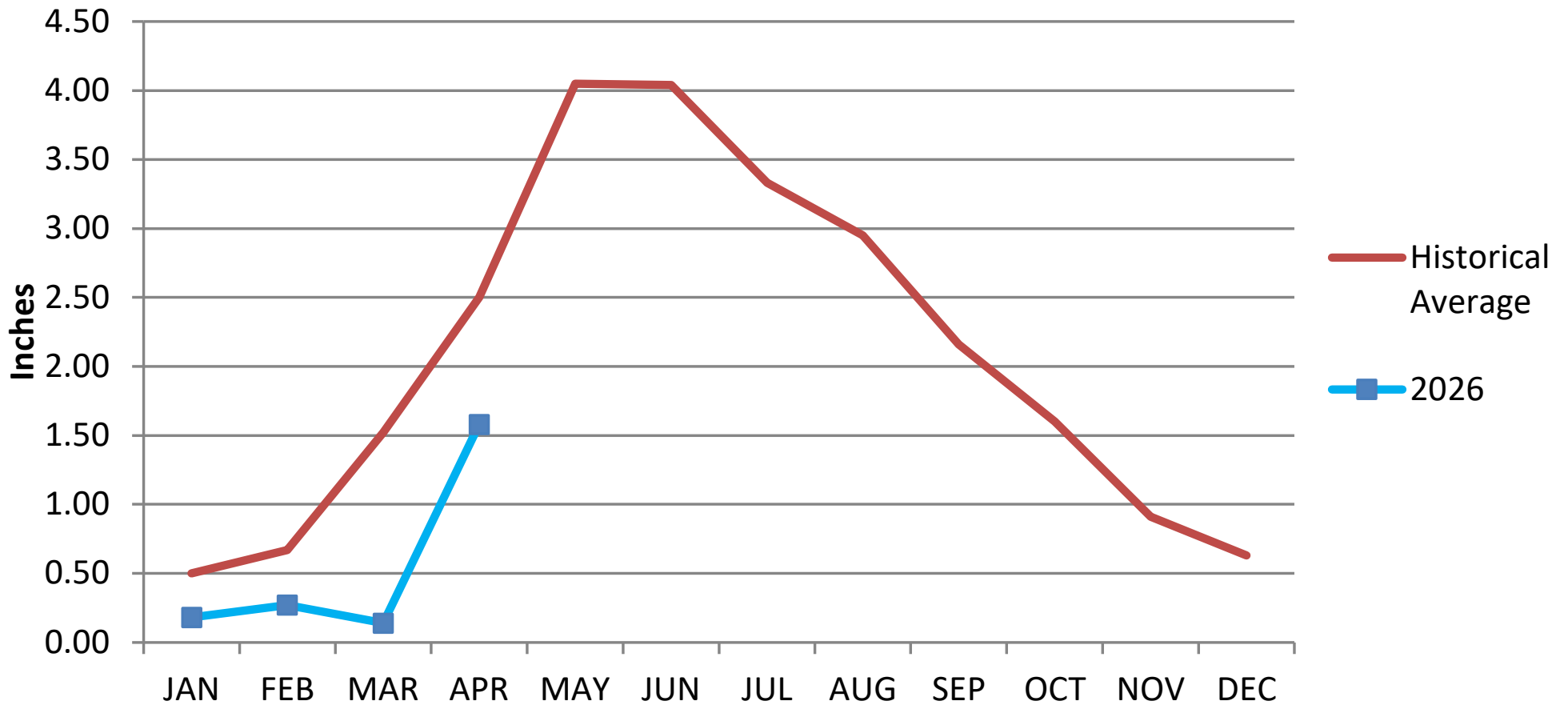
