

TRI-BASIN TOPICS

Spring 2005

Volume 19, Issue 2

“Dedicated to the Conservation of our Natural Resources”

State and NRD Restrict Irrigated Land Development

Landowners are prohibited from developing additional irrigated land in some portions of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District. Additional irrigated land development is restricted in the Republican River Basin in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney counties and that portion of the Platte Basin west of US highway 183 (Gosper and northwest Phelps counties).

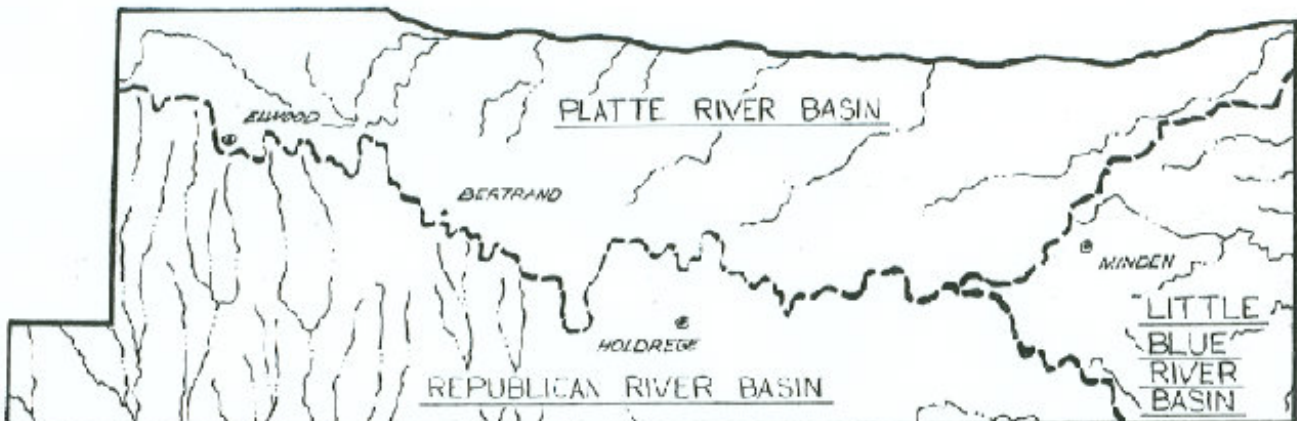
Tri-Basin NRD had to restrict development in the Republican Basin because the Republican River Compact, an agreement between Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado and the federal government, limits the amount of water Nebraskans can consume in that river basin. Data collected by the State of Nebraska indicates that the current amount of irrigated land in that basin is about equal to Nebraska’s consumption limit. Additional irrigated land can’t be developed, because that could result in Nebraska violating the compact agreement.

Last September, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Director Roger Patterson declared the Platte Basin west of Highway 183 “overappropriated” (more water water is being used than the river system can sustainably supply). As in the Re-

publican Basin, no additional irrigated cropland can be developed, because it would worsen the problem of over use of water resources. DNR Director Patterson has indicated that he will declare the Platte Basin east of Highway 183 (northeastern Phelps and Kearney counties) as fully appropriated in January, 2006. After that declaration is made, no additional irrigated land can be developed in that part of the district.

Tri-Basin NRD is in the process of certifying (counting) irrigated land in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties. Certification entitles a landowner to use groundwater to irrigate existing cropland, hayland and pasture, regardless whether the land was previously irrigated with a well or canal water. The NRD has completed certification in the Republican River basin portion of the district. The district is now finalizing certification of irrigated land in the overappropriated portion of the Platte River Basin (west of US Highway 183). Irrigated cropland in the Platte Basin east of Highway 183

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Managers Message

By: John Thorburn

Phragmites on the March

The arrival of Sandhill Cranes is an annual indicator of spring in south-central Nebraska. Tourists

come from all over the world to see these majestic birds as they roost on the Platte River and feed in neighboring crop fields.

Careful observers will note that this spring the cranes will have less elbow room when they wade the Platte. That's because an invasive plant is smothering islands and choking river channels from North Platte to Grand Island. This invasive plant is called *phragmites*, also known as common reed. *Phragmites* is a tall grass. A really, really tall grass. It typically grows 10 to 12 feet tall, but can get as high as 20 feet. It also grows very densely, crowding out native plants and covering open sandbars essential for cranes as roosting habitat.



Phragmites is native to Australia. The introduced *phragmites* is very similar to a native reed, but it can be distinguished from native plants by its rough straight stems and aggressive growth habit (native reed is not widespread in Nebraska outside the Sandhills). It spreads rapidly by both seed and rhizomes (runners), roots that spread along the ground surface and sprout new plants at regular intervals.

Phragmites was originally introduced as an ornamental grass. Often mistakenly referred to as "pampas grass", it is favored landscaping because it has frondy seed heads at the top of the tall stems. It is still widely featured in home and commercial landscaping which, in my opinion, is equivalent to using musk thistle or poison ivy to beautify your property.

