

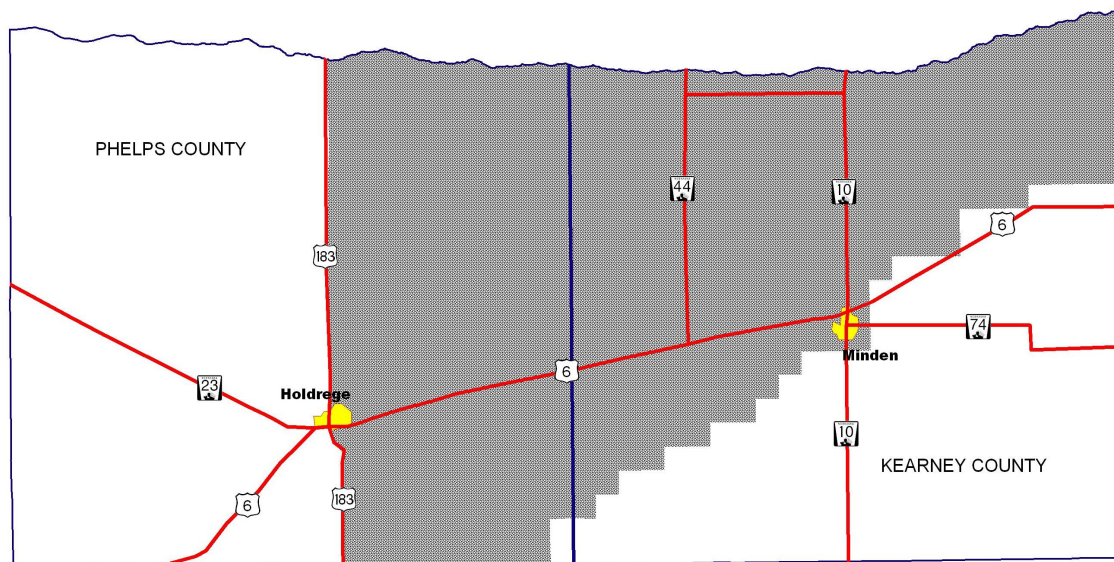
# TRI-BASIN TOPICS

Spring 2006

Volume 20, Issue 1

**"Dedicated to the Conservation of our Natural Resources"**

## State DNR Calls Platte in Kearney, Phelps Fully Appropriated



Map courtesy:  
Jeff Shafer,  
NE Dept. of  
Natural  
Resources

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Acting Director Ann Bleed declared the Platte Basin from Elm Creek (US Highway 183) downstream to Columbus fully appropriated on December 30, 2005. That means that DNR believes that the interconnected water resources of this portion of the Platte Basin are now being fully utilized, and any additional use would reduce the supply for existing water users.

The fully appropriated designation is considered preliminary as of the date that *Tri-Basin Topics* went to press. For this reason, DNR hasn't yet made a final map of the affected area. The preliminary map prepared by DNR (above) includes the entire Platte Basin in Phelps and Kearney Counties, along with some portions of the Little Blue River Basin in Kearney County.

The primary consequence of this designation for NRD constituents is that land within the affected area that has no prior history of irrigation can only be irrigated if an equal amount of land with irrigation history is returned to a dryland use. New irrigation wells can still be drilled, but they can only be used to water

existing irrigated land.

Tri-Basin NRD will soon begin the process of certifying (counting) irrigated land in the fully appropriated area. All land that is classified as irrigated on the 2006 property tax rolls will be certified for groundwater irrigation. In those cases where land has not been classified as irrigated by a county assessor, a landowner must provide independent verification (typically an FSA 578 certification form) demonstrating that the land has a recent history of irrigation, in order to get certification.

Land that has a history of irrigation with CNPPID canal water will be certified for groundwater irrigation, even if there is no well on the property. This NRD policy enables Central customers to drill wells to supplement Central water, if they wish to do so. Please call the NRD office on our toll-free number (877) 995-6688, if you have questions about the fully appropriated designation, irrigated land certification, or any natural resources issue.



