

Tri-Basin Topics

Winter 2010

"Dedicated to Conservation of our Natural Resources"

Volume 24, Issue 1

Annual Holdrege Water Conference Set for February 4

The annual Holdrege Water Conference will be held Thursday, February 4, 2010 at the Phelps County Ag Center. Registration is at 10 a.m. and sessions will start at 10:30 a.m. The program should conclude around 3 p.m. A free lunch will be provided for those attending. The conference is sponsored by Tri-Basin Natural Resources District, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District and UNL Extension.

Sessions at the conference will focus on water-related issues that affect agricultural producers in central Nebraska.

The morning session will begin at 10:30 a.m. and will focus on Crop and Water Management Tools. Ken Cassman, Director of the Nebraska Center for Energy Science Research will present his findings of an irriga-

tion water efficiency study he has conducted using data from the Tri-Basin NRD area. Jim Specht from UNL will give a presentation titled "A User-Friendly Website to Improve Irrigation Management of Soybean." A presentation on soybean cyst nematode by Loren J. Giesler, UNL Extension Plant Pathologist will round out the morning session.

Tom Cech of the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District will give the keynote address for the conference at 12:30 p.m. Cech's presentation is titled "Groundwater and Surface Water Conflicts in Colorado: An Alarming Trend."

The afternoon's first session will focus on Platte River issues. Rich Walters of the Nature Conservancy will discuss Phragmites control efforts along the Platte River. A representative from Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District will present information on the water supply in the Platte River. A third speaker for this session is yet to be confirmed.

The Republican River will be the focus for the final session of the afternoon. James Williams of Nebraska Department of Natural Resources will speak on the state's perspective on the Republican River issues. John Thorburn, General Manager of Tri-Basin NRD, Jasper Fanning of Upper Republican NRD and Mike Clements of Lower Republican NRD will talk about the Republican River situation in their respective natural resources districts.



Lake Seldom Wetland south of Holdrege



Manager's Message

by John Thorburn

Legislators: Give Us the Tools to do the Job

Tri-Basin NRD includes portions of the Platte, Little Blue and Republican River basins. We recently cooperated with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to create a joint integrated water management plan for the Platte Basin portion of our district. We also worked with DNR and four other Platte Basin NRDs to develop a joint integrated water management plan for the entire Overappropriated portion of the Platte River Basin. We are implementing these plans through actions such as an agreement we made with Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) to lease surface water irrigation rights and redirect that water to the Platte River to offset streamflow depletions resulting from groundwater uses developed after 1997.

Now we are challenged to do our part to help the state maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact. Water seeping from CNPPID canals within Tri-Basin NRD has boosted flows in Republican River tributary streams within our district, so our net depletions to the basin's water supply are relatively small. DNR staff recently determined, however, that it may be necessary to curtail irrigation on as many as 9000 acres of irrigated land within the Republican Basin portion of Tri-Basin NRD in water-short years to maintain compact compliance.

The Tri-Basin NRD Board of Directors don't believe that it is legally or ethically acceptable for the district to shut off irrigation wells without compensating irrigators. Furthermore, we think that alternative measures, such as streamflow augmentation, voluntary retirement of irrigated land and irrigation efficiency improve-

ments could reduce or eliminate the need to prohibit irrigation. We recognize, however, that state funds are not available to compensate landowners or to implement these alternative measures.

Tri-Basin NRD is willing to use local property taxes to pay for compensation and alternatives to curtailing irrigation, but the State Supreme Court has decreed that NRDs cannot use property taxes to assist the state with Republican River Compact compliance. Even if we weren't constrained by that court decision, our district would be challenged to raise sufficient funds to handle our obligations in both the Platte and Republican River Basins simultaneously within the limits of our current levy authority.

