



Fall 2022

Volume 36, Issue 4

Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

2022 Annual Report and Long-Range Plan

Tri-Basin NRD Vision

The vision (overall goal) for Tri-Basin NRD is to "work cooperatively with District residents to promote good stewardship of land and water resources."

Tri-Basin NRD Mission

Tri-Basin NRD's mission is to "manage, conserve and protect the District's land and water resources." This mission will be accomplished by protecting the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater, reducing soil erosion and flooding, promoting agricultural best management practices, forestry, and wildlife habitat preservation. These tasks can only be accomplished by working cooperatively with residents and agencies of local, state, and federal government.

Protecting Groundwater Supplies

Protecting and managing groundwater supplies is one of the most important jobs we do at Tri-Basin NRD. Our groundwater management goal is to ensure that "all groundwater supplies within the Tri-Basin NRD will be used in a beneficial manner, efficiently managed and properly utilized to preserve this vital resource forever." Achieving that lofty goal is made more difficult by the variability of weather on the Great Plains. Just in the past decade we have seen extremely wet (2019) and dry years (2012 and 2022).

Because our climate is so unpredictable, the Tri-Basin NRD Board of Directors began working with the State of Nebraska and Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) back in 2006 to divert excess flows from the Platte when available and allow that water to soak into the ground.

It seeps down into our aquifers, stored until irrigators need it

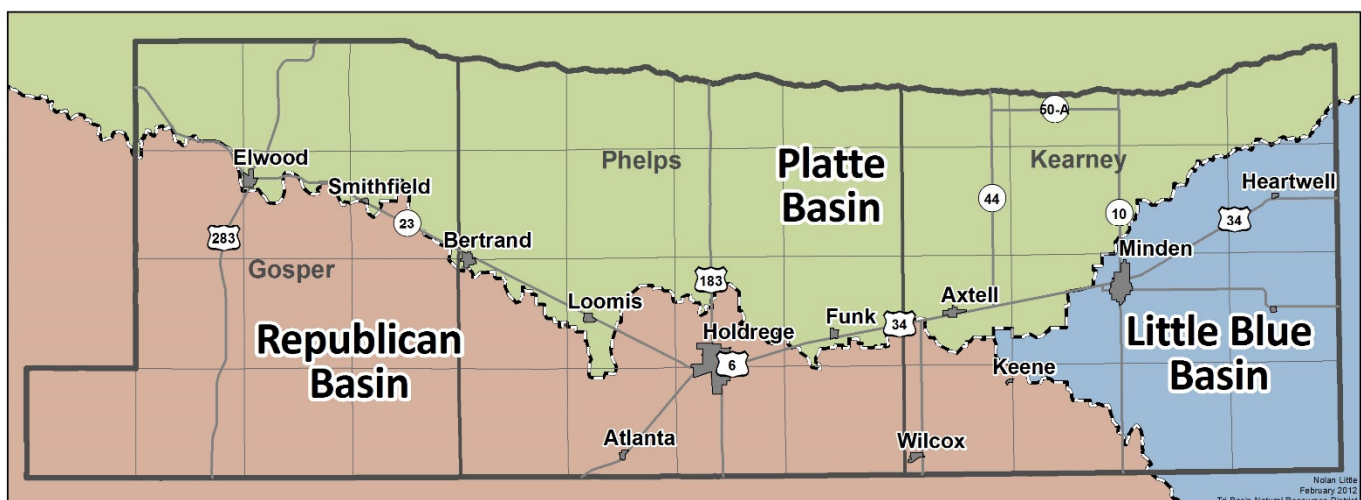
during a drought. We have diverted over 121,000 acre-feet of water in the past sixteen years to ensure that our groundwater supplies remain viable, even during extreme drought.

Tri-Basin is also required to replace groundwater that is pumped by our irrigators, to the extent that it reduces streamflows in the Platte and Republican Rivers and their tributaries. The District currently operates three augmentation wells when needed to help sustain streamflows in the Platte and Republican River basins. We are also working cooperatively with Lower Republican NRD and Central NE Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) to develop the Platte-Republican Diversion. This project will enable us to divert water from the Platte when there are excess flows that exceed levels necessary for all other water users. We want to transport that water through CNPPID's canal system to Turkey Creek, a tributary of the Republican River. Platte flows diverted into the Republican basin are counted as "imported water" in the Republican River Compact calculations, so water that would otherwise flow down the Platte unused will help Nebraska fulfill our obligation to provide water to the state of Kansas.

