

NewsWatch

Kansas seeks amends for water use

By BILL SPIEGEL

NEBRASKA must be held accountable for its overuse of Republican River water in 2005 and 2006, a Kansas official declared in December.

David Barfield, chief engineer of the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources, says Nebraska used 82,870 acre-feet more water from the Republican River than it was allotted over a two-year period. This quantity of water — enough to supply a city of 100,000 people for 10

Key Points

- Kansas has contacted Nebraska about its overuse of Republican River water.
- In 2003, Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado decided how to divvy up the river's water.
- Kansas seeks money; Nebraska is working to reduce its water use.

years — caused significant economic loss in the Kansas Republican River basin, particularly due to lack of irrigation water.

As such, Barfield says the state of Nebraska should immediately shut down wells within 2.5 miles of the Republican River and its tributaries and on land in the basin where irrigation started after 2000. Moreover, Nebraska should pay Kansas compensation for the economic loss and other damages, Barfield wrote in a letter dated Dec. 19 to Ann Bleed, head of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources. The letter gives Nebraska 45 days to respond.

"The damage to Kansas was significant," Barfield says. Just as Kansas re-

ceived \$37 million from a settlement years ago from Colorado's overuse of Arkansas River water, the state should be entitled to "tens of millions of dollars," according to Barfield. The Kansas attorney general, he adds, is charged with enforcement of the settlement.

The Supreme Court decision

Under terms of a 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decree and final settlement stipulation among Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado over a previous Republican River dispute, the three states meet each year to determine each state's allocations from the river. Over the past four years, Nebraska's average allocation was 280,000 acre-feet of water per year; Kansas' was about 220,000 acre-feet and Colorado's, 30,000 acre-feet.

The allocations are based on a five-year rolling average in normal years. In the case of "water-short" years, a two-year running average replaces the five-year average. Due to drought, 2005 and 2006 are considered water-short years.

The 2003 agreement forgave Nebraska for previous overuse of Republican River water but requires strict adherence to the current rules.

"Since 2002, Nebraska has cut allocations and quit letting new wells in," Barfield says. But that is not enough for compliance — thus the demand to shut down wells within 2.5 miles of the Republican River basin. Such action would have a much greater effect on streamflow than similar action further away from the river, he explains.

Ultimately, "we need to know we're getting our water," he says.

Nebraska's efforts

The first few years of the compact, Nebraska had yet to develop a suitable water management plan for the Republican River. That's when severe overuse occurred, says Dan Smith, manager of the Middle Republican Natural Resource District in Curtis, Neb.

Since then, the state's three natural resource districts have implemented conservation measures that will help it comply with the compact.

For example, in Smith's district, farmers are changing crop rotations and idling acres to reduce water needs.

"If they continue to do that, over the long term Nebraska can get into compliance and stay there," he says.



NEW TRACTOR :: PROVEN HERITAGE



Buhler Versatile four-wheel drive tractors are known for their reliability, unprecedented longevity and ease of service and maintenance. In that tradition, Buhler is pleased to unveil the new line of 305 to 400 horsepower four-wheel drives. These tractors include numerous improvements and features that were unavailable in the previous generation. The new 305 to 400 horsepower range shares many of the same features as the successful High Horsepower Tractor (HHT) Series 4WD. Features include a larger cooling package for better air flow, higher road speeds, a wider, more spacious cab with available training seat, and an optional deluxe cab that adds a semi-active heated seat, powered and heated external mirrors and auto climate control.

Powered by Cummins engines, available in 305, 340, 375 and 400 horsepower.

Available in May 2008.







Visit your local Buhler Versatile dealer
or www.buhler.com.

Buhler Versatile Inc.
888.524.1003 :: info@buhler.com
www.buhler.com





WATER TALK: David Barfield, chief engineer of the KDA's Division of Water Resources, says Kansas is owed "tens of millions of dollars" by Nebraska.