



Summer 2025  
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# Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

## The Perkins County Canal: Water Security in Nebraska

Water is Nebraska’s most precious Natural Resource. It is essential to the economic success of our state. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NeDNR) part of the new Nebraska Department of Water, Environment, and Energy (NDWEE), along with other interested parties, has been thoroughly reviewing Nebraska’s Platte River water resources.

Due to a downtrend in seasonal flows in the South Platte River, Nebraska proposed constructing the Perkins County Canal—a \$628 million infrastructure project. The canal aims to secure the state’s water rights from the South Platte River, as specified in the South Platte River Compact, but there is opposition from Colorado.

### Compact

The South Platte River Compact was signed in 1923, and enacted federally in 1926. It guarantees Nebraska two key water entitlements:

- **120 cubic feet per second (cfs)** during the irrigation season (April 1 to October 15)
- **500 cfs** during the non-irrigation season (October 15 to April 1), contingent on the construction of a canal

Nebraska left the canal unbuilt for a century. But with Colorado’s increased demand and over 300 proposed water projects threatening river flows, Nebraska leaders say the time to act is now.

In 2022, the Nebraska Unicameral approved the Perkins County Canal Project Act, stating that it is essential to the economic prosperity, health, and welfare of the people of Nebraska, and to the health of the entire Platte River Basin.

### Why Nebraska Wants the Canal

Governor Jim Pillen and Attorney General Mike Hilgers argue that Colorado’s upstream diversions are depriving Nebraska farmers of vital irrigation water. The canal would allow Nebraska to capture winter flows, store them in reservoirs, and redistribute them statewide for agriculture, municipal use, and energy production.

Potential benefits for Nebraska:

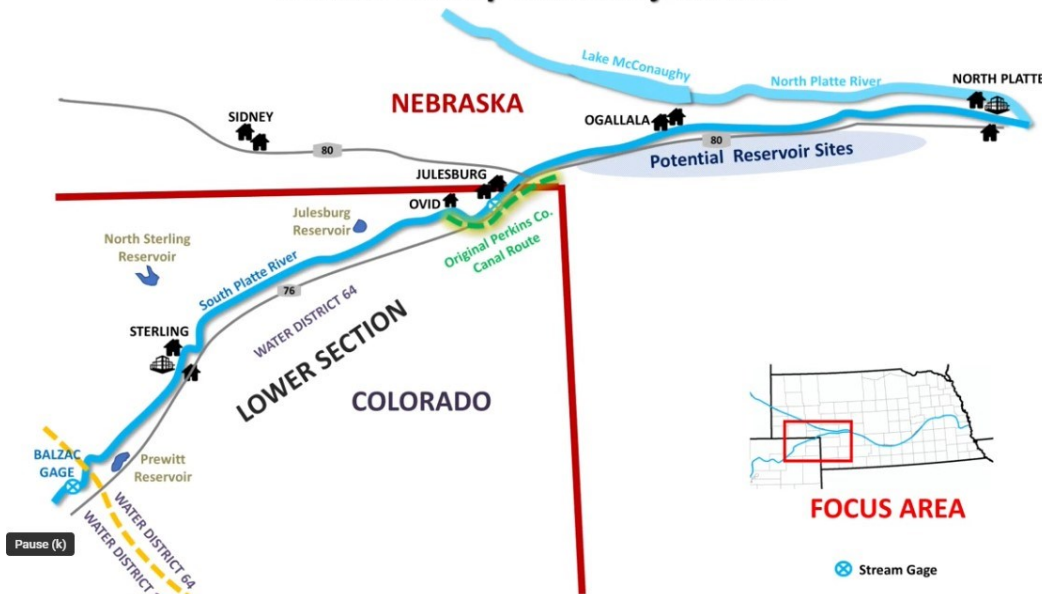
- Protect water supply for irrigation
- Protect drinking water supplies for cities, including Lincoln and Omaha
- Ensure cooling water for Nebraska’s largest power plant
- Support wildlife habitat
- Maintain tourism and recreational opportunities

### Lawsuit

In July 2025, Nebraska filed a lawsuit against Colorado in the U.S. Supreme Court, accusing its neighbor of violating the compact and obstructing canal construction. The complaint cites Colorado’s refusal to agree on canal location, size, and water flow, despite Nebraska’s offers to buy land at 115% of market value.

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### Perkins County Canal Project Area



“Dedicated to Conservation of our Natural Resources”

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Colorado officials, including Governor Jared Polis and Attorney General Phil Weiser, have dismissed the canal as unwise and unlikely to happen.

### What's Next?

NDWEE is pushing forward with design and permitting, aiming for completion by **2032**. But with litigation likely to stretch for years, the canal's future remains uncertain.

## 2024 to 2025 District Water Levels

Tri-Basin NRD staff measured groundwater levels in over 90 irrigation wells this past spring. Additionally, there are over 140 dedicated observation wells across the district are equipped with water level sensors and data loggers that record readings twice a year. We also

cooperate with Central NE Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) to share groundwater level data. They measure about 60 observation wells in the irrigation district's service area in the Platte River basin.