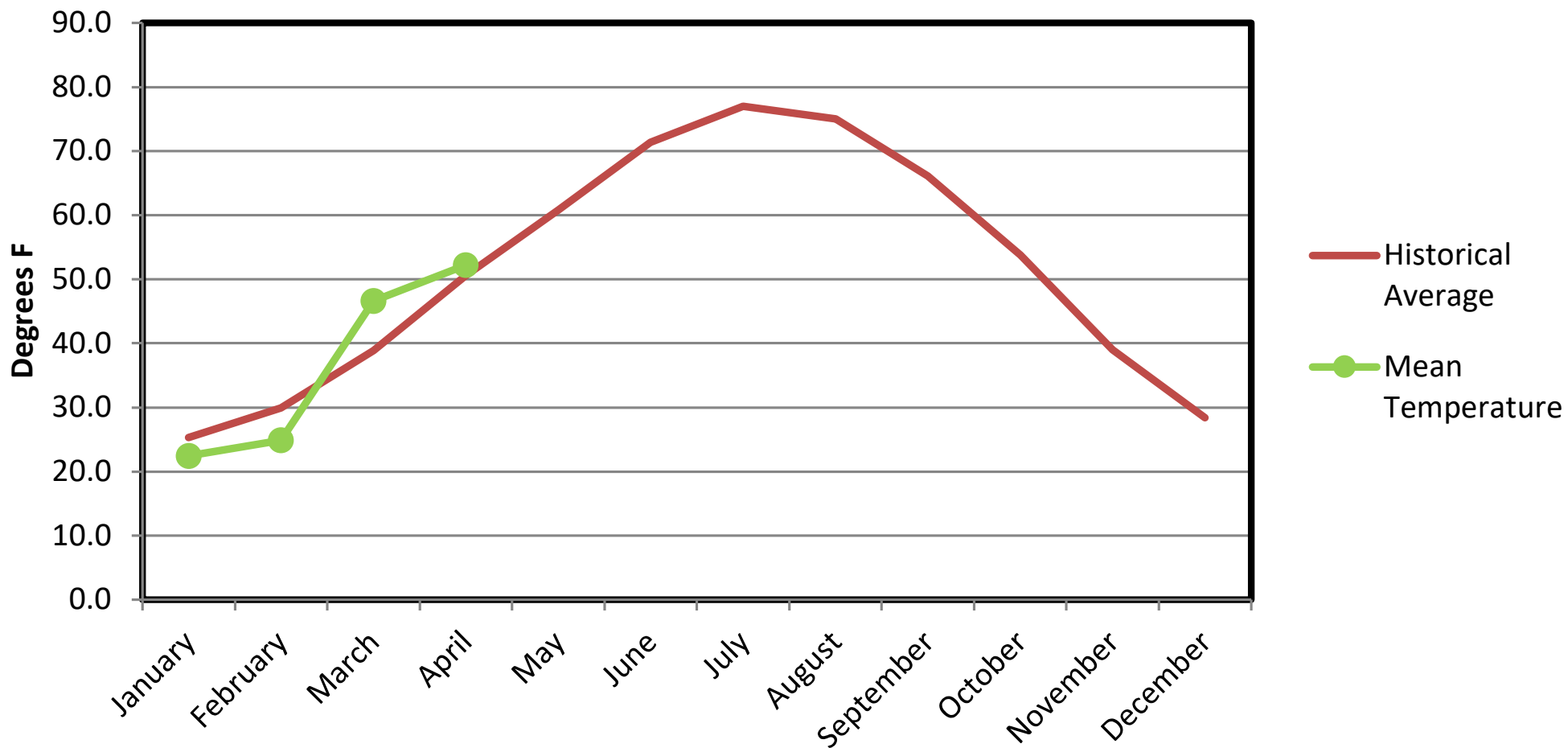


