

## Manager's Report January 12, 2026

Happy New Year! It's a chance to make a new start, go a different direction, make changes in your life. Its also a chance to look back on the past year. Looking back, weather-wise, we see a year that wobbled back and forth from dry to wet and back to dry again. We ended 2025 more than six inches short of average rainfall, almost the exact same amount that we had in 2024-17.73". The current drought monitor map shows much of Nebraska, including Tri-Basin NRD, as "Abnormally Dry". We end the year just as we ended 2024, teetering on the edge of a drought. We can't look upstream for relief, either, since Platte Basin snowpack is abnormally low so far this winter.

January through March is informally referred to as the "meeting season". We kicked off the meeting season on January 8, with an "Ag Industry Symposium", sponsored by Tri-Basin NRD and the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture at the Ag Center in Holdrege. Our Water Program Specialist, Carrie Putnam, with help from Sasha and an inter-agency team that included Lisa Kaslon, a meeting facilitator from UNL, planned and presented this meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to try to get feedback from ag industry professionals about how we can increase knowledge and utilization of our cost-share and other conservation programs. We had about 35 attendees, split between industry professionals and agency personnel. The meeting went well and I, at least, gained a few insights regarding how our cost-share programs are perceived. Good work, Carrie!

The center ring during meeting season is the Unicameral. Our state legislature could be a real circus this year. State senators will need to consider whether to expel one of their own for misconduct. This is expected to be a prolonged debate. The main order of business, however, will be addressing a \$471 million shortfall in the state budget. Between those two topics, there isn't likely to be time to discuss much else during a short 60 day session, so we aren't likely to see much new legislation approved this year.

Even though we aren't likely to see a lot of new bills approved this year, its important to understand how the legislature works and what their priorities are for the future. The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts hosts an annual legislative conference that gives NRD directors opportunities to learn about legislation and meet with legislators in an informal setting. Nearly all of our directors plan to attend this year's conference, which will be held January 26-28.

Its important to know whats going on in Lincoln, but we also need to keep in touch with our partners closer to home. We have scheduled a joint committee meeting with CNPPID directors on Monday, February 2 at 1 PM at the CNPPID office. This meeting WILL be advertised, so all interested directors can attend. This will be our first joint meeting in four years, so its overdue.

Our February board meeting is typically also used as a work session, when directors can get briefings on topics that we don't have time to discuss during regular

board meetings. The main topic that I have for a work session is to review changes to our Republican Basin IMP, which the board is expected to approve during our February meeting. I would appreciate any ideas that you have for items to discuss or to gather more information about. Todd will also recommend that we change the date of our February meeting from Wednesday, February, 18 to the following Wednesday, February 25.

We will hold a hearing to seek public comment on our revised Republican Basin IMP on Wednesday, February 4 at 11 AM at our office. I don't really expect any public comment at this hearing, but it's a step in the process. I would REALLY appreciate it if a director could attend this hearing as a board representative. Please let me know if you're available to attend this meeting. I will happily buy lunch for any directors who make time to participate in this hearing.

The South-Central NE Water Conference is coming up on Thursday, February 5. This meeting will, as always, be at the Phelps County Ag Center here in Holdrege. Our keynote speaker will be Nebraska's new "Chief Water Officer" Matt Manning. He will give us an update on Platte Basin water issues.

I am sorry to report that Curtis Scheele's father, Bill Scheele, died last Friday, at the age of 81. Pat Nott and I went to his funeral Tuesday (1/13) at Steele City NE, a small village southeast of Fairbury. All those who spoke about Curtis' dad referred to him as "Mr. Steele City." He was the mayor, the postmaster, a member of the volunteer fire department, monitored the village water system, etc. He did all the little jobs that require steady attention to keep a small town going. Most small towns have a "Bill" who has always been around and always made sure that things got done. An increasingly urgent question for small towns across Nebraska and the Nation is: where will we find another "Bill"? Curtis has been a great asset to this NRD in our efforts to help farmers become more efficient irrigators. I would like to offer condolences to Curtis and his family on behalf of Tri-Basin staff and directors.

The NRD's main checking account was briefly overdrawn during the holidays. A check for \$97,000 to a vendor for flowmeters came through at the same time that payroll was due. We have also had delays in reimbursement from both federal and state agreements. Nicole quickly transferred funds from our sinking fund accounts to make up the overdraft, so there weren't any penalties assessed against our account. We will get a big tax distribution in January that will enable us to make everything right. This used to be a common problem until we built up our reserve funds. Nicole is learning the challenges of managing an account with highly variable income and outlays.

That's all that I can think to mention to you this month. I hope to see all of you next Wednesday afternoon for our first meeting of 2026!