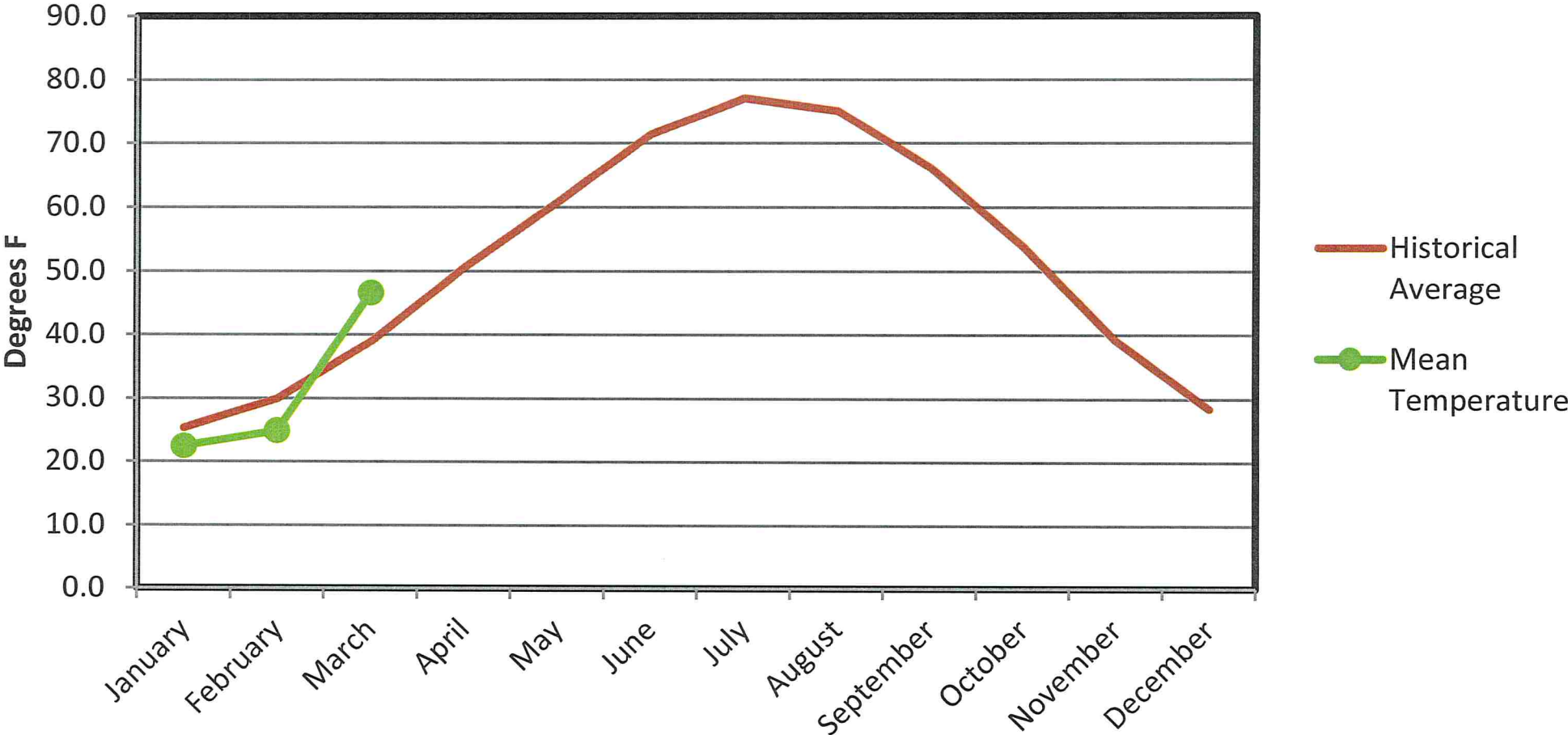


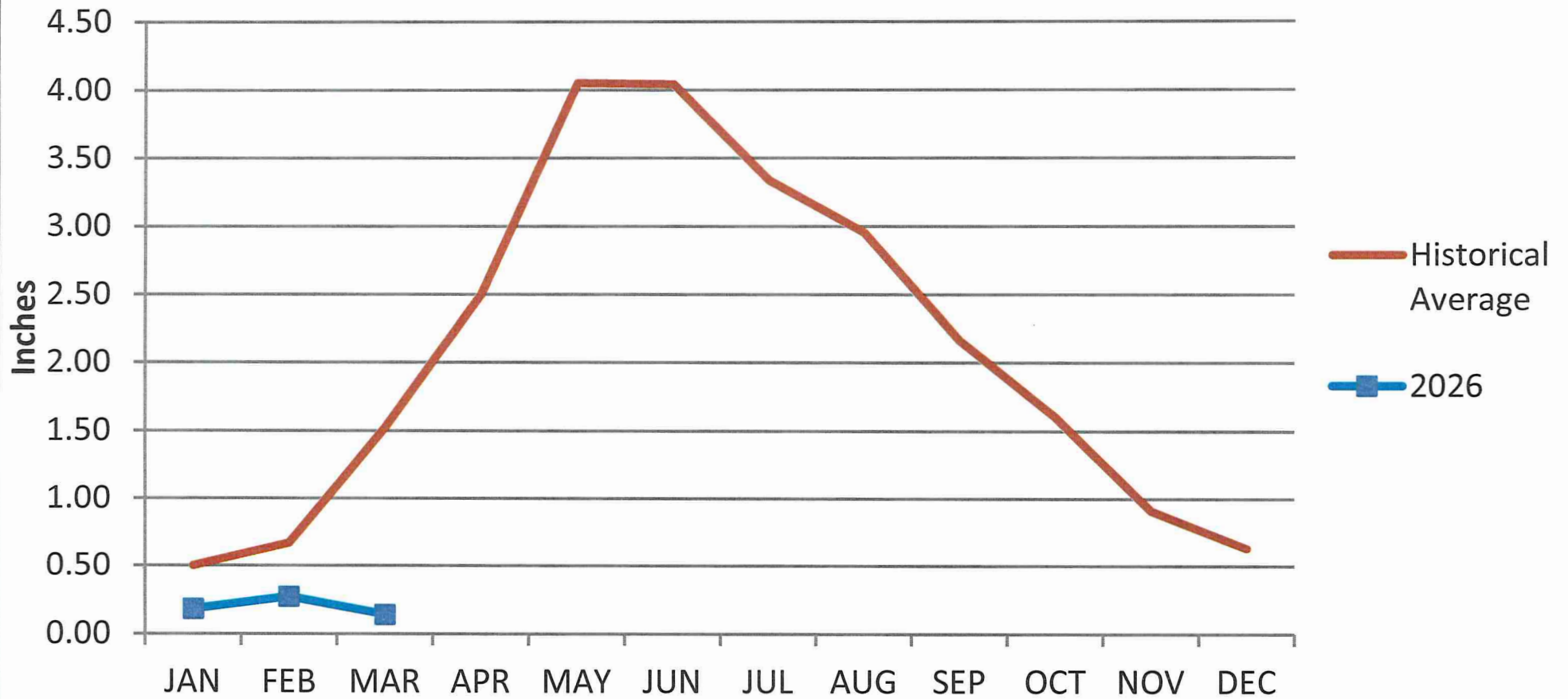
Tri-Basin NRD

Holdrege Monthly Mean Temperature - 2026



Tri-Basin NRD

Holdrege Monthly Precipitation - 2026



Tri-Basin NRD
1723 Burlington
Holdrege, NE 68949



Phone: (308) 995-6688
Fax: (308) 995-6992
Email: tribasin@tribasinrd.org

Natural Resources District

March 2026 - Holdrege

Temperature: (°F)

* High: 91° (Recorded March 26)

* Low: 4° (Recorded March 16, 17)

* Mean: 46.6° (Normal for March 38.6°)

Mean High: 63.9° (Normal: 52.0°)

Mean Low: 30.4° (Normal: 26.3°)

NOTES:

Precipitation for March 2026: .14"

(Normal for March: 1.33")

Precipitation for the year through March: .55"

(Normal for the year through March: 2.52")

NOTES: Damaging Winds noted 1 day

Fog noted 1 day

March 2025

Temperature:

High: 84°

Low: 19°

Mean: 30.°

Precipitation:

For the month: 1.13"

For the year: 2.29"

Snow for March: 6"

Snow total for year: 13."

| First Quarter 2026 Grand Island Stream Gauge Data | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| | Jan Act | Jan Tar | Well Run | Feb Act | Feb Tar | Well Run | Mar Act | Mar Tar |
| 1 | 2550 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 1200 | 2250 |
| 2 | 2770 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 1200 | 2250 |
| 3 | 2400 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 989 | 2250 |
| 4 | 1660 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 551 | 2250 |
