

## Manager's Report

June 15, 2026

May had above average rainfall! This sort of statement isn't usually followed by an exclamation point, but it was the first time in eight months that we have had more than dampness (see weather info in packet). In spite of recent rains, which often came in the form of punishing storms, Tri-Basin NRD is still in a drought. A recent National Weather Service announcement that a "strong" El Nino is in effect is likely to reinforce the drought. We can and should hope and pray for more rain, but accept that the drought is likely to be with us for some time yet, so we need to conserve our vital groundwater supplies.

I'm sorry to have to report on the passing of former NRD director Gary Lindstrom of rural Wilcox (see obituary in packet). Gary was an NRD director for nearly 30 years (1979-2007). He was the Tri-Basin representative on the NARD board for more than a decade and he was president of the Groundwater Management Districts Association in 2005-06. Gary was very active in the early days of the Platte Basin Cooperative agreement, which eventually became the Platte River Recovery Program. He also had a desire to see local landowners treated fairly in dealings with state and federal government. He was a good-natured guy and a friend to all. He will be missed.

I am pleased to report that, thanks to Carrie Putnam, we brought our last crop report violator into compliance without having to issue a cease and desist order! Carrie knows the gentleman and was able to help him fill out his forms and get in compliance. Thanks, Carrie!

I have recently devoted attention to the Platte River Recovery Program (PRRIP) and one of its proposed projects. PRRIP would like to be able to release water from Elwood Reservoir and run it down Plum Creek to the Platte River to reduce shortages to endangered species target flows. The NRD has cooperated in engineering studies related to this proposal and we were asked to help once again with landowner contacts. Larry Reynolds expressed concern about potential impacts to properties along the creek as well as access roads and crossings. The PRRIP is bound to a "Good Neighbor" policy which prohibits them from taking actions and initiating projects that aren't supported by affected local landowners. For that reason, PRRIP director Jason Farnsworth suggested that a meeting should be held to explain the proposed project to affected landowners and to hear their criticisms and concerns. We will hold that meeting this Thursday (June 18) at the Elwood American Legion Hall.

I participated as a “Downstream Water User” delegate at the PRRIP Governance committee meeting at Cheyenne, Wyoming last week. The Plum Creek Diversion project and PRRIP’s plans to “augment sediment” in the Platte by dozing hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of sand into the Platte River near Overton, which is another project that this NRD is interested in, were the main topics of discussion at this meeting. Jason Farnsworth announced his resignation as PRRIP director, effective at the end of this year, during the Cheyenne meeting. Jason has been a sensible, thoughtful leader for PRRIP. I wish him well in his future endeavors.

Nicole, Nolan and I met a couple weeks ago to start drafting our FY 2026-2027 NRD budget. The budget will likely be lower this year, since we have finished our Net Recharge Tool project and a couple NDWEE grants for remote-reading flowmeters and observation wells. We are also fortunate that we (once again) had NO health insurance increase this year. Our NARD Risk Pool had some challenges in its early years, but it is running very well now and outperforming all commercial health insurance carriers. We don’t expect significant increases in our property or workmen’s compensation insurance, which is also good news. We do need to budget for a couple vehicles and I’m getting quotes for re-roofing the Armory. Those will be our main “big ticket” items this year. We usually have a board work session focused on reviewing the budget. Our July board meeting is scheduled for July 15, but that’s a bit early for us to have our budget numbers all in place. We could have a budget meeting the morning of the board meeting, but some revenue and year-end numbers will be preliminary. Otherwise, we might want to hold a separate budget work session. Rescheduling the board meeting to keep both on the same day is also an option. The following Wednesday (July 22) works best on my calendar, if you want to reschedule.

Another potential budget item would be funding part of the cost of a new soil conservation technician for NRCS. USDA has funds to pay 50% of the cost of a new position. Cammie convinced me that the best opportunity for us to take advantage of this opportunity would be to hire a technician that we can train to become an Irrigation Water Management Specialist once Curtis Scheele decides to retire. In the meantime, this person could help producers with irrigation management and help NRCS process cost-share and other program applications. I will include this proposal as part of my draft budget, for discussion purposes.

Chemigation season is in full swing. We have over 900 inspections to do this summer, which is a big load, but Jane Crofton is back to help us and Central Platte NRD has agreed to let Carrie help with the chemigation program one day a week. Amanda Mackin is also taking over Dana Christensen’s position, which will be focused on chemigation administration. It a big job, but we have a great team in place and I’m confident that we will

“Git ‘er done!” Since we are shifting Amanda to Dana’s position, we are now advertising to fill our data clerk job. If you know anyone with good computer skills, we would like to interview them. We are taking applications until June 19.

We need to schedule a public hearing on the proposed changes to our groundwater management rules. The soonest that we can hold that hearing during a regular board meeting would be during our August 19 meeting. I will ask the board to schedule that hearing.

That’s all that I have to report. I will NOT be at the next board meeting (breaking my consecutive meeting attendance streak at 30 years and eleven months), because I need to take my wife, Deb, to a medical appointment in Omaha, so I will ask Nolan to substitute for me. Be nice to him. I wish you well at YOUR next board meeting on THURSDAY, June 25 at 1:30 PM.