Tri-Basin NRD is always looking for ways to help our irrigators improve their efficiency, so our agricultural economy and our drinking water supplies will be assured for the foreseeable future.

Tri-Basin's Water Conservation Incentive Program (WCIP) began in 2019. It rewards participating producers that are willing to limit their groundwater use. A second WCIP option is targeted at CNPPID customers, encouraging them to use canal water to the extent possible, even when they also have groundwater wells. The NRD board uses a ranking system to

Basin Boundaries



determine which WCIP applications will provide the greatest benefit. Landowners have enrolled 2507.81 groundwater acres and 3071.20 commingled acres in WCIP through the 2022 crop year.



Checking Data
Logger in
Observation
Well

Tri-Basin's board needs data to make timely and accurate decisions about groundwater management. The District started measuring groundwater levels in 1977, building on groundwater data collected by CNPPID and the University of Nebraska as far back as 1939. We now have a network of more than 200 irrigation wells and 137 dedicated observation wells that are measured at least twice yearly by NRD staff. Most dedicated observation wells also have automated sensors that record groundwater levels twice each day.

Local groundwater declines prompted Tri-Basin NRD directors to enforce groundwater pumping limits in Union Township (5N-22W), Gosper County in 2009 to protect the declining groundwater supply there. More recently, directors became concerned about declining groundwater levels in May Township in Kearney County (6N-13W), Elk Creek Township in Gosper County (5N-23W), and Grant Township in Kearney County (5N-13W). These townships are designated as Phase Two for groundwater quantity management. Tri-Basin NRD takes a proactive approach to groundwater management. It is our expectation that acting now will arrest groundwater declines and preclude the need for additional restrictions. Wind-driven wildfires ravaged Gosper County in April 2022. TBNRD Board terminated the previous allocation period, allowing farmers in Union Township to pump without restriction as they tried to re-vegetate fire damaged areas to reduce erosion. A new allocation period for Union Township will commence in 2023.

2022 Irrigation Water Management Forms

If you would like to have your reports mailed to you, call Tri-Basin NRD at 308-995-6688.
Reports due November 22, 2022.

Protecting the Quality of Groundwater

TBNRD has regulated fertilizer application to protect groundwater quality since 1989. District staff work cooperatively with farmers and agronomists to help improve the timeliness, efficiency, and effectiveness of fertilizer application. This has resulted in stable or declining nitrate-nitrogen levels in groundwater supplies throughout the district.

- 234 irrigation wells tested for nitrate levels in 2022

Tri-Basin NRD staff protected groundwater supplies from contamination by permitting chemigation, the process of applying fertilizer and ag chemicals through irrigation systems. This process allows farmers to "spoon feed" fertilizer to their crops as it is needed and reduces nitrogen leaching below the crop root zone into the aquifer. In 2022, Tri-Basin NRD issued:

- 102 new chemigation permits
- 2,310 chemigation renewal permits
- 949 inspections of chemigation safety devices

Attention Chemigators:

Please drain your main line check valve to prevent freezing and extend the life of the check valve.

Planting Trees for Future Generations

Tri-Basin NRD sells conservation trees and shrubs for windbreak and habitat plantings. The district provided 775 free tree seedlings for local Arbor Day celebrations. Tri-Basin staff help landowners diagnose tree diseases and fungal blights and decide on treatment methods.

Tri-Basin NRD Conservation Tree Sales						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Contractor Planted	4,361	5,726	3,205	1,581	2,825	2,825
Hand-Plant	2,080	2,225	3,853	2,307	2,890	2,540

Preparing for Disasters

Tri-Basin NRD, along with Phelps, Gosper, and Kearney Counties, developed a district-wide All Hazard Mitigation Plan (AHMP). The plan outlines steps that would be taken in an emergency. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires local governments to have a Hazard Mitigation Plan before it will provide federal disaster relief funding. This plan needs to be reviewed and updated every five years. Tri-Basin was awarded \$8,100 grant by FEMA in 2022. This grant will cover 75% of the cost of updating the AHMP. The remainder of the expense will be divided between TBNRD, Gosper, Phelps, and Kearney counties.