| 5 | 1160 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 810 | 2250 |
| 6 | 1220 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 810 | 2250 |
| 7 | 752 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 482 | 2250 |
| 8 | 1050 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 499 | 2250 |
| 9 | 1200 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 490 | 2250 |
| 10 | 1010 | 1000 | | Ice | 1800 | | 957 | 2250 |
| 11 | 1120 | 1000 | | 1560 | 1800 | | 606 | 2250 |
| 12 | 1390 | 1000 | | 1610 | 1800 | | 625 | 2250 |
| 13 | 1180 | 1000 | | 1560 | 1800 | | 1240 | 2250 |
| 14 | 848 | 1000 | | 1590 | 1800 | | 1600 | 2250 |
| 15 | 1050 | 1000 | | 1180 | 3350 | | 721 | 2250 |
| 16 | 1120 | 1000 | | 1590 | 3350 | | Ice | 1200 |
| 17 | 1100 | 1000 | | 1590 | 3350 | | 810 | 1200 |
| 18 | Ice | 1000 | | 947 | 3350 | | M | 1200 |
| 19 | Ice | 1000 | | 1450 | 3350 | | M | 1200 |
| 20 | Ice | 1000 | | 1450 | 3350 | | M | 1200 |
| 21 | Ice | 1000 | | ICE | 3350 | | M | 1200 |
| 22 | Ice | 1000 | | ICE | 3350 | | M | 1200 |
| 23 | Ice | 1000 | | 1090 | 3350 | | M | 1700 |
| 24 | Ice | 1000 | | 889 | 3350 | | 887 | 1700 |
| 25 | Ice | 1000 | | 1080 | 3350 | | 405 | 1700 |
| 26 | Ice | 1000 | | 1200 | 3350 | | 336 | 1700 |
| 27 | Ice | 1000 | | 829 | 3350 | | 268 | 1700 |
| 28 | Ice | 1000 | | 1010 | 3350 | | 275 | 1700 |
| 29 | Ice | 1000 | | | 3350 | | 298 | 1700 |
| 30 | Ice | 1000 | | | 3350 | | 286 | 1700 |
| 31 | Ice | 1000 | | | 3350 | | 264 | 1700 |