Nobody wants new taxes, but Tri-Basin NRD needs an additional revenue source to minimize regulatory disruption of irrigated agriculture, which is the foundation of our economy. One option could be the "Occupation Tax" on irrigated land that was authorized by LB 701 in 2007. That tax is currently subject to a court challenge. The main basis for that challenge is that the tax is intended for a "closed class" of Republican Basin NRDs. We think that the Unicameral could fix that closed class problem. We are hopeful that a revised occupation tax authority might also give NRDs more discretion to vary the tax rate based on differing hydrologic situations or other circumstances. For instance, we would like to be able to vary the tax rate on irrigated land depending on which river basin or portion of a river basin the land is located in and by the water source (surface water or groundwater) used for irrigation.

Tri-Basin NRD intends to do our part to implement our Platte Basin Integrated Management Plan and keep the State of Nebraska in compliance with the Republican River Compact. We are willing to use local funds to reach these goals. We need the Unicameral to give us a tool like the occupation tax to enable us to reach our goals.

Chemigation and Nitrogen Management Recertification

Tri-Basin NRD will be sending out renewal forms during January to producers who had chemigation permits last year. Those producers whose chemigation certification has expired will need to attend one of the chemigation training sessions which are held in February and March. Anyone needing to add new chemigation permits for the 2010 season should contact the Tri-Basin NRD office.

Producers in Phase 2 and Phase 3 Groundwater Quality Management Areas also need to have a current Nitrogen Management card. If your card has expired, you should receive notification from our office. Nitrogen Management Training will be held in conjunction with pesticide applicators classes on the following dates:

February 11..... 9:30 a.m..... Phelps Co. Extension Office	March 9..... 7 p.m..... Phelps Co. Extension Office
February 12..... 1 p.m..... Gosper Co. Fairgrounds	March 4..... 1 p.m..... Gosper Co. Fairgrounds
February 5..... 9:30 a.m..... Kearney Co. Fairgrounds	March 1..... 1 p.m..... Kearney Co. Fairgrounds

For more information on either of these programs, please contact the Tri-Basin NRD office toll-free at 1-877-995-6688.

TRI-BASIN NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT 2010 HAND PLANT ORDER FORM

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____ PHONE: _____

ORDERS MUST BE IN MULTIPLES OF 25 at \$15.00 per bundle.

Deadline for placing orders is April 2, 2010.

QUANTITY	SPECIES
	CONIFERS
	AUSTRIAN PINE
	COLORADO BLUE SPRUCE
	LIMBER PINE
	PONDEROSA PINE
	RED CEDAR (EASTERN)
	RED PINE
	SOUTH WESTERN WHITE PINE
	BROADLEAFS
	BLACK WALNUT
	BUR OAK
	CATALPA
	HACKBERRY
	KENTUCKY COFFEE TREE
	RED OAK
	SWAMP WHITE OAK
	SYCAMORE
	SHRUBS
	AMERICAN PLUM
	BUFFALO BERRY
	CHOKECHERRY
	COTTONEASTER
	GOLDEN CURRANT
	LILACS
	LOVELACE HAZELNUT
	RED OSIER DOGWOOD
	SAND CHERRY
	SKUNKBUSH SUMAC
	Total # of Trees
	Multiply total # of trees x .60
	Mulch
	Subtotal
	Tax (Holdrege 7%, Elwood 5.5%, Minden 6.5%)
	TOTAL AMOUNT DUE/PAID

Tree Pickup will be at: _____ Tri-Basin NRD _____ Minden NRCS _____ Elwood NRCS

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

(All meetings are at NRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.)

January

January 1 New Year's Day (office closed)
 January 12 NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.*
 January 18 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (office closed)

February

February 4 Holdrege Water Conference
 February 9 NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.*
 February 12 Coffee AM at TBNRD - 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.
 February 15 Presidents' Day (office closed)

March

March 9 NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.*
 March 14 Daylight Saving Time begins
 December 25 Christmas (office closed)

* Times are tentative

CONSERVATION TIP

Insulate hot water pipes. You will save water, save energy and get immediate hot water at the faucet.