- Residents protected: 17,549

Providing Conservation Cost-share

Tri-Basin NRD provides and administers cost-share funds for many soil and water conservation practices, including well decommissioning, soil moisture sensors, irrigation well flowmeters, conservation tree plantings and conversion of irrigated cropland to dryland cropland and grassland.

Fiscal year 2021-2022 cost-share paid:

- \$23,136.91 for locally funded conservation tree plantings
- \$39,063.54 state funded NSWCP for conservation practices
- \$13,215.21 well decommissioning cost-share using state and local funds



Managing Financial Resources Wisely

Natural resources district budgets can vary considerably from year-to-year, due to funding for project construction, grant awards and other capital expenditures. Tri-Basin NRD's operational budget has historically increased at an average rate of 4.86%. The district operating budget for FY 2022-23 is approximately \$1.65 million. The total budget for FY 2021-22 was \$3,617,371. The total budget for FY 2022-23 is \$2,468,535, which is a 32% decrease. Property tax asking in FY 2021-22 was \$1,093,898, whereas the tax asking for FY 2022-23 is \$1,118,141, which is an increase of only 2%. While the levy for 2022-23 decreased 1% due to a slight increase in property valuation. Future budgets for the next five years are expected to follow a similar pattern of variability in overall expenses but increases in property taxes and the operating budget should be in line with overall inflation.

- Total operating expense budget: \$1,534,077.68 (July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022)
- Tax levy set at .021214 per \$100 valuation.

Tri-Basin NRD may need to acquire real estate by fee title for projects planned within the next five fiscal years. Land use easements will be needed if certain projects proceed.

An owner of a house valued at \$100,000 will pay just \$21.21 in 2022 to protect this area's natural resources.

Personnel to Serve the District

Tri-Basin NRD's personnel needs are currently met with a staff of ten full-time employees and one part-time employee at the office in Holdrege as well as three full-time NRCS field office employees. The district budgeted to add one new full-time employee at the Holdrege office this next year but does not anticipate any other changes in staffing needs for the next five years.

Ensuring Rural Domestic Water Quality



Tri-Basin NRD wants rural residents in Gosper, Phelps, and Kearney Counties to have drinking water that is as safe as public water supplies. Any district resident who uses a rural household water well can ask NRD staff to sample their well once per year at no charge; the sample will be tested for nitrates and bacteria. For more information on this program, contact Tri-Basin NRD at (308) 995- 6688.

- Domestic wells tested in 2021-2022: 18

Educating about Natural Resources

It is important to inform students as well as adults about the need to conserve and protect our natural resources. Tri-Basin holds many educational events throughout the year.

- South Central Water Conference: Presented in cooperation with CNPPID, Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce, and Lower Republican NRD. Agricultural producers and agri-business professionals met to discuss current water issues in February at the Phelps County Ag Center and virtually.
- Rainwater Basin Conservation Day at Sacramento WMA for eighth grade students.
- Natural Resources Report: A weekly update on natural resources issues every Wednesday at 4:17 p.m. on KRVN 880 AM radio.
- Seven in-person Nitrogen Management Classes were held across the district for producers.
- Water Jamboree is a collaborative event for fifth and sixth grade students. Attended by 405 students from 13 schools at Harlan County Lake
- Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) is an NRD sponsored natural resources camp. Two scholarships to the camp were awarded to students from Holdrege Middle School by the district.