# Tri-Basin NRD Holdrege Monthly Precipitation - 2026



# Tri-Basin NRD

## Holdrege Monthly Mean Temperature - 2026



Tri-Basin NRD  
1723 Burlington.  
Holdrege, NE 68949



Phone: (308) 995-6688  
Fax: (308) 995-6992  
Email: [tribasin@tribasinrd.org](mailto:tribasin@tribasinrd.org)

*Natural Resources District*

---

## April 2026 - Holdrege

### Temperature: (°F)

\* High: 89° (Recorded April 22)

\* Low: 24° (Recorded April 18, 19)

\* Mean: 52.2° (Normal for April 51.2)

Mean High: 67.2° (Normal: 64.9°)

Mean Low: 37.2° (Normal: 37.6°)

### NOTES:

Precipitation for April 2026: 1.58"

(Normal for April: 2.46")

Precipitation for the year through April: 1.99"

(Normal for the year through April: 4.98")

**NOTES:** Rain noted 7 days  
Fog noted 1 day  
Trace noted 2 days

---

## April 2025

### Temperature:

High: 85°

Low: 27°

Mean: 51.°

### Precipitation:

For the month: .82"

For the year: 3.11"

Snow for April: 0"

Snow Total for Year: 19"





STATION (Climatological) Elwood 85		(River Station, if different)	MONTH Mar 2026
STATE NE		COUNTY Gosper	RIVER
TIME (local) OF OBSERVATION RIVER		TEMPERATURE 08:00	PRECIPITATION 08:00
TYPE OF RIVER GAGE		ELEVATION OF RIVER GAGE ZERO	FLOOD STAGE NORMAL POOL STAGE

WS FORM B-91  
(03-09)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

## RECORD OF RIVER AND CLIMATOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

DATE	TEMPERATURE			PRECIPITATION		WEATHER (Observation Day)						RIVER STAGE		REMARKS (SPECIAL OBSERVATIONS, ETC.)					
	24 HRS ENDING AT OBSERVATION		AT OBSN	24 HR AMOUNTS		Mark 'X' for all types occurring each day						Gage reading at ___ AM	Tendency						
	MAX	MIN		Rain, melted snow, etc. (in and hundredths)	Snow, ice pellets, hail (ins and tenths)	A.M.		NOON		P.M.					Fog	Ice pellets	Glaze	Thunder	Hail
1				0.00	0.0	0													
2				T	T	0													
3				T	0.0	0													
4				0.00	0.0	0													
5				0.00	0.0	0													
6				0.00	0.0	0													
7				0.00	0.0	0													DAMPNESS IN THE AIR, CLOUD COVER, WIND AT ABOUT
8				0.00	0.0	0													
9				0.00	0.0	0													HIGH TEMPERATURE YESTERDAY REACHED INTO THE MID-
10				0.00	0.0	0													HIGH TEMPERATURE OF 80 DEGREES
11				T	T	0													
12				0.00	0.0	0													
13				0.00	0.0	0													SMOKE IN THE AIR FROM FIRES YESTERDAY & ALL NIGH
14				0.00	0.0	0													
15				0.00	0.0	0													BLOWING DIRT, SMOKE FROM FIRES NOT FAR FROM HERE
16				0.00	0.0	0													WIND TO +50 MPH YESTERDAY. 5 DEGREES @ 8:00 A.M
17				0.00	0.0	0													STILL SMOKE SMELL IN THE AIR, LESS WIND YESTERDA
18				T	0.0	0													
19				0.00	0.0	0													A MOSTLY CALM 24 HR. PERIOD GIVING THE FIRE FIGH
20				0.00	0.0	0													80+ DEGREES YESTERDAY, MOSTLY CALM,
21				0.00	0.0	0													HIGH TEMP OF 82 DEGREES. A CALM 24 HOURS.
22				0.00	0.0	0													95 degrees yesterday.
23				0.00	0.0	0													STRONG WIND ALL DAY YESTERDAY AT LEAST 35 MPH GU
24				0.00	0.0	0													
25				0.00	0.0	0													
26				0.00	0.0	0													Temperature reached into the upper 80s again.
27				0.00	0.0	0													BLOWING DIRT, POOR VISIBILITY. SMOKE IN THE AIR.
28				0.00	0.0	0													WIND CONTINUES TO BE HAZARDESS.
29				0.00	0.0	0													Wind guesstimate of At least 50 MPH yesterday. B
30				0.00	0.0	0													
31				0.00	0.0	0													MOSTLY LIGHT WIND YESTERDAY WITH HIGH TEMPERTURE

