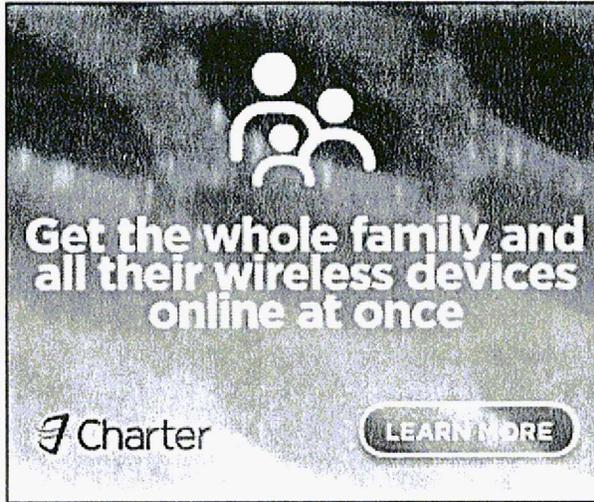


BREAKING One dead, one injured in plane crash near Broken Bow Updated March 28, 2

Making noise over water rights 0

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Posted: March 2, 2010 at 3:00 pm

HOLDREGE — A surface water irrigation district manager wants people to know that groundwater users aren't the only Republican Basin farmers with water supply and interstate compact concerns.



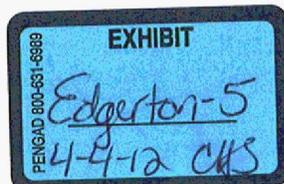
"We're trying to make some noise, stand up for our water users and protect their water rights," Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District Manager Brad Edgerton told the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District board Monday in Holdrege.

His district likely will deliver 8 inches of water per acre over eight weeks on three canals this summer.

The federal Bureau of Reclamation's drawdown of Hugh Butler Lake behind

the damaged Red Willow Dam north of McCook will mean no water on the fourth canal. "The people on Red Willow Canal probably won't see any water for the next three years," Edgerton said.

A sinkhole and cracks were found at the 50-year-old earthen dam. The damage probably is the result of interior settling. Studies of the problems and needed repairs are being made, and plans will be submitted to Congress for funding approval in February 2011.



Edgerton's district will be responsible for 15 percent of the cost. "This thing ain't gonna be cheap," he said. "... They (bureau officials) are really on the fast track to get this resolved. They tell me this is the first time they've had to drain a reservoir."

About 5,000 acre-feet of water has been left in the reservoir, or enough to keep the water about a foot above the seal.

Surface water irrigators also are knee-deep into Republican River Compact compliance issues and integrated water management plans written by natural resources districts and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

Edgerton said that while all the attention is on Nebraska's compact compliance and river flows to Kansas, Colorado has overused its allocations by about 70,000 acre-feet in recent years.

Colorado's compliance project involves purchasing 9,500 acres of farmland, retiring the irrigation and pumping the equivalent water into an 11-mile pipeline to augment the North Fork of the Republican River near Wray, Colo., just west of the Nebraska state line.

Edgerton said the plan is to pump 15,000 acre-feet annually into the augmentation system until the water debt to Nebraska is paid and then reduce pumping to 9,000-10,000 a-f to maintain compact compliance. He said Nebraska and Kansas officials have problems with the plan, which is headed toward arbitration.

He met last year with Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning about Frenchman-Cambridge irrigators being harmed by Colorado diversions in excess of the compact allocation. "The attorney general's office is more worried about Kansas (issues with Nebraska) than our interests with Colorado," Edgerton said.

He reviewed for the CNPPID board the state-proposed measures for Nebraska to comply with the compact in dry years. They include reducing groundwater and surface water use near the river.

"I don't see anything in the plan that says 'compensation,'" Edgerton said. "This is strictly regulation."

Not being addressed are groundwater-related streamflow depletions that affect surface water irrigators' supplies. Edgerton said DNR's provisional estimate of 2009 stream depletions linked to groundwater pumping is 231,000 a-f.

Frenchman-Cambridge officials are awaiting a DNR ruling on their request to reclassify the Republican Basin from fully appropriated to overappropriated. Edgerton said DNR officials told him an overappropriated definition can be used only in areas under a three-state agreement, such as the Platte Basin west of Elm Creek, not a three-state compact.

He has argued that the Kansas v. Nebraska lawsuit settlement constitutes a three-state agreement. His board has authorized an appeal if DNR decides not to re-evaluate the basin designation.

Edgerton was asked if Bureau of Reclamation officials are involved in the water supply issues for their reservoirs related to the compact and groundwater use. "We're trying to drag them into this more than they are ... we need a strong voice in the bureau to stand up and protect their water rights," he said.

Frenchman-Cambridge officials support a bill introduced by state Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege to create a Republican Basin Sustainability Task Force.

"Really, that's something people aren't talking about out there. What is sustainable?" Edgerton said.

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