First Quarter 2026 Overton Stream Gauge

| | Jan Act | Jan Tar | We | Feb Act | Feb Tar | Well | Mar Act | MarTar | Well Ran |
|----|----------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 329 | 1000 | | 909 | 1800 | | 1990 | 2250 | |
| 2 | 1080 | 1000 | | 580 | 1800 | | 382 | 2250 | |
| 3 | 1610 | 1000 | | 909 | 1800 | | 1030 | 2250 | |
| 4 | 1490 | 1000 | | 815 | 1800 | | 1070 | 2250 | |
| 5 | 401 | 1000 | | 1020 | 1800 | | 359 | 2250 | |
| 6 | 868 | 1000 | | 1440 | 1800 | | 359 | 2250 | |
| 7 | 971 | 1000 | | 1440 | 1800 | | 958 | 2250 | |
| 8 | 833 | 1000 | | 1540 | 1800 | | 60 | 2250 | |
| 9 | 1010 | 1000 | | 1060 | 1800 | | 371 | 2250 | |
| 10 | 2110 | 1000 | | 1520 | 1800 | | 1010 | 2250 | |
| 11 | 1020 | 1000 | | 1320 | 1800 | | 1680 | 2250 | |
| 12 | 374 | 1000 | | 1600 | 1800 | | 2020 | 2250 | |
| 13 | 1870 | 1000 | | 1570 | 1800 | | 1990 | 2250 | |
| 14 | 934 | 1000 | | 1540 | 1800 | | 564 | 2250 | |
| 15 | 735 | 1000 | | 1540 | 3500 | | 718 | 2250 | |
| 16 | 1430 | 1000 | | 295 | 3500 | | 1810 | 1200 | |
| 17 | 1920 | 1000 | | 1510 | 3500 | | 2150 | 1200 | |
| 18 | 2140 | 1000 | | 1490 | 3500 | | 3.3 | 1200 | |
| 19 | 382 | 1000 | | 965 | 3500 | | 3.75 | 1200 | |
| 20 | 1800 | 1000 | | 965 | 3500 | | 3071 | 1200 | |
| 21 | 295 | 1000 | | 891 | 3500 | | 3.74 | 1200 | |
| 22 | 395 | 1000 | | 1020 | 3500 | | 3.69 | 1200 | |
| 23 | 1850 | 1000 | | 388 | 3500 | | 2.69 | 1700 | |
| 24 | 248 | 1000 | | 774 | 3500 | | 2.69 | 1700 | |
| 25 | m | 1000 | | 510 | 3500 | | 311 | 1700 | |
| 26 | m | 1000 | | 609 | 3500 | | 343 | 1700 | |
| 27 | m | 1000 | | 2070 | 3500 | | 277 | 1700 | |
| 28 | m | 1000 | | 2020 | 3500 | | 253 | 1700 | |
| 29 | m | 1000 | | | | | 281 | 1700 | |
| 30 | m | 1000 | | | | | 219 | 1700 | |
| 31 | m | 1000 | | | | | 244 | 1700 | |

Tri-Basin NRD
1723 Burlington St.
Holdrege, NE 68949



(308) 995-6688
Fax: (308) 995-6992
tribasin@tribasinprd.org

Natural Resources District

General Manager
JOHN THORBURN

March 23, 2026

Chairman
TODD GARRELS
Holdrege, Nebraska

Brent Soneson
11670 734 Rd
Holdrege, NE 68949

Vice Chairman
JOE BILKA
Holdrege, Nebraska

Dear Brent:

Treasurer
JEFF RYAN
Heartwell, Nebraska

During their regular board meeting on March 19, 2025 the Tri-Basin NRD Board of Directors authorized a variance to allow you to pump as much as nine inches per NRD-certified acre from well G-007950 on your property in the Southeast Quarter of Section 33-7-17 in Phelps County. The variance enabled you to maintain compliance with NRD rules and regulations, which require that all landowners must have adequate certified irrigated acres for the entire area that can be irrigated by irrigation systems connected to groundwater wells. That variance expired January 1, 2026. During their regular meeting on March 18 the board chose not to renew your variance. They also determined that your property doesn't qualify for our Water Conservation Incentive Program commingled option.

Secretary
ROB HINRICHS
Axtell, Nebraska

While these two options aren't available to you, there are still several ways for you to consider to maintain compliance with our rules. They include:

BRIAN BERGSTROM
Axtell, Nebraska

JOEL GRAMS
Minden, Nebraska

DAVID GRIMES
Minden, Nebraska

ED HARRIS
Loomis, Nebraska

- 1 Acquiring additional certified irrigated acres (it is our understanding that you need 28 more acres),
- 2 Requesting that the Phelps County Assessor combine adjacent parcels to enable you to "pool" a larger number of irrigated acres,
- 3 Reducing the number of acres irrigated by your pivot system by installing permanent stops to limit the travel of the system or shorten the length of the pivot system, or
- 4 Disconnecting well G-007950 from your irrigation system.

