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Republican River Flows Increasing Due to Dundy County Project

IMPERIAL, NE - If you've noticed a recent uptick in Republican River flows, especially in its western reaches, it may be due to a new stream flow enhancement project that has begun operating in Dundy County.

The Rock Creek Augmentation Project initiated by the Upper Republican Natural Resources District in Imperial began operations in February. It is currently operating at full capacity, with the potential to help both surface and groundwater users throughout the Republican Basin. Rock Creek is a tributary of the Republican River and joins the Republican just outside of Parks, Neb.

The United States Geological Survey operates a stream gauge at Parks and the most recent reading from the gauge said Rock Creek flows were 34 cubic feet per second. Flows registered before the NRD began operating the project were about 7 cfs. Engineers have determined that Rock Creek has plenty of capacity to handle the additional flows.

"We're very pleased that the project is operating as we expected and such a large percentage of the water we are providing is already reaching the Republican River," said Jasper Fanning, general manager of the Upper Republican NRD. "It will help both groundwater and surface water users throughout the Republican Basin without creating additional demands on the Ogallala Aquifer that is so vital to the future of this region."

The project has the potential to help surface water users by decreasing the amount of time that surface water availability is curtailed by the state to help ensure compliance with the Republican River Compact. It could help allow the continued use of surface water that otherwise would be shutdown to achieve compliance with the Compact. For groundwater users, the project will help prevent severe and sudden regulations of their water use to maintain Compact compliance. Non-agricultural water users could also benefit due to the groundwater recharge that occurs as the Rock Creek water makes its way downstream.

The project was made possible by the Upper Republican's purchase in early 2011 of 3,260 irrigated acres located several miles north of Parks near what used to be the headwaters of Rock Creek. By retiring the land from irrigated production, the NRD is able to use water that otherwise would have been irrigated on and consumed by crops to increase stream flows. Ten wells on the property are plumbed together and connected to a

main, 24-inch pipeline that is approximately seven miles long. The end of the pipeline is located a little more than a mile north of the Rock Creek Fish Hatchery, an important hatchery to the State of Nebraska. It contributes to the production of nearly half of the trout stocked throughout Nebraska.

The grassland restoration associated with the project is being funded with a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, which is funded by proceeds from the Nebraska Lottery and has awarded more than \$178 million to conservation projects in Nebraska since 1994. The NRD applied for a NET grant and was awarded a \$735,000 this year with the potential to receive another \$105,000 next year.

Four NRDs – Upper, Middle, Lower Republican NRDs and the Twin Platte NRD - are working on a similar stream flow enhancement project in Lincoln County. A lawsuit filed by Frenchman Cambridge Irrigation District and Bostwick Irrigation District has temporarily delayed the project but is not expected to prevent it from being constructed.

If you have questions about the Rock Creek project, contact the Upper Republican NRD at 308-882-5173. The NRD will try to arrange tours of the project this spring.