FARM WATER

‘I live in reality’

State engineer says no dice to suspending irrigation rules

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THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

ROCKY FORD — A time-out from Arkansas Valley surface irrigation rules is unlikely, even though farmers say they’re paying for water they’re not even using.

At this week’s meeting of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District, Dale Mauch, a Lamar farmer on the Fort Lyon Canal, asked State Engineer Dick Wolfe if the 2010 surface irrigation rules could be suspended until a study of pond leakage is complete.

“Dick, we’d like to have the state help us, because sometimes it seems like you’re the enemy,” Mauch told Wolfe at one point.

Mauch explained that under 2010 surface irrigation rules, he was required to purchase replacement water to augment his pond-fed sprinklers, even though he hasn’t been able to irrigate since mid-June because of the drought.

Mauch is among farmers trying to loosen up state water-replacement requirements by trying to prove that irrigation ponds that feed sprinklers leak more than presumed by a state formula.

The state presumes 3 percent leakage, while farmers say it’s closer to 20 to 25 percent.

Wolfe replied that the state’s actions are bound by court-decreed rules that make it difficult to alter or suspend any of the provisions.

“Dale, the state’s computer model doesn’t agree with you,” another farmer joked.

“I live in reality,” Mauch laughed.

Pueblo County farmer Tom Rusler, who farms on the Bessemer Ditch, asked if the accounting for the rules could be done after the irrigation season, rather than in advance.

Wolfe said the rules require a plan prior to the irrigation season and can’t be altered without a change in the court decree. Wolfe said the rules could be amended to reflect the results of the pond study. Additionally, the Lower Ark district, which administers a group plan for water replacement under Rule 10 of the rules, can amend its report.

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