# Managers Message

By: John Thorburn

## The Republican River Compact

There has been a great deal of anguished discussion lately about how Nebraska can stay in compliance with the Republican River Compact. The Republican River Compact is an agreement between Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado to divide the water supply of the river basin among the states.

Nebraska has a challenge complying with the compact partly because the agreement restricts our water use more severely in dry years. The compact terms allow each state to consume a percentage of the basin water supply. Nebraska gets 49% of the water, Kansas gets 40% and Colorado gets 11%. These percentages remain constant, but the actual water supply is calculated annually, so Nebraska gets 49% of a smaller pie in a dry year. That causes compliance problems because Nebraska farmers need to pump more irrigation water on their crops in dry years than they do in years when precipitation is average or above average.

This problem was partly addressed by the settlement of the *KS v NE* lawsuit. The settlement allows each state to average water use over several years. Unfortunately, during a drought we are only allowed to average water use over a three-year period. Even though rainfall in 2005 was close to average in most places, water use this year will be averaged together with 2004, which was a drier year. If 2006 is well above average in terms of rainfall, Nebraska should be able to avoid the need to compensate Kansas for using more than our share of the Republican River water supply.

I hope and pray next year will be a wet year, but studies of tree rings indicate that, over the last 1000 years, southern Nebraska has regularly seen droughts lasting a decade or longer. Since we can't count on Mother Nature to solve our water problems, we need to develop plans to reduce water consumption or increase our water supply.

Republican Basin NRDs are already taking steps to reduce water consumption. Development of additional irrigated cropland is prohibited throughout the Republican Basin. Groundwater pumping is also limited in much of the basin. Basin NRDs and the Department of Natural Resources are working together to manage interconnected ground and surface water.

The State of Nebraska and Republican Basin NRDs

are sponsors of a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program that allows landowners to stop irrigating cropland and plant native grass on it in exchange for irrigated rental payments. Landowners can also sign up in the federal EQIP program and earn as much as \$85 an acre per year to quit irrigating but continue farming dryland. Nearly 60,000 acres, about five percent of irrigated land in the Republican Basin in Nebraska, are already enrolled in conservation programs. Additional state and federal funds may be made available soon to sign up more land in these programs.

It will take several years for land retirement programs to show benefits in terms of increased streamflows. If Nebraska can increase streamflows within the next year we will be in a better position to maintain compact compliance. That means that, in the short term we need to "free up" surface water currently being used, or import water from other parts of the state. It is possible to lease surface water irrigation rights, to the extent that they are available. It is also possible to pump water out of wells into streams to augment streamflows.

Another less conventional, but effective option to increase water supplies would be to cut down trees along the river and its tributaries. A mature cottonwood tree uses as much as 500 gallons of water per day. Trees grow undisturbed along riverbanks because floods have been nearly eliminated by reservoirs built along the river during the 1940s and 1950s. Other potential options include starting a cloud-seeding program or breaching livestock dams that hold back runoff water and providing stock wells as replacement water supplies.

All of these options are expensive. Land retirement programs can also indirectly affect the economy of the valley. We have to remember, however, that Nebraska has to live up to the deals we made with Kansas in the Republican River Compact and in the *KS v NE* lawsuit settlement. If we fail to comply with the compact, a judge will enforce these agreements.



## Nitrogen Management Classes

*January 18, 2006	Minden Ag Center	9:00 A.M.
*January 23, 2006	Elwood Ag Center	1:00 P.M.
February 9, 2006	Holdrege NRD Office	2:00 P.M.
February 9, 2006	Holdrege NRD Office	7:00 P.M.
*March 2, 2006	Holdrege Ag Center	1:00 P.M.
*March 2, 2006	Holdrege Ag Center	7:00 P.M.

