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Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District Secures \$2.5 Million for Conservation Projects

Result of Court ruling on dispute with Republican River, Kansas v. Nebraska

On February 24, 2015, in the case of Kansas v. Nebraska No. 126 Original, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of Kansas in the dispute over the states' rights to the waters of the Republican River Basin. The Court ruled Nebraska had "knowingly failed" to comply with the Republican River Compact and awarded Kansas \$5.5 million for its losses.

The 2015 Legislature introduced Senate Bill 112 Section 178, which designated where all moneys recovered by the state of Kansas would be deposited. Of the \$5.5 million, \$2 million was reimbursed to the Attorney General's office for litigation costs and through the action of state legislators the remaining \$3.5 million was credited to fund water improvement projects in the basin.

"I am pleased and proud Kansas farmers in the affected area will receive a portion of the settlement monies and have developed a plan to re-invest it in water efficiency projects which will serve the area for years to come," said Rep. Sharon Schwartz (R-Washington, KS). "This ultimately is a win-win for communities and farmers who depend on a reliable source of water."

The Republican River and its tributaries are important surface and groundwater resources to the state of Kansas. To determine the priorities for the basin the lower Republican River stakeholders, officials from the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) and the Kansas Water Office (KWO) met last month to discuss possible ways to use the funds for conservation projects. The consensus was \$2.5 million should be awarded to Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District (KBID) for conservation projects within the district and the remaining \$1 million used to explore other water improvement project possibilities in the area.

"It is time to move past the litigation phase and move forward with solutions," said Secretary of Agriculture Jackie McClaskey. "These projects will ensure farmers in north central Kansas will continue to be productive while being more efficient with their compact water supply."

As the water planning agency, KWO will hold the funds for dispersal. They recently signed a contract for KBID to receive the allocated \$2.5 million to be used in the conversion of open lateral canals to buried pipe systems for delivery of irrigation water.

“The stakeholders in the lower republican river identified water management and conservation as a priority of damage award funds,” said Tracy Streeter, Kansas Water Office Director. “We are pleased to partner with KBID, a leader in irrigation efficiency, to implement conservation projects in line with the Governor’s Water Vision.”

KBID has a long and successful history regarding completing these types of conversion projects with their own employees and construction equipment. Over the past few decades, the district has converted more than 90 miles of open lateral canals to buried pipe systems to allow them to continue their conservation plan of building a better district. Unfortunately the cost of the larger open canals to buried pipe systems was unaffordable for them to do on their own.

“We have found by converting open canals to buried pipe systems, an average of 30-40 percent of the water is saved through the elimination of evaporation, seepage and operational spills,” said KBID Superintendent Kenny Nelson. “The monies available through this opportunity will help the district improve our efficiency and upgrade our aging infrastructure. It is our method of creating value and protecting our natural resource at the same time.”

The KWO, KDA and local stakeholders are also studying additional storage options in the area as well as improved water management to serve water users outside of the irrigation district.

Visit www.kwo.org in the coming months for more information as projects begin or contact KBID at 785-374-4514.

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