TRI-BASIN NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Todd Garrelts, Chairman Holdrege, NE
 David Nickel, Vice Chairman Kearney, NE
 Ed Harris, Treasurer Loomis, NE
 Larry Reynolds, Secretary Lexington, NE
 Brian Bergstrom Axtell, NE
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 David Nelson Upland, NE
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 David Olsen Minden, NE
 Ray Winz Holdrege, NE

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 Alex Hasenauer Land Resources Technician
 Tammy Fahrenbruch Office Manager
 Esther Smith Office Clerk
 Nicole Salisbury Information & Education Coordinator
 Patty Abrahamson Assistant Office Clerk
 Ruth Nielsen Minden Office Secretary
 Lori Hagan Elwood Office Secretary
 Tami Reese 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.

♦ Tree Order Form
 ♦ Holdrege Water Conference
 ♦ 2009 TBNRD Annual Report
IN THIS ISSUE

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Natural Resources District
1723 N Burlington Street
Holdrege, NE 68949



Non-Profit Permit
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Holdrege, NE 68949
 Permit No. 220

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

2009 *In Review*

Annual Report

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District is a local government agency which is responsible for protection of natural resources in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties in South Central Nebraska. Tri-Basin NRD is unique among Nebraska's 23 NRDs because it includes portions of three different river basins: the Republican, the Platte, and the Little Blue Basin. There are 13 members of TBNRD's Board of Directors, 12 of which are elected from geographical districts and one at-large member. The vision of Tri-Basin NRD, as set forth by these directors, is to work cooperatively with District residents and others to promote good stewardship of land and water resources.

2009-2010 TBNRD Board Members: Todd Garrelts (Chairman), David Nickel (Vice Chairman), Ed Harris (Treasurer), Larry Reynolds (Secretary), Brian Bergstrom, Harold D Erickson, Dick Helms, Phyllis Johnson, Brad Lundeen, David Nelson, David Olsen, David Raffety and Ray Winz.

In July, 2009, the Tri-Basin NRD district headquarters moved to 1723 North Burlington Street in Holdrege. The new location includes staff offices, a board meeting room, a second meeting room and a basement for storage of records, allowing TBNRD staff to better serve its constituents.



Protecting Our Groundwater

In 2006, Tri-Basin NRD completed the process of certifying, or verifying, irrigated acres in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties. Certifying irrigated land is part of the NRD's policy for managing limited irrigated land resources.

In September 2009, Tri-Basin NRD directors made changes to the district's Rules and Regulations in order to comply with Tri-Basin NRD's Platte Basin Integrated Management Plan and requirements of LB 477. Changes were made to the process used in transferring certified irrigated acres from one location to another. LB 477 requires a limited title search on properties involved in irrigated acre transfers before an application to transfer acres may be made. Tri-Basin NRD included this requirement in the district's Rules and Regulations and implemented a \$100 filing fee for irrigated acre transfers.



The district continually monitors groundwater quantity throughout the three counties by measuring water

levels in irrigation wells and dedicated observation wells. Thanks to a grant from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, TBNRD now has a dedicated observation well in each township in the district. Dataloggers in these wells

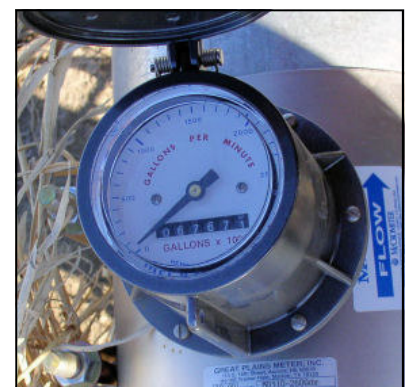
automatically measure water levels at regular intervals. Regularly measuring our aquifers helps Tri-Basin NRD directors to make better informed decisions about our groundwater supplies and to discern trends in the water levels.

Based on data from these wells, the Tri-Basin NRD board decided to enforce groundwater pumping limits in Union Township in Gosper County in 2009. Declines in groundwater levels in Union Township necessitated a pumping limit of 27 inches over three years to protect groundwater supplies from depletion.