JOE LARSON
Loomis, Nebraska

BRAD LUNDEEN
Wilcox, Nebraska

G. REED PHILIPS
Bertrand, Nebraska

DAVID RAFFETY
Kearney, Nebraska

Please contact this office within the next 30 days and let us know which of these options that you wish to pursue to resolve this matter. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

LARRY REYNOLDS
Lexington, Nebraska

Sincerely,

John Thorburn
Manager

Tri-Basin NRD
1723 Burlington St.
Holdrege, NE 68949



(308) 995-6688
Fax: (308) 995-6992
tribasin@tribasinrd.org

General Manager
JOHN THORBURN

March 25, 2026

Chairman
TODD GARRELTS
Holdrege, Nebraska

Matthew T. Manning, Chief Water Officer
Nebraska Department Water, Energy, and Environment
245 Fallbrook Blvd suite 100
Lincoln, NE 68521
matt.manning@nebraska.gov

Vice Chairman
JOE BILKA
Holdrege, Nebraska

Treasurer
JEFF RYAN
Heartwell, Nebraska

Sent via electronic mail only

Dear Mr. Manning:

Secretary
ROB HINRICHS
Axtell, Nebraska

On March 18, 2026, the Board of Directors (Board) of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (District) approved a motion signifying that the District has reached agreement with the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (Department) to adopt the proposed Second-Generation *Tri-Basin Natural Resources District Integrated Management Plan for those portions of the Tri-Basin NRD Located within the Republican River Basin (IMP)* and to adopt and implement controls and incentive programs described therein, without modifications. The agreed upon IMP is included as Attachment 1. The Minutes of the March 18th, 2026, District Board Meeting are included as Attachment 2.

BRIAN BERGSTROM
Axtell, Nebraska

JOEL GRAMS
Minden, Nebraska

DAVID GRIMES
Minden, Nebraska

ED HARRIS
Loomis, Nebraska

We understand that the Department has likewise taken the necessary action to confirm its agreement of the Proposed IMP. We would appreciate written confirmation of the Department's action in that regard.

JOE LARSON
Loomis, Nebraska

BRAD LUNDEEN
Wilcox, Nebraska

The Board and the Department held one public hearing in Holdrege, Nebraska on February 4, 2026.

G. REED PHILIPS
Bertrand, Nebraska

The Board appreciates the collaboration and valuable contributions of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, District staff, and the Department's staff in the development of the goals and objectives and the preparation of this revised IMP. The District looks forward to continued collaboration with the Department in the implementation, reviews, and revisions of the IMP.

DAVID RAFFETY
Kearney, Nebraska

LARRY REYNOLDS
Lexington, Nebraska

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Todd Garrelts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Todd Garrelts
Board Chair, Tri-Basin NRD

Attachments (2)

Cc: John Thorburn, General Manager, Tri-Basin NRD,
jthorburn@tribasinprd.org

Sam Capps, Environmental Supervisor, Nebraska Department of Water,
Energy, and Environment, sam.capps@nebraska.gov

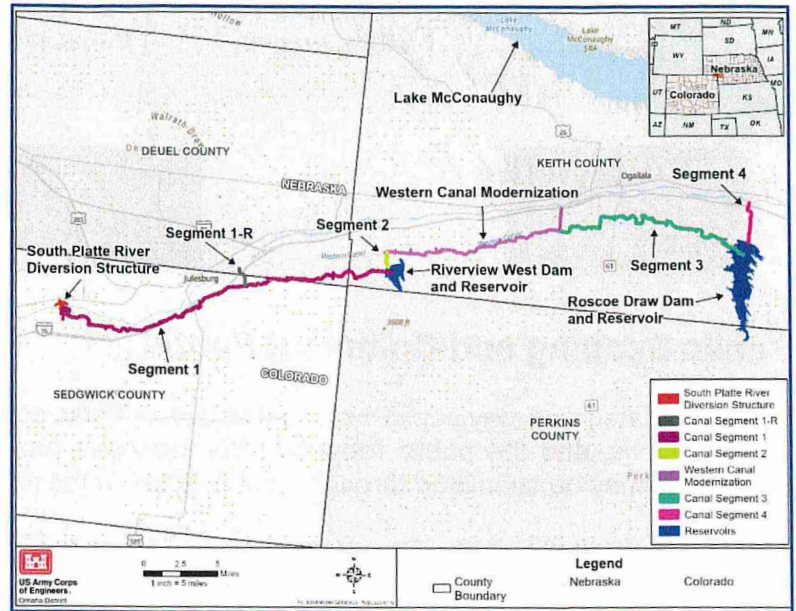
DRAFT

FACT SHEET

Perkins County Canal Project

What is the Clean Water Act?

The Clean Water Act (CWA) regulates quality standards for surface waters and discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States. Section 404 of the CWA requires approval prior to the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is responsible for considering permit applications for these discharges using the Section 404b(1) guidelines. The USACE Omaha District Regulatory Division is reviewing a Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (DWEE) permit application for its proposed Perkins County Canal project.



What is the NEPA Process?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to evaluate major federal actions and inform decision makers and the public of the potential beneficial and adverse environmental consequences of proposed actions and alternatives. To comply with NEPA and the CWA, USACE will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and evaluate impacts of the proposed activity to inform the decision on DWEE's permit application. The law also requires federal agencies address other regulatory requirements including the National Historic Preservation Act and Endangered Species Act, among others, during the NEPA effort. USACE will involve agencies with jurisdiction by law or special expertise, and Tribal Nations in the analysis effort and offer the public opportunities to provide comments and information.

