet of surface water that will be available to downstream users when Nebraska is in compliance with the compact and can be passed on through to Harlan County Reservoir when Nebraska needs water for compact compliance.

Riverside Irrigation Company began operations in June of 1894. Originally organized as an unincorporated association, they filed articles of incorporation in 1935 and again in 1960. Riverside held four natural flow appropriative rights dating from 1893 and irrigated 672 acres. The canal lies in a seven mile long area along the west side of the Frenchman River in Hitchcock County just west of Culbertson. Riverside has been an active player in maintaining compact compliance. They were willing to lease their water to the State and the MRNRD for three years to help Nebraska work toward compliance with the compact during the drought of 1998 through 2007.

“The shareholders of Riverside approached the Board of the Middle Republican NRD in the spring of 2011 and indicated they were willing to sell their irrigation rights to the NRD,” said Roger Kolbet, land owner and shareholder of the Riverside Irrigation Company. “One of the main reasons we were interested in selling was that leasing the water to the district was hit or miss from one year to the next making irrigation and crop planning difficult. It made more sense for us to do a permanent sale. By selling our surface water rights we help the MRNRD stay in compliance. Since we have additional properties in the district, we will also benefit from the district staying in compliance,”

said Kolbet. “The district was easy to work with during this process and we appreciate that,” he added. Over the next few months title searches were made and contracts were developed. In the fall of 2011 most of the contract offers were made and the purchase of the surface water and groundwater rights were finalized.

The project was funded with federal funds through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and through the NRD’s occupation tax,” said Dan Smith, General Manager of the Middle Republican NRD. The purchase of the irrigation rights from Riverside Irrigation Company is a significant step taken by the Middle Republican NRD towards long-term compliance with the standards in our integrated management plan and provides extra water to the State of Nebraska when needed for compact compliance.

Benefits from this project include:

- Protects water supplies, future users, and helps keep Nebraska in compliance by increasing flows to the river.
- Protects the local economy and future water uses by staying in compliance with the compact and not having to shut off irrigation in the rapid response areas of the district.
- Reduces production costs to the farmer by eliminating operation and maintenance costs of the canal.
- Increases productivity and efficiency of the family farm. By filling in the canal farmers have added land to grow crops and created longer, more efficient rows on their property.
- By maintaining long-term compliance with the river compact, we help the State of Nebraska avoid additional legal fees and damages in the future.

“This is one of the many management actions that the district has taken. We continue to support irrigation practices that reduce consumptive use, and we continue to fund programs with willing landowners that provide for permanent and temporary retirement of irrigated acres. We are currently in negotiation with another irrigation district to explore the benefits that can be obtained with an intentional recharge project,” said Smith.

More management actions will be needed in the future and the MRNRD will continue to work with any willing party to insure that this NRD stays within its share of the consumptive uses of the waters of the Republican River Basin. The MRNRD is working with other NRDs, irrigation districts, the State of Nebraska, and the Bureau of Reclamation in a basin study that will explore the conjunctive use and management of the waters of the basin. “Through the best management of all waters we can continue to protect the economy of the basin. Managing surface water and ground water together rather than separately can help Nebraska stay in compliance and maintain the maximum number of irrigated acres in the basin. Reductions in consumptive use will continue to be needed, but proper management can keep Nebraska from having to impose a compact call year and restrict users in our part of the basin,” said Smith.

The Middle Republican Natural Resources District protects lives, property and the future of this district through a wide range of stewardship, management and education programs—from flood control to groundwater monitoring, from irrigation management to outdoor recreation, and more. Activities and projects of NRDs are reviewed and approved by a locally-elected board of directors. There are 23 natural resources districts across the state. For more information, visit www.mnrnd.org.

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