

Manager's Report

August 10, 2026

My wife, Deb, son Joe and I took a nice vacation to Colorado at the end of July. I always enjoy visiting the mountains, partly because the cool, clear air seems to calm down my allergies (usually). Unfortunately, this summer it was hot and dry in the mountains, with highs in the mid- to-upper 90s. There were also several wildfires around the state, which made the air hazy and reduced air quality. At least the humidity was low. We had a great time in spite of the hot, hazy weather. The highlight of the trip was a ride on the Durango-Silverton Narrow Gauge Railway. The views of the Animas River Canyon were spectacular and the ride was a real thrill! Now I'm rested and ready for action again.

Nicole and I have been working on the budget. We met with Carrie a couple weeks ago and she helped us resolve some formula reference issues. The board will hold a public hearing on the budget this month. Next month, we need to hold hearings to finalize our levy and tax asking. This year's budget is a total of about \$90,000 higher than last FY.

We will also hold a public hearing on proposed changes to the NRD Soil and Water Management Rules. I have not had any questions or received testimony from NDWEE yet, but they did send a letter acknowledging receipt of the review request. CNPPID was also invited to comment. If the board approves the rules after the hearing, we will need to publish a final notice. Rules will take effect no sooner than 90 days after board approval.

We will also hear from CNPPID Hydraulic Project Operations Manager, Cory Steinke, who will present information about how CNPPID plans to manage their limited water supply over the next couple years. As you are aware, much of the western United States, including western Nebraska, is in drought. While the drought has eased somewhat in this area, it is still very dry further west. While we should hope and pray for a snowy winter in the mountains, even extraordinarily heavy snowmelt isn't likely to fill all the reservoirs upstream of Lake McConaughy. That is a pre-condition for McConaughy to gain any meaningful amount of storage water for 2027. Therefore, CNPPID will not have much water to deliver in 2027 and they might not have any substantial amounts of water to release in 2028. Any further reduction in CNPPID irrigation deliveries will reduce groundwater recharge and increase groundwater withdrawals, accelerating existing drawdowns in groundwater levels. This is a serious matter that will require advance planning and preparation to prevent long-term damage to groundwater supplies.

It is worth noting that we will meet in Kearney at the UN-K Regional Engagement Center, rather than at our office. The address of the facility is 2204 University Drive. To help you visualize it, the facility is almost directly south of the Brass Buckle warehouse on West

Highway 30 (see map in packet). We will meet in the Gala South room and eat in Gala North. The board meeting will be at 10:30 AM, followed by lunch and discussion of water issues with invited guests in the afternoon.

Chemigation and water sampling are the major focus for staff this summer. In a dry year, we are able to get more water quality samples, which will create a clearer, more detailed analysis of groundwater quality in the district. Our interns gathered many of those samples. Elwood Middle School Science teacher Jane Crofton has been helping with chemigation inspections again this summer and she did a great job. Thanks to her help, we are on track to complete over 800 chemigation inspections this summer. Thanks to Jane, Jeff and Pat for all their hard work!

The 2026 Annual Meeting of the Republican River Compact Administration will be held in McCook at the Community College on August 27. I don't expect any newsworthy developments from that meeting, but we need to keep track of compact compliance issues more closely, now that we are in a drought and a designated "Water-short Year" in the Republican Basin. We have also scheduled our annual Little Blue Basin IMP Progress Review meeting. It will be held on Tuesday, September 22 at 1 PM at Minden Exchange Bank Community Room.

I am told that the Wilcox/Ragan municipal well has been able to run without interruption since we last met. Some adjustments were made to the VFD at the suggestion of Jim Edmondson with NDWEE's Drinking Water Division (Jim attended our board meeting). I am hopeful that we can resolve that situation in a beneficial way. Unfortunately, there is now another municipal water supply problem in the district. The Village of Smithfield was notified that their water supply exceeds the drinking water standard for Lead (see letter in packet). This is a long-term problem that can probably be solved only by replacing water supply pipes in the Village water system.

That's all that I have to tell you for this month. I look forward to seeing all of you next Wednesday MORNING in Kearney.