What is the DWEE's proposed project?

DWEE's proposed project would divert water from the South Platte River near Ovid, Colorado and return it to the South Platte River near Roscoe, Nebraska. The water would be conveyed through approximately 60.8 miles of newly constructed or modified existing canals. The proposed project includes river-gated and canal-gated structures to divert and control flows into the canal, lined and unlined canal structures, and two dams and storage reservoirs, one with a capacity of approximately 17,000 acre-feet, and the other with approximately 77,000 acre-feet.

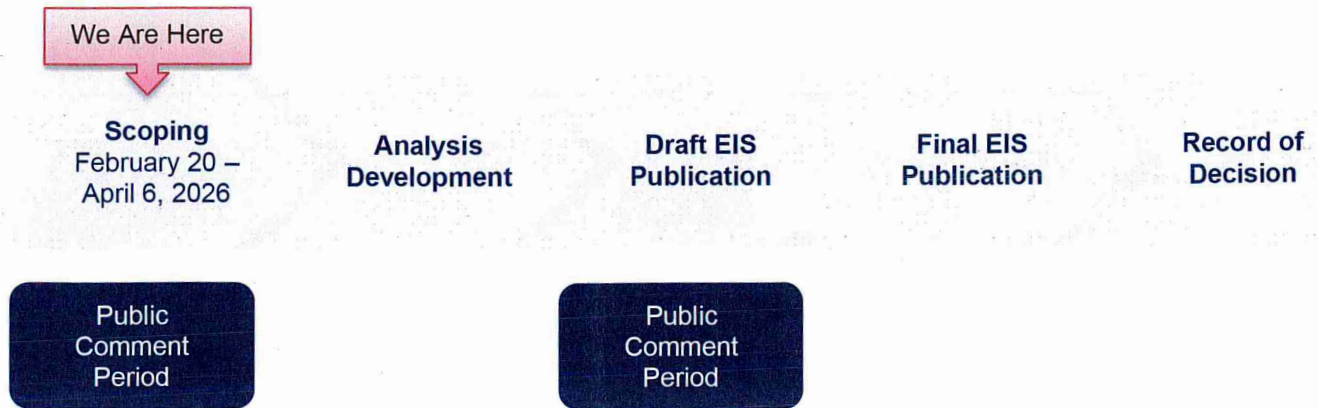
DWEE's Purpose

DWEE's stated purpose for the proposed project is to secure South Platte River inflows at the Colorado Nebraska state line during the non irrigation season at a minimum rate of 500 cubic feet per second, along with capacity to divert excess flows, which may be retimed to support Nebraska's irrigation needs in the South Platte River on a basis consistent with the terms of Article VI of the South Platte River Compact.

Project Alternatives

USACE will develop a basic and overall project purpose during the analysis effort. These will be used to identify reasonable and practicable alternatives to the proposed project that may be analyzed in the EIS and considered in the permit decision.

NEPA Process Timeline



Public Scoping and Comment Period

USACE initiated a 45-day public comment period on February 20, 2026, to gather input from interested agencies, Tribal Nations, and the public regarding the proposed project and the scope of the environmental reviews. Comments may be submitted through April 6, 2026, in the following ways:

- Electronically via the Regulatory Request System at <https://rrs.usace.army.mil/rrs> using the search term NWO-2023-00518
- Email: PCC.EIS@usace.army.mil,
- Postal mail: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District Regulatory Division, Attn: PCC, 1616 Capitol Avenue, Omaha, NE 68102
- Verbally or handwritten at in-person meetings and verbally at virtual meetings.

Public Scoping Meetings and More Information

Denver: Monday, March 9th 5:30 7:30pm (Mountain) @ Airport Marriott Gateway

Julesburg: Tuesday, March 10th 5:30 7:30pm (Mountain) @ Sedgewick County Community Center

Kearney: Wednesday, March 11th 5:30 7:30pm (Central) @ Harmon Park Activity Center

Virtual: Wednesday, March 18th 1 3pm (Mountain)/2 3pm (Central) via Microsoft Teams Webinar

Visit the Project Website for More Information:

<https://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Missions/RegulatoryProgram/Colorado/EIS-Perkins-County-Canal/>

What is Scoping?

The public comment scoping process is a chance for the public to comment on the proposed project, suggest alternatives, identify potential significant issues or probable impacts on the public interest, or share relevant information or analyses for USACE to consider. The public is also encouraged to share any current or planned activities in, or in the vicinity of the proposed action. Scoping comments should be as specific as possible and contain as much detail as necessary to inform USACE's NEPA analysis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the project and how to submit a comment, scan the QR code or visit the project website at <https://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory-Program/Colorado/EIS-Perkins-County-Canal/>



Ranchers face losses, rally support after Nebraska fires

Grace Ptak, Scottsbluff Star-Herald

Keaney Hub

3/19/2026

When the Morrill Fire got within three miles of Joe Newkirk's ranch headquarters in Oshkosh, he and his family - reluctant to leave their livestock - leapt into defensive action instead.

"We were getting some baby calves on the ground and we had a good handle on things," Newkirk said. "We have a couple of center pivots to the north of the buildings that we turned on, so that would damn sure slow it down if it did get here."