CONDITION OF RIVER AT GAGE		CHECK BAR (for wire weight) NORMAL CHECK BAR		OBSERVER					
A. Obstructed by rough ice B. Frozen, but open at gage C. Upper surface smooth ice D. Ice gorge above gage		E. Ice gorge below gage F. Shore ice G. Floating ice H. Pool stage		Closed by Charlene Nott (ELWN1) on 01 Apr 2026 02:48PM					
READING				SUPERVISING OFFICE					
DATE				GID Hastings					
				STATION INDEX NO.					
				25-2690-08					

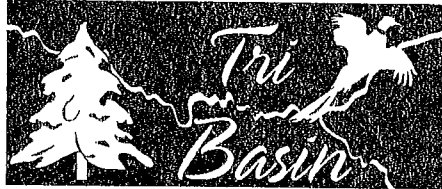
**Second Quarter 2026 Overton Stream Gauge Data**

	Arp Act	Arp Tar	Well Run	May Act	May Tar	Well Run	June Act	June Tar	Well Run
1	196	1700			1700			800	
2	175	1700			1700			800	
3	574	1700			1700			800	
4	1350	1700			1700			800	
5	1920	1700			1700			800	
6	291	1700			1700			800	
7	271	1700			1700			800	
8	211	1700			1700			800	
9	191	1700			1700			800	
10	199	1700			1700			800	
11	177	1700			800			800	
12	191	1700			800			800	
13	191	1700			800			800	
14	184	1700			800			800	
15	177	1700			800			800	
16	139	1700			800			800	
17	128	1700			800			800	
18	3.04	1700			800			800	
19	2.66	1700			800			800	
20	2.43	1700			800			800	
21	2.41	1700			800			800	
22	2.61	1700			800			800	
23	2.41	1700			800			800	
24	2.43	1700			800			800	
25	2.34	1700			800			800	
26	2.33	1700			800			800	
27	2.38	1700			800			800	
28	2.42	1700			800			800	
29	2.42	1700			800			800	
30	2.66	1700			800			800	
31					800				

**Second Quarter 2026 Grand Island Stream Gauge Data**

	<b>Apr Act</b>	<b>AprTar</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>May Act</b>	<b>May Tar</b>	<b>May V</b>	<b>June Act</b>	<b>JuneTar</b>	<b>Well Run</b>
1	277	1700			1700			800	
2	340	1700			1700			800	
3	427	1700			1700			800	
4	476	1700			1700			800	
5	447	1700			1700			800	
6	1010	1700			1700			800	
7	1410	1700			1700			800	
8	642	1700			1700			800	
9	425	1700			1700			800	
10	376	1700			1700			800	
11	336	1700			800			800	
12	362	1700			800			800	
13	336	1700			800			800	
14	323	1700			800			800	
15	298	1700			800			800	
16	310	1700			800			800	
17	253	1700			800			800	
18	264	1700			800			800	
19	253	1700			800			800	
20	253	1700			800			800	
21	275	1700			800			800	
22	264	1700			800			800	
23	221	1700			800			800	
24	150	1700			800			800	
25	140	1700			800			800	
26	234	1700			800			800	
27	192	1700			800			800	
28	163	1700			800			800	
29	185	1700			800			800	
30	193	1700			800			800	
31					800				

Tri-Basin NRD  
1723 Burlington St.  
Holdrege, NE 68949



(308) 995-6688  
Fax: (308) 995-6992  
tribasin@tribasinrd.org

*Natural Resources District*

General Manager  
JOHN THORBURN

Chairman  
TODD GARRELTS  
Holdrege, Nebraska

April 15, 2026

Vice Chairman  
JOE BILKA  
Holdrege, Nebraska

Treasurer  
JEFF RYAN  
Heartwell, Nebraska

Mitigation Section  
Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)  
2433 N.W. 24<sup>th</sup> Street

Lincoln, NE 68524-1801

Secretary  
ROB HINRICHS  
Axtell, Nebraska

BRIAN BERGSTROM  
Axtell, Nebraska

RE: Tri-Basin NRD Hazard Mitigation Plan Update  
Financial Commitment Letter

JOEL GRAMS  
Minden, Nebraska

To Whom It May Concern:

DAVID GRIMES  
Minden, Nebraska

The Tri-Basin NRD Board of Directors, during their regular meeting on April 7, 2026, committed to cover the estimated local share amount of \$45,200 in cash towards the Tri-Basin NRD Hazard Mitigation Plan Update. These funds are currently available and will remain so for the duration of the project, or 36 months from project approval and obligation of funds.