A dry winter and spring led to an early start to the irrigation season in 2025. The result is that groundwater levels declined across Tri-Basin NRD. Conditions were driest in Kearney County, which led to declines of more than one-fourth of a foot. We received higher than average rainfall in June and July, which provided some recharge to our aquifers and allowed farmers to curtail irrigation somewhat. We are also fortunate to receive supplemental groundwater recharge in the Platte Basin portion of the district from CNPPID deliveries of irrigation water to customers, these farmers' use of surface water for irrigation and diversion of excess flows from the Platte River.

### Tri-Basin NRD Static Water Annual Basin Comparison Spring '24 – Spring '25

◆Republican:	-0.14'
◆Platte:	-0.27'
◆Little Blue:	-0.26'
◆District:	-0.21'

## Free ET Data Texting

ET Data (Evapotranspiration Data) texts go out Monday through Friday from June through August.

Texts contain:

*Daily (D) and Future 3 Days (F3d) estimated water use for both Corn and Soybeans (Beans) at three locations across the district: Holdrege 5N (Hld), Axtell 5NE (Axt) and Smithfield 2E (Smfld).*

Additional Weekly Text includes:

*Weekly Precipitation (Wk Precip), Corn Growing Degree Days (Corn GDD), and Beans Growing Degree Days (Beans GDD) for all three locations.*

To subscribe:

- Scan the **QR Code** below, or
- text **START** to **308-216-8188**

Call Sasha at 308-995-6688 with any problems or questions.



# Meet Our Summer Interns at Tri-Basin NRD

This summer, the Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (NRD) was thrilled to welcome two bright and dedicated interns, **Kendra Podbregar** and **Ashley Wacker**, to our district office. They've been a tremendous asset to our team!

## Kendra Podbregar

Kendra joined us from Hopkins, Michigan. She's currently a senior at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, MI and is on track to graduate in December 2025 with a bachelor of science degree in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. Kendra is an active member of the Women in Natural Resources Organization at Michigan Tech. When she's not helping out at the NRD or taking summer classes, she enjoys a variety of hobbies, including reading, cooking, baking, hiking, bird-watching, and exploring historical sites and monuments.

## Ashley Wacker

A native of Osmond, Nebraska, Ashley is a sophomore at South Dakota State University in Brookings, South Dakota, where she's majoring in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences. Ashley is deeply involved in natural resource organizations, holding memberships in the SDSU AFS sub-unit, the SDSU Pheasants Forever Chapter, FFA, and 4-H. Her personal interests include hunting, fishing, reading, hiking, and appreciating antique cars and memorabilia.



Above: Kendra Podbregar and Ashley Wacker are the 2025 summer interns at Tri-Basin NRD.

## Hands-On Experience

For the past 26 years, the Tri-Basin NRD has proudly offered summer internships, providing invaluable hands-on experience to college students interested in natural resource conservation. Our interns play a vital role in our daily operations, assisting with a variety of projects.

Their responsibilities include:

- Collecting and testing groundwater quality samples
- Monitoring local wildlife habitats
- Helping maintain drainage improvement project areas (IPAs)
- Testing irrigation system efficiency

Beyond their work at the NRD, our interns also collaborate with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and get to tour the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, broadening their understanding of regional conservation efforts.

These internships often serve as a springboard for future careers. Many of our former interns have gone on to pursue successful careers in agriculture and natural resources, working with agri-businesses, NRDs, NRCS, and various state agencies. In fact, our very own Land Resources Manager, **Dalton Refior**, spent three summers as a Tri-Basin NRD intern himself!

We're incredibly proud of the contributions Kendra and Ashley have made this summer and are excited to see where their passion for natural resources takes them!



Left: Ashley is checking on a soil moisture sensor in a soybean field.





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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

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# CALENDAR

August 20 ..... NRD Board Meeting, 10:30 p.m.  
 Younes Convention Center South, Kearney, NE  
 August 22-September 1 ..... Nebraska State Fair  
 September 1 ..... NRD Closed for Labor Day  
 September 17 ..... NRD Board meeting, 1:30 p.m.\*  
 September 9-11 ..... Husker Harvest Days,  
 Wood River, NE  
 September 18 ..... Rainwater Basin Conservation Day  
 Sacramento-Wilcox WMA, Wilcox, NE  
 October 15 ..... NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.\*  
 October 13 ..... NRD Closed for Columbus Day  
 \* Times are tentative. All meetings are at TBNRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.

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 David Raffety ..... Kearney  
 Larry Reynolds ..... Lexington

**TRI-BASIN NRD STAFF**

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 Jane Crofton ..... Seasonal Water Resources Technician  
 Tammy Fahrenbruch ..... Water Programs Coordinator  
 Lori Hagan ..... Office Clerk  
 Sasha Hahn ..... Information & Education Coordinator  
 Nolan Little ..... Assistant Manager  
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 Dalton Refior ..... Land Resources Manger  
 Carolyn Schaaf ..... Elwood Office Secretary  
 Lisa Schroeder ..... Minden Office Secretary  
 Nicole Simeon ..... Administrative Secretary  
 Esther Smith ..... Office Assistant  
 John Thorburn ..... General Manager  
 Jeff VanEperen ..... Water Resources Technician

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