In the end, the Newkirk lost about a third of their summer range to the fire. Fortunately, there were no cattle on it at that time, and the majority of the historic 1892 ranch was spared. Other ranchers in the area, Van Kirik said, have not been so fortunate.

"It was a total catastrophe for a lot of ranches north of Oshkosh, for sure."

Van Newkirk said. "It just moved so fast. It was just totally devastating to these people that were at the head of the fire because once it started, they had absolutely no time to get cattle out of the way, or even to try to head the fire away from them."

The key factor to the Morrill Fires's devastation is the high-speed multidirectional winds that have guided effortlessly across the prairie, catching those in its path completely off-guard.

"(With) 70 mile-an hour wind, I think (the fire) went 60 miles in probably 18 hours." Said Van Newkirk "So that just did not give anybody enough time."

Van Newkirk said that the fire's speed hasn't been the only uniquely destructive things about it.

"This was all on privately owned ground," Van Newkirk said. "A lot of those, that the other big great range fires on Forst Service or BLM or something like that, the government owns, but this was all owned by taxpayers. We're living in on it. That really needs to be stressed, because a lot of livings were

hampered by this, I mean, if they lost their hat and their pasture, the need relief immediately – and they're getting it.

In response to the fire, Van Newkirk said that the thigh-knit web of rural communities have come together to offer extra hay, fencing supplies, and other necessities to those affected by the blaze over the weekend.

"We've had several calls, people wanting to bring hay, Van Newkirk said Monday. "I think there was five loads on the way today (headed to)different ranches."

The immediacy of the support neighboring communities have shoe to each other has been a guiding light in face of tough times ahead.

"The other night, we took some tables and chairs up to the fire hall, and there were probably two or three dozen people there, townspeople, and they were receiving food, Gatorade." Van Newkirk said. "There was a bushel basket full of Chapstick there for these firefighters, I mean, everybody just kind of pulled together . It was really nice to see, it really was."

The selfless support doesn't end with donations - Van Newkirk emphasized the heroism of volunteer firefighters from all over the state, and even neighboring states, who have been arriving each day to help protect the far-flung community.

"There are a slug of firefighters in the country form off over the country," said Van Newkirk. "I mean, every town I saw, from Omaha, to Lincoln, Hastings, Rocky Ford. Colorado, I was a fire truck go by this morning. I mean, it's just amazing how the firefighters (assemble) when they're serious about his, and God bless them, because they're all volunteers."

Right now, most of Van Newkirk's neighbors and community members are out of immediate danger, he said. Though everyone is still holding their breath for the next big outbreak.

"If the wind would happen to come up 70 miles an hour again not doubt there are some parts of that fire that are still smoldering, and that's the

clinker right there,” Van Newkirk said. “These cow chips, they can smolder for days ... That’s probably the main concern.”

With the Panhandle weather forecast Tuesday, the ranching and firefighting community continued to be wary. The National Weather Service in Cheyenne has issued an alert that critical fire conditions exist and the area is under a fire weather watch through Saturday.’ A Red Flag warning is in effect for portions of southeast Wyoming and western Nebraska through 8 p.m. Tuesday, A high Wind warning is in effect through midnight.

Exhausted and overwhelmed, Van Newkirk said that all his community can do is stay alert. Give what they can and hope for a reprieve.

“These volunteer fire departments are pretty hard to replace/ They’re getting tired too,” Van Newkirk said. “It sounds like a good foot of snow would do us more good than anything right now.”

Governor describes impact of historic, uncontained wildfires

John Reyes and Dan Crisler, Omaha World-Herald

Kearney Hub

3/17/2026

LINCOLN – Amid high winds and cold temperatures, crews worked Monday to extinguish four wildfires that extended over nearly 700,000 acres of central and west Nebraska.

State officials allowed reporters to attend a Monday afternoon briefing on the wildfires that have now raged for about 4 days, destroyed structures and agricultural land, forced evacuations and caused one death.

“Yesterday was a very challenging day for firefighters,” State Forester John Erixson said Monday in Lincoln. Dry conditions helped to cause the fires.

The rain and snow that fell Sunday, however, was not much help.

“The humidity helps you, but we’ve got 60 miles per hour,” Erixson said.

“So the fire behavior becomes really erratic.”

He said firefighters are out in the wind and cold with water spraying.

There’s nothing worse, Erixson said, “As far as getting wet and not being to do as much as you could do if the temperatures were a little better.”

State weather conditions are expected to swing wildly, though bringing June-like temperatures in mid-March.

Caleb Brown, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in North Platte, said in a phone call that Tuesday will be “the biggest day of concern.”

“We’re expecting temperatures out here in western, and southwest Nebraska to warm back into the 70s with humidity values falling again 25% or lower. We’re expecting northwest winds gusting as high as 35 to 45 mph,” Brown said, adding those conditions will create “Critical fire conditions.”

The largest of the four fires is actually the largest in Nebraska history: The Morill fire in Aruther, Garden, Keith and Morill Counties. It covers nearly

600,000 acres, with about 500 structures along the perimeter . The Cottonwood fire in Dawson and Lincoln counties is 122,144 acres and has three evacuation zones. At least 15 households have been ordered to evacuate/ The Anderson Bridge fire in Cherry County is 16,405 acres, and the Road 203 fire om Blaine and Thomas counties is 36,814 acres and within U.S Forest Service jurisdiction.

Officials said the fight against the fires will continue for at least the coming days; The fires are at 0% containment , aside from the Anderson Bridge fire at 33% containment .