Phragmites is spreading rapidly in the Platte

River. As it takes hold, it outcompetes native plants, destroys wildlife habitat and obstructs streamflows. *Phragmites* spreads so rapidly because it has no natural control in the Great Plains. Fire by itself is not an effective control method. The grass is not very palatable to cattle, although Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District ("Central") has had some success getting goats to feed on it.

Some herbicides have proven effective at controlling *phragmites*, but it is difficult to effectively apply herbicides on this plant because of its tall, dense growth habit. Helicopters have proven effective as a delivery system for applying herbicides on these plants because they can spray with great precision and the downdraft from their rotors pushes the spray down into the interior of *phragmites* clumps. Unfortunately, using helicopters to spray weeds is very expensive. When Central used helicopters to spray *phragmites* on their Jeffrey Island property, they spent about \$200 per acre for the treatment. Treating the Platte river channel from Lexington to Grand Island using this method could cost as much as \$10 million per year.

This invasive plant presents new challenges that require new ideas and approaches to effective land and wildlife habitat management. County weed control superintendents are working together with UN-K researchers, environmental groups and state and federal agencies to develop a strategy to control *phragmites* and other invasive plants in the Platte River. I hope that this effort succeeds. If it doesn't, someday the Platte will be filled with "ornamental grass", but sandbars and cranes will be just a memory.



....Irrigated Land continued from page 1

(eastern Phelps and Kearney counties) will be certified in 2006.

Property tax records are the primary source of information that Tri-Basin NRD uses to determine the number of certifiable irrigated acres. Land must be taxed as irrigated cropland or irrigated grassland to be certified by the NRD. Landowners in northeast Phelps and Kearney counties need to check with their county assessor to make sure that their irrigated acreage assessments are correct **before** the certification process starts in their area, so the NRD can certify the appropriate number of certified irrigated acres on their property.



Todd Garrelts

Todd Garrelts and his wife, Nancy live on the outskirts of Holdrege with their daughter, Paige, and their son, Blake. Todd represents subdistrict 4 and serves as treasurer for the Tri-Basin Board of Directors. After graduating from Elm Creek High School, Todd attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. He currently attends Bethel Lutheran Church, and is a member of Phelps-Gosper Livestock Feeders Association, Nebraska Cattlemen, and Nebraska Corn Growers. In his free time Todd enjoys spending time at the lake and taking fly-ing lessons.

After the NRD has closed an area to new development, the only way landowners can develop uncertified land (land without a previous irrigation history) for irrigation is by ceasing irrigation on existing irrigated land and transferring existing certified acres to a new location. One certified acre must be transferred for each new acre to be developed. Landowners must apply to the NRD to transfer irrigated land.

Transfers of certified irrigated land need to be approved by the NRD Board of Directors and affected county assessors before they can proceed. If you have questions about certifying irrigated land, you can get more information by contacting the Tri-Basin NRD office toll-free at (877)995-6688, or you can read our rules and regulations on-line at www.tribasinrd.org.

Landowners in Tri-Basin NRD With Irrigated Land in the Republican River Basin

- * **Flowmeters must be installed on all irrigation wells in the Republican River Basin in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties by December 31, 2005.**
- * **If you have an approved Republican Basin Flowmeter Cost-Share Agreement – Your flowmeters must be installed no later than September 30, 2005 to qualify for 50% cost-share. If eligible, your cost-share application can be extended to September 30, 2005.**

Call Tri-Basin NRD Toll Free (1-877-995-6688) for questions.

Note: You must receive cost-share approval

Check out these web sites:

<http://www.agwaterbudget.com>
<http://www.nws.noaa.gov>
<http://dnrdata.dnr.state.ne.us/NeRAIN>
http://www.dnr.state.ne.us/dnrnews/news2004/summer2004_sm.pdf
<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/>
http://net.unl.edu/swi/pers/water_worries.html

-Water Allocation to Economic Recovery
-National Weather Service
-NE Rain and Hail Study
-LB 962
-Water Data for the Nation
-Nebraska Reservoirs



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

(All meetings are at NRD office in Phelps County Ag Center unless otherwise noted.)

May

- May 10 - NRD Board Meeting at 7:30 p.m.*
- May 30 - Memorial Day (office closed)

June

- June 8-9 -Republican River Compact Admin. Meeting in Wray, CO
- June 14 - NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.*

July

- July 4 - Independence Day (office closed)
- July 7 -NE Natural Resources Commission Meeting 8:30 a.m.*, Super 8 Motel, Holdrege
- July 12 - NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.*
- July 16-21 -Kearney County Fair
- July 23-28 -Phelps County Fair

* Times are tentative

NOTICE

- Landowners and operators who wish to renew chemigation permits must submit renewal permit applications by May 31, 2005!

TRI-BASIN TOPICS is a publication of the
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Patty Abrahamson.....Holdrege Office Secretary

A mailing list is maintained and requests to be placed on the list should be sent to the above address. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to the General Manager.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**1308 Second Street
Holdrege, NE 68949**

Natural Resources District



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