

Manager's Report
March 10, 2025

March "came in like a lamb" with a nice warm day, a big relief after the nasty cold weather we experienced in much of February (see weather data in packet). We had some more winter nastiness last week, but this week is expected to be very springlike. It is March in Nebraska, however, so anything is possible, including a "roaring" lion of a blizzard at the end of the month.

The board did some good work on one of the coldest days of winter last month. That will make this month's "to do" list a little shorter. We have a couple groundwater quality-related items this month. Nolan will give a report on groundwater quality data collected last year. I will also ask the board to approve all remaining Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Program (NRIP) applications, pending availability of state funds. I have been assured that we will get additional funds from DNR to cover all pending, valid, NRIP applications.

We held our annual IPA meetings this past Friday. Attendance was light (two in the morning, one in the afternoon), but I did get one of the attendees to sign up land in WCIP. I think that next year we will try something different and advertise these meetings as "Coffee with the NRD", or something like that, opening it up to all district residents who have questions about the NRD and our programs. I will present proposed IPA assessments for FY 2025-26 this month for board review.

Last month, the board directed me to send a letter to DG Fuels, regarding our expectation that they will do an aquifer impact study. After talking to NRD attorney, Don Blankenau, however, I think that we need to revise our rules first. I will ask the board to authorize me to develop a proposal to revise the district rules for commercial wells. This proposal will need to be considered at a public hearing before it can be finally approved.

Chairman Garrelts asked me to list Flowmeter requirement as an agenda item. Our current rules require landowners to install flowmeters when groundwater is pumped onto a neighboring property (groundwater transfer), when enrolling in the WCIP program, whenever a landowner is approved for an irrigation-related cost-share application, or when a new well is drilled. Landowners are also required to meter wells in phase two and phase three groundwater quantity management areas. Finally, as a result of the settlement of the *Kansas v. Nebraska* lawsuit in the Republican basin, all wells in that basin are required to be metered and report water use. The result of all these rules is that nearly 100% of wells in the Republican Basin are metered, nearly half the wells in the Little Blue basin are metered, but only about one fourth of wells in the Platte Basin are metered and reporting to us. Water use data is valuable to the district for both groundwater quantity and quality management purposes.

Another item that the Chairman directed me to list on the agenda is consideration of assisting Central NE Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) with paying the cost of sponsoring three UNL Mesonet weather stations. The weather

stations cost \$3000 each per year to maintain. We use the data for our daily crop water use text messaging service during irrigation season. The Chairman proposed to the CNPPID board that Tri-Basin would be willing to assume half the cost of sponsoring the weather stations. We haven't heard yet whether this proposal is acceptable to CNPPID.

Nolan and I had a ZOOM meeting with Lyndon Vogt from Central Platte NRD and Jennifer Schellpeper from NDNR to discuss priorities for excess flow diversions in 2025. The parties agreed that, since none of us need to offset additional depletions at this time, we should look at sites some distance from the Platte, so we get return flows over several years. Elwood Reservoir will be the priority for excess flow diversions this year. We also discussed excess flow diversions to re-use pits. CNPPID had sent DNR a proposal for reuse pit diversions that anticipated diverting during the winter, which would require winterizing diversion sites between the main Phelps Canal and reuse pits. Winterizing work greatly increases delivery cost, so we will ask CNPPID to deliver water to pits only when there isn't any danger of the canals freezing, say April 1 to October 31. Jennifer will ask CNPPID to provide rates for deliveries under those circumstances.

A couple weeks ago, I met with Johnson Lake resident and former CNPPID director Ron Fowler. Ron is involved in the Johnson Lake trails committee. Gosper County is planning to replace the bridge at the inlet to the lake, and the trails committee would like to include a pedestrian lane in the design of the bridge. He wanted to know if the NRD could help the trails committee find grant funds to pay the additional cost of the pedestrian lane. I have reached out to Papio-Missouri NRD, which does a lot of trail-building, to help me figure out options for the trails committee.

We are getting ready for a prescribed burn with our neighbors around the Platte-Republican Diversion pasture. This will be a big burn of nearly 1500 acres. Dalton is working with a burn boss from Pheasants Forever and a prescribed burn crew from Frontier County (see fire map in packet). They did some prep work over the weekend, burning a parking area and some corners. The date of the big burn is weather-dependent, but it should happen sometime later this month.

The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture and Upper Big Blue NRD sponsored an Ag Industry symposium meeting last Thursday at York College (see agenda in information packet). The meeting was very well attended and good discussions were had between conservation agency staff and agriculture industry representatives. It is our hope that the result of these meetings will be to make conservation programs and the way we present them to landowners more compatible with and responsive to the needs of their farm operations. Our Water Program Specialist, Carrie Putnam helped develop plans for this meeting. We hope to hold a similar meeting in Holdrege this fall.

That's all that I have to tell you this month. I look forward to seeing all of you next Wednesday. Enjoy the nice weather, but keep a sharp eye out for the lion that is lurking at the end of this month!