Most of the firefighters combating the blazes in western and central Nebraska are volunteers. The National Guard has sent 29 airmen and soldiers to help fight the fires and also provide two helicopters equipped to dump water.

Gov. Jim Pillen spent the weekend observing the fires, meeting with the people fighting them and those impacted.

From a helicopter, he was able to see “things that were really, really extraordinary.” And described “miles and miles burned out.”

Sherry Vinton, director for the state’s Department of Agriculture said the 600, 000 acres of the largest fire would be enough to grazing land for 35,000 cows.

Pillen said that in the Sandhills, there were recessed areas not burned out because the wind was so strong that it blew the fire “straight across the top.”

His takeaway from talking with residents and firefighters : “We’re exhausted. We need people to come. “

He relayed that message to the mayors of Omaha, Lincoln, and Columbus, “There’s not a flinch .”

Those cities have sent staff and personnel to help.

At the emergency management headquarters in Lincoln, Pillen expressed gratitude for everyone’s work amid “maybe the most challenging and

extraordinary time in the history of our state.” He also said Nebraska has in place the resources it needs to fight the fires.

Officials noted help has come in from other states, like Utah, Wyoming and Iowa.

Emergency management also received a federal grant to mitigate and control fires on public or private forest or grasslands. The grant may help recover some of the costs of the fire response.

Residents have also stepped up to help.

Bridgeport married couples Buffy Prince and Brian DeBlois and Ethan and Emmily Hackett organized a donation drive that saw Black Hills Energy donate \$1000. With that, they put together a Walmart order of supplies, a pallet of water, and energy drinks and hygiene products for the small Chapell Fire Department. The department serves the Panhandle town of 850 people south of the Morrill wildfire.

Prince said the four decided to donate to small – town fire department after receiving word from a 911 dispatcher in Sydney that the Chappell department needed help with supplies both at the station and in their fire engines.

“We didn’t see a supply pile when we were there.” Prince said.

“They definitely needed that.”

“All the little creeks and little areas that had trees in them, they’re gone,” she said. “Everything just turned to ash. There’s literally nothing up there. Where the cows once roamed, it’s just empty and smoking.”

David Boyd, a public information officer with the Rocky Mountain Complex Incident Team, said the fires have damaged homes, and ranches. Livestock has been killed.

Some towns, including Farnam, about 50 miles southeast of North Platte, have been evacuated “multiple times,” said Rachelle Lipker, executive for the American Red Cross chapter serving central and western Nebraska.

The Red Cross has opened evacuation centers in North Platte and Brady, which is about 20 minutes east of North Platte.

So far, no one has come in Lipker said.

“This is a great thing about Nebraska : Neighbors take care of neighbors,” said Lipker. “ What we’re seeing is that people are going to staying with friends and family. We’re there is needed, but, as yet, nobody has utilized our shelter.”

With nobody in the shelters, Lipker said and the approximately 20 Red Cross volunteers under her command have mainly focused on supporting fire fighters who have come from around Nebraska, neighboring statea and other states as far as Michigan and Arizona.

Perkins County Canal Funds off-limits, lawmakers vote

Josh Reyes, Omaha World-Herald

Kearney Hub

3/12/2026

LINCOLN- A majority of Nebraska lawmakers dammed up an attempt Tuesday to divert funds from the planned Perkins County Canal so shoe up a budget funding gap of \$125 million.

While completion of Nebraska's largest-ever project is years away, the resounding vote against touching any of the \$628 million set aside for the canal was a clear signal that even in challenging circumstances, the Legislature considers that money off-limits.

State Sen. Jane Raybould of Lincoln introduced an amendment to a budget bill (Legislative Bill 1072) to draw close to \$79 million from the Perkins County project.

While considered vital to Nebraska's future, the canal is embattled. Nebraska sued Colorado last year over the project, and many landowners in Colorado have resisted handing over their land to facilitate work.

The project would build a canal – and reservoir system to draw water from the South Platte River. The canal would start in Colorado and draw water into southwest Nebraska under a century-old compact between the states.

Raybould said pulling money from the project doesn't make Nebraska look weak or indicate to Colorado that the state isn't serious about building the canal.

Raybould said lawmakers are clinging to the funds like a "sacred cow" while starting down the budget gap.

She asked, "Well, colleagues, what are going to do next year?"

Next year you're going into the next biennium. You're going to have an \$874million budget deficit".

For many in the state, particularly Republicans, touching the canal money is a nonstarter. A similar notion last year failed to get traction, and Gov. Jim Pillehas said the money is off-limits

Only nine lawmakers, none of them Republicans, voter in favor of Raybould's amendment.

Sen. Tanya Storer of Whitman addressed Colorado officials who may be listening to the canal discussion and said "Don't get excited. We're still on track.

She said while the budget is a challenge, the state is not in crisis. In past years when the state had to tighten its belt and make spending cuts, "The sky didn't fall. Government didn't collapse, and we got back on track." Storer said.

Sen Paul Strmmen of Sidney, touted the economic returns of building the canal, saying that it's expected to contribute \$2 billion in growth and provide water for irrigation and recharging the state's aquifer.

Sen. Mike Jacobson of North Platte called Raybould amendment "not serious" souring Sen Macheala Cavanaugh of Omaha to ask what is a serious suggestion to solve this year's and future budget issues.

