

Manager's Report July 8, 2025

My opening comment in last month's report reflected my fear that we were going to get locked into a drought this year, but June proved to be a very wet month, with 6" total rainfall (see weather data in packet). Holdrege actually missed a few storms. I know that much of northeast Phelps and nearly all of Kearney county got at least 4" in a single rain last month. The wet and stormy trend has persisted into this month. My son Joe and I took advantage of a break in the rain on the evening of July 4th and quickly shot off all of our fireworks.

July means chemigation inspections in Tri-Basin NRD. We have over 2600 permits this year. Jane, Jeff and Pat were out in the field when it wasn't raining, checking out farmers' chemigation safety equipment. We check all new permits before they're used and we check systems with renewal permits every three years. Inspections may seem like an unnecessary hassle during a busy time of year, but we consistently find about five percent of systems need work done to achieve compliance. Chemigation and fertigation are best management practices, but safeguards need to be in place and functional to protect the aquifer from accidental contamination.

July is also budget-making time at the NRD. Nicole, Nolan and I have been working on the budget for over a month now. We met with the Executive Committee this morning to review our draft. The committee gave me clear direction to try to avoid any property tax increase this year. That's a tough standard to meet, but we will do our best to look for opportunities to make cuts. The committee also recommends that staff get a 3% cost-of-living increase. They also recommend that I be given the opportunity to disperse an additional two percent to employees, based on their performance. I don't want to overwhelm Nicole with the details of this budget process, so we haven't done much in terms of collecting background data for the budget packet in the manner that Carie did in past years. If there is specific information that you would like to review for budget purposes, let me know. Also, Carie Lynch will give us an informal, internal audit of the budget details. Nobody else knows the budget process better than Carie. I really appreciate her willingness to act as a financial consultant for us.

Groundwater quality sampling of irrigation wells is also part of our July workload. Since irrigation started early, we started sampling early also. Our interns, Kendra and Ashley have been very helpful with this task. We should end up with a pretty comprehensive set of groundwater quality sample data for 2025. Don't forget that we also offer FREE domestic well water quality sampling to all district residents. Contact Pat Nott if you want him to check your domestic wells.

The newly merged Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment (NDWEE) launched on July 1. Jesse Bradley former director of NDNR, will manage the merged department and Matt Manning will become the state "Chief Water Officer". We received funds from NDWEE to help pay for eleven remote-reading flowmeters,

which have been installed across the Republican Basin portion of the District. They are all up, running and reporting to us via "AgSense" network. It will be interesting to review the data at the end of the irrigation season.

Tri-Basin participates in one county fair each year. This year, we will be at the Kearney County Fair in Minden. The Kearney County Fair runs July 18-20. They have a newly paved parking lot this year, too. Come out and see us at the Exhibit building.

Our August meeting will be different than in past years. Instead of our usual district tour, the board has decided to have a short retreat to discuss Platte Basin water management issues. The board meeting will be held in the morning at the Younes Convention Center-South, followed by lunch and the retreat. The retreat will consist of a series of presentations on various aspects of surface water management in the Platte Basin in central Nebraska.

University of Nebraska economists recently completed a study of the impact of well drilling moratoria and allocations on the value of irrigated cropland (see study in packet). Their conclusion is that neither of these regulations have significant impact on the value of irrigated land.

The board will have a work session to review the proposed NRD budget and to discuss proposed changes to our rules and regulations. Don Blankenau will attend to help review the rules revisions. The work session starts at 10 AM, followed by lunch and the board meeting.

That's all that I have to tell you this month. Don't forget to show up at 10 AM next Wednesday for our work session.