Staff at Tri-Basin NRD also monitor the quality of groundwater in the district annually. In 2009, TBNRD staff took 295 samples from irrigation wells, which were tested for nitrates and pesticides. Through this program, Tri-Basin NRD has limited nitrogen-based fertilizer application in order to protect the quality of our district's groundwater.

Chemigation, the process of applying chemicals through irrigation systems, is permitted and overseen by Tri-Basin NRD staff to assure proper application of the chemicals. 115 new chemigation permits and 1138 renewals were issued by TBNRD in 2009.

Rural residents in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties need to know whether they have safe drinking water. The district offers a program that allows rural residents to have their household drinking water tested for nitrates and bacteria free of charge once a year.



Offering Conservation Cost-Share Assistance

Tri-Basin NRD provides or administers cost-share funds for well decommissioning, soil moisture sensors, irrigation well flowmeters, conservation tree plantings and conversion of irrigated cropland to dryland cropland and grassland. In fiscal year 2008-2009, Tri-Basin NRD approved \$33,319.33 in funding for conservation tree planting cost-share and \$102,793.20 in NSWCP cost-share funds.

Managing Financial Resources Wisely

TBNRD's total operating expense budget from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 was \$926,157.21 with the levy set at 0.057488 per \$100 valuation. An owner of a house valued at \$100,000 paid just \$57.48 in 2009 for the protection of this area's natural resources.

Planting Trees for Future Generations

Each year, Tri-Basin NRD offers conservation trees and shrubs for sale for windbreak and habitat plantings. In 2009, 11,702 trees and shrubs were planted and 2545 trees and shrubs were sold for hand-planting, up from the previous year. Tri-Basin NRD also provides free tree seedlings for



several educational events and for local Arbor Day celebrations. The district distributed nearly 1000 free trees to district residents in 2009.

Educating and Informing Local Residents

Tri-Basin NRD sponsors several educational events, for both youth and adults. Each February, Tri-Basin NRD joins Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District and UNL Extension to host the Holdrege Water Conference. At this event, agricultural producers and agri-business professionals gather to discuss current water issues relevant to the TBNRD area.

Other adult information and education programs include Nitrogen Management classes for agricultural producers and the weekly Natural Resources Report on KRVN 880 radio station.

In April, Tri-Basin NRD holds the Rainwater Basin Conservation Day for eighth grade students at Sacramento-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area. About 200 students attend this event each year to learn about geology, wetlands, soils, trees and wildlife. Tri-Basin also helps to sponsor the Water Jamboree for area fifth grade students held every April at Harlan County Reservoir. All aspects of water conservation are presented in hands-on sessions to the ap-

proximately 600 students who attend this event.

In 2009, Tri-Basin NRD hosted the Southwest Area Land Judging competition for high school agricultural education students.



Tri-Basin NRD Special Projects

Tri-Basin NRD had several special projects in 2009:

Hazard Mitigation Plan – Work on the All-Hazard Mitigation began in 2009. This district-wide plan outlines options to minimize damage and loss of life resulting from natural disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires local governments to have Hazard Mitigation Plans in place before it will provide federal disaster relief funding.

NeRAIN Program – Tri-Basin NRD, along with the other NRDs in the state, coordinates area volunteers for the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources' Nebraska Rainfall Assessment and Information Network (NeRAIN) program. Volunteers throughout the district record rain and snow fall in order to track precipitation and document the size, intensity, duration and preferred tracks of storms.

Lake Seldom Prescribed Burn – Tri-Basin NRD conducted a prescribed burn on Lake Seldom south of Holdrege in late April 2009. The primary purpose of this prescribed burn was to improve upland and wetland habitat by clearing the area of undesirable plants, such as reed canary grass. The burn also set back non-native cool season grasses.



Nature Trails Signs at Lake Seldom and Nature's Mosaic – Educational signs were provided by Tri-Basin NRD along the nature trail at Lake Seldom south of Holdrege and at Nature's Mosaic near Axtell.