\*Denotes With Private Applicators Training

### Chemigation Training 2006

February 10 Kearney Kearney Fairgrounds 1:00 p.m.

February 21 Holdrege Holdrege Ag Center 1:00 p.m.

\*Contact your local extension office if you still need to be certified and cannot make these training dates. Other locations and dates may be available.

## ARBOR DAY

**It is now the time of year to begin thinking about planting trees. We are selling seedlings as usual this spring. If you're interested in planting a windbreak, contact the NRD or your local NRCS office to have one of their technicians help you draw up your plans. If you would like to order trees to plant yourself, you may call the NRCS office in your area, or call Tri-Basin NRD toll free at 1-877-995-6688. We would be happy to send you a brochure and order form, or you may stop in the office to place an order. You also may log on to our web site at [www.tribasinnrdr.org](http://www.tribasinnrdr.org) to see available species and costs; there is a printable order form for your convenience. We will take orders for trees through March 24, 2006.**

*Other holidays repose on the past.  
Arbor Day proposes the future.  
- J. Sterling Morton*

## Trees for Newborns

Tri-Basin NRD offers parents of newborn babies born in Gosper, Kearney and Phelps counties a free tree to commemorate the birth of the newest addition to their family. Sizes of the trees range from 1.5-3 feet. Trees include species such as Norway Maple and Little Leaf Linden. Contact the Tri-Basin NRD with your name, address, phone number and the baby's birth date.

In April of each year we will contact you to pick up your "baby tree". If you have any questions, or are interested in reserving a tree, please call us at 995-6688 or 1-877-995-6688, or e-mail us at [tribasinnrdr.org](mailto:tribasinnrdr.org).



### Check out these web sites:

<http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/irrigation/>  
<http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/4838453/detail.html>  
<http://tribasinnrdr.org/domesticwatertest.html>  
<http://www.dnr.state.ne.us/legal/Kansasvs.html>  
<http://www.farmersalmanac.com>  
[http://net.unl.edu/swi/pers/water\\_worries.html](http://net.unl.edu/swi/pers/water_worries.html)

-Irrigation Engineering Publications  
 -Platte River Running Dry  
 -Domestic Nitrate Testing  
 -Republican River Settlement Implementation  
 -Farmers Almanac Forecasts  
 -Nebraska Reservoirs



# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

## March

March 14 - NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.\*

## April

April 11 - NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.\*

April 12 - Rainwater Basin Conservation Day at Sac-Wilcox

April 26 & 27 - Water Jamboree at Harlan County Reservoir

## May

May 9 - NRD Board Meeting at 7:30 p.m.\*

May 29 - Memorial Day (Office Closed)

\* Times are tentative

## WATER CONSERVATION TIP

- Use the garbage disposal less and the garbage more (saves 50 to 150 gallons a month).

TRI-BASIN TOPICS is a publication of the  
Tri-Basin Natural Resources District,  
1308 Second Street,  
Holdrege, NE 68949 (308) 995-6688  
Toll Free 877-995-6688  
E-mail [tribasin@tribasinprd.org](mailto:tribasin@tribasinprd.org)

### TRI-BASIN NRD STAFF

John Thorburn ..... General Manager  
Richard Holloway ..... Assistant Manager  
Charles Brooks ..... Land Resources Coordinator  
Carie Lynch ..... Administrative Secretary  
Roger David ..... Conservation Technician  
Steve Nelson ..... Land Resource Technician  
Tammy Fahrenbruch ..... Office Manager  
Esther Smith ..... Office Clerk  
Shannon Helms ..... Inf. & Education Assistant  
Nicole Salisbury ..... Office Assistant  
Marlene Shearer ..... Minden Office Secretary  
Jill Wessels ..... Elwood Office Secretary  
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.

### TRI-BASIN NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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\*Fully Appropriated Portions  
of the Platte Basin  
\*Republican River Compact  
\*Trees for Newborns

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**1308 Second Street  
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*Natural Resources District*



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