

Environmental Trust funds to help range restoration on URNRD augmentation site

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Thursday, 08 March 2012 18:40 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 March 2012 18:41

By Nate Jenkins

Upper Republican NRD Asst. Mgr.

The Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD) is in line to receive an \$840,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust to help fund rangeland and stream flow restoration associated with its augmentation project near Rock Creek in Dundy County.

The grant approval is preliminary at this point but the board of the Nebraska Environmental Trust has recommended that the project be funded.

The NET board will take formal, final action on grant recommendations in April. The NRD's grant application is one of almost 60 requests that have received preliminary approval. There were a total of nearly 140 grant applications from across Nebraska.

A significant portion of the grant funds, if granted, will help with seed and seed-drilling costs on the URNRD augmentation project in southwest Dundy County.

Grant funds may also be used to help increase flows to benefit operations at the Rock Creek Fish Hatchery.

Last year the URNRD purchased approximately 4,000 acres, 3,260 of them irrigated, for \$10 million for the planned augmentation project.

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Beginning this 2012 crop year, the 24 pivots on the property will cease irrigating crops and the land under these pivots will be resown with natural grasses.

Five of the wells will be piped together so water that otherwise would have been used to irrigate crops can be pumped into Rock Creek when needed to maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact.

Additional pipeline will be constructed to carry the water to Rock Creek. The NRD plans to use wells on the northern half of the property to minimize impacts on stream flow.

It is expected that less water will be pumped under the project than would have been pumped had the property remained in irrigated production.

This month, a contractor will begin drilling grass and forbs into approximately 2,000 acres. The remaining acres will be seeded at a later date. Minimal irrigation is expected to occur to help establish grass on the property.

Assuming approval, the NRD will receive \$735,000 this year with another \$105,000 set aside for the project next year.