"So what is the plan? Perkins Canal No. Income tax pause, No. Property? No. So what are we doing? she asked, adding that "Everything should be considered.

The Legislature will continue debating the budget in coming days.

Meanwhile, The Army Corps of Engineers is hosting public meetings this week on the project. Nebraska officials held meetings on the project in the western part of the state.

The Bird Nerd

Mary Jane Skala, Kearney Hub

3/19/2026

Tobin Brown of Lincoln calls himself the Bird Nerd. In 2025, he set out to identify as many bird species as could in Nebraska in a single year.

“I thought it would be incredibly difficult.” He told an audience of sandhill crane enthusiasts at Rowe Sanctuary last Saturday .

But he broke a new record, documenting 355 species. The previous record was 337 species, counted by a birder in 2013.

He put 35,000 “miles of adventure” on his car as he drove through 76 counties. He even dashed into Wyoming to catch a rare Pacific tern.

He got the oil changed on his Subaru Outback seven times. He replaced the tires on the car and had to replace a wheel bearing after a grueling ride on a dirt road.

Brown, 29, a full-stack web developer for Applied Systems, spent most of his spare time playing Pokeman until the summer of 2023, when he and his brother took a birding class during a trip to New Mexico. They were hooked. Brown has not play Pokeman since.

In late 2024, he decided to do a “bird year” in 2025. “That’s a competition against yourself to see how many birds you can see in one year,” he said.

“I hope to see 350. I knew it would take travel, timing and a lot of luck.”

Brown prepared a spreadsheet showing 460 species of birds that can be found in Nebraska , along with arrival or departure dates for migratory birds, their peak times here and other extensive data.

He also consulted ebird a website for birders. “That helped me decide where and when to see various species of birds,” he said.

He had accumulated nearly two years of overtime on his job, but he continued to work and squeezed in many of his birding expeditions into long weekends.

Brown spent 45 nights on the road. He camped frequently, but he got a motel room on cold nights.

He put the most miles on his car in September, and the second-most in May, but many of his ventures were close to his Lincoln home or near Omaha.

The count begins

During his first four days. Jan. 1-4, he drove out to Lake Ogallala and knocked off 92 species, helped, in part by the dam outflow that keeps the water open.

“One day, I walked out a mile to find certain gulls. I couldn’t find them, but when I got back to my car, there they were, just 10 feet away,” he said.

He parked and often walked two to three miles searching for specific species, based information in his spreadsheet.

In March, he chased one species three different times – on March 17 in Merrick County, on March 23 in Buffalo County, and on March 24 in Keith County, where he finally got its picture.

On March 25, among the sandhill cranes that gather along the Platte River in their annual migration, Brown spotted a rare common crane. He spent 24 hours searching for it near Grand Island. About 1 p.m., he pulled up to a flock of sandhill cranes and “it was right there.”

In April, he started early in morning to find warblers and migratory birds. “I was off to great start,” he said.

In the summer, he drove out to Lake Ogallala in search of rare shorebirds, warbler and more shocked to see a red-throated loon here in June. “That month is its breeding season, and most breed in the Arctic,” he said.

In August, he drove to Scottsbluff four times to see hummingbirds, which comes through the Panhandle every year. He also took a one day trip to Scottsbluff to find an arctic tern.

In early September, he drove out to western Nebraska to see migratory birds that show up here only during that time of year. On Sept. 20, in Kimbal County, he saw a red-naped sapsucker, a rarity here.

"Sometimes it took three weeks to track down a bird," he said. "it wasn't a big year for snowy owls , but I did see a few."

Surprises

Brown said Nebraska's list of 465 bird species is one of the highest in this geographical region.

He had hoped to see 350 species , but he saw 355. Sometimes, the birds surprised him.

He planned to look for a Pacific loon in late October, but he saw one on the Sutherland Reservoir early in the year.

In mid- August, he saw a swallow-tail kite, which is commonly seen in Florida. "He was out of his normal range. We chased him for an hour," he said.

In eastern Nebraska , he saw a Costa's hummingbird, which is normally found only in the Southwest and Mexico. It hung around for about two weeks. Finally, wildlife rehabilitation workers took it back to Arizona and released it in Saguaro National Park.

Brown noted that many of the rare birds he saw are common to the South.

"They are probably here due to climate change," he said. "But others, like swallow-tailed kites tend to wander in the fall."

In February, he saw an all-white red-tailed hawk, another rarity.

His "birding experience of the year" came when he saw a crested caracara which he happened to see in early December when he was chasing a Mexican Duck drake.

"I was driving down the highway, and birds were flying over. I didn't expect to see the caracara. They are rare. The only one seen previously was in a rehab place," he said.

"But the craziest things was the Pacific wren. I got a report at 10 a,m, I got in the car 15 minutes later and drove six hours to a reservoir in Wyoming and spent an hour looking for the bird," he said.

"I took a picture. It was terrible photo. But I got in the car and drove for six hours home. It was better than missing the bird," he said.

Rewards

Brwon said the most rewarding parts of his trip were the people he met and the places he saw.

"People who say Nebraska is flat only take I- 80. We have sandhills and badlands. I saw turtles, rabbits and snakes. Sometimes I got bored, so I began keeping track of insects," he said.

He discovered restaurants too. His favorite is Golden Hour Barbecue in Alliance. "Get there early. I got there 20 minutes after it opened, and the line was out the door," he said.