Stream Table Demonstration at Water Jamboree

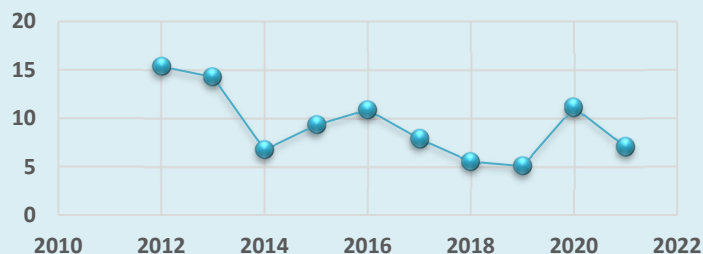
About Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (NRD) protects lives, property, and the future of Gosper, Phelps, and Kearney counties through a wide-range of stewardship, management, and education programs-from tree planting to groundwater quality and quantity monitoring, from irrigation management to outdoor recreation and more. Activities and projects of Tri-Basin NRD are reviewed and approved by a locally elected board of directors. Tri-Basin NRD is one of 23 Natural Resource Districts across the state. For more information, visit tribasinnrd.org or call (308) 995-6688.

2021 Active Irrigation Wells

County	Total Irrigation Wells	Certified Irrigated Acres
Kearney County	2,122	228,727.06
Phelps County	2,175	258,304.53
Gosper County	757	93,466.11
Total	5,054	580,497.70
Basin	Total Irrigation Wells	Certified Irrigated Acres
Republican Basin	1,614	90,146.56
Platte Basin	2,614	298,730.36
Little Blue Basin	826	91,620.78
Total	5,054	580,497.70

Average Irrigation Water Use in the Republican Basin* Portion of TBNRD



*All Republican Basin irrigation wells are metered. Metered water use is also reported from a limited number of wells in the Platte and Little Blue Basins.

TBNRD Staff to Inspect Flow Meters

Each year, NRD staff inspect and take readings from meters in about one-third of the townships in the District. This year we will be doing inspections in Ranges 15W, 19W, and 24W, and in 5-22 of Gosper County (Union Township).

If you have irrigation wells in these townships and you put your meters in storage for the winter, you can call Tri-Basin NRD at 1-877-995-6688 to schedule an inspection. If there is no meter at the site when TBNRD staff come to inspect, you will receive a letter requesting access to the meter for inspection.



Fall 2022

Tri-Basin Topics

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District
1723 Burlington St. Holdrege, NE 68949
(308) 995-6688
email: tribasin@tribasinncrd.org
www.tribasinncrd.org

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Nebraska's NRDs: Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future

Calendar

October 10 Columbus Day – Office Closed
October 11 Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.*
November 8..... Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.*
November 11.....Veteran's Day – Office Closed
November 24-25 Thanksgiving – Office Closed
December 13..... Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*
December 26..... Office Closed for Christmas Holiday
January 2 Office Closed for New Year's Holiday
January 10 Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*
January 16 Martin Luther King Day – Office Closed
TBD South Central Water Conference
February 8..... Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*

*Times are tentative. All meetings are at TBNRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.

TRI-BASIN NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bradley Lundeen, Chairman	Wilcox
Todd Garrelts, Vice Chairman	Holdrege
Robin Hinrichs, Treasurer	Axtell
Joe Bilka, Secretary	Holdrege
Brian Bergstrom	Axtell
Mike Cavanaugh	Minden
David Grimes	Minden
Ed Harris	Loomis
Joe Larson	Loomis
Reed Phillips	Bertrand
David Raffety	Kearney
Larry Reynolds	Lexington
Jeff Ryan	Heartwell

TRI-BASIN NRD STAFF

Amy Dutton	Minden Office Secretary
Tammy Fahrenbruch	Water Programs Coordinator
Lori Hagan	Office Clerk
Sasha Hahn	Information & Education Coordinator
Nolan Little	Water Resources Manager
Carie Lynch	Administrative Secretary
Nate Munter	Land Resources Coordinator
Patrick Nott	Water Resources Technician
Nancy Pemberton	Elwood Office Secretary
Tami Reese	Holdrege Office Secretary
Dalton Refior	Land Resources Technician
Esther Smith	Office Assistant
John Thorburn	General Manager
Jeff VanEperen	Water Resources Technician

Requests to be added to the mailing list can be emailed or mailed to the above address. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to the General Manager.

Get Tri-Basin Topics in your inbox instead of your mailbox!

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