ED HARRIS  
Loomis, Nebraska

JOE LARSON  
Loomis, Nebraska

If you have any questions regarding this financial commitment letter, please feel free to contact me, John Thorburn at (308) 995-6688 or [jthorburn@tribasinrd.org](mailto:jthorburn@tribasinrd.org).

BRAD LUNDEEN  
Wilcox, Nebraska

Sincerely,

G. REED PHILIPS  
Bertrand, Nebraska

DAVID RAFFETY  
Kearney, Nebraska

  
John Thorburn, General Manager

LARRY REYNOLDS  
Lexington, Nebraska

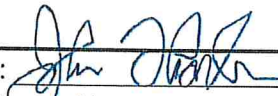
## **AGREEMENT FOR OPERATATION OF AUGMENATION WELL**

Pursuant to the Nebraska Interlocal Cooperation Act, Neb. Rev. Stat. §13-801 et. seq., Tri-Basin Natural Resources District ("TBNRD") and Lower Republican Natural Resources District ("LRNRD"), both parties being political subdivisions of the State of Nebraska, hereby enter into this Agreement for Operation of Augmentation Well ("Agreement"), as follows:

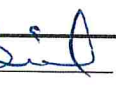
1. **WELL OPERATION:** TBNRD has right and authority to operate an augmentation well registered with the Nebraska Department of Water Energy and Environment as G-179201, and located on land owned by Don Holen Farms, Ltd., hereinafter referred to as "Turkey Creek Augmentation Well." TBNRD agrees to operate Turkey Creek Augmentation Well to discharge groundwater produced from that well into Turkey Creek for augmentation purposes, a beneficial use. TBNRD shall operate the Turkey Creek Augmentation Well as practicable on the dates and times requested by LRNRD. TBNRD shall meter the well and determine the volume of water withdrawn. LRNRD shall have access to the Turkey Creek Augmentation Well at all hours of normal business operations to inspect the well and observe its operation.
2. **NOTICE AND COMPENSATION:** At the end of the Agreement Term, TBNRD shall provide notice and confirmation to LRNRD of the dates and times that the Turkey Creek Augmentation Well was in operation and the volume of water pumped. LRNRD shall compensate TBNRD for the cost of operation of the Turkey Creek Augmentation Well in the amount of fifty-four dollars (\$54.00) an acre-foot of water pumped. LRNRD shall make payment to TBNRD on or before December 31 of each year this Agreement operates.
3. **LIABILITY AND INDEMNIFICATION:** Parties agree to share equally any liability for claims or causes of action that arise from the discharge of groundwater into Turkey Creek or impacts to surrounding groundwater wells allegedly caused by the operation of the Turkey Creek Augmentation Well.

4. TERM: This Agreement shall terminate on December 31, 2026, unless the Parties hereto agree to extend this Agreement in writing. Any future extension/s shall be limited to one year.
5. APPLICABLE LAW AND SEVERABILITY: This Agreement is governed by the laws of the State of Nebraska. If for any reason whatsoever, any of the provisions of this Agreement shall be held or deemed invalid, unenforceable, or otherwise inoperative, the remaining sections shall continue in full force and effect as if agreed to without the inoperative provisions.
6. NO ASSIGNMENT: The rights and liabilities of the Parties under this Agreement may not be assigned by one party without the prior written consent of the other party to this Agreement.

**Tri-Basin Natural Resources District  
("TBNRD")**

By:   
Title: Manager  
Date: 12/8/25

**Lower Republican Natural Resources  
District ("LRNRD")**

By:   
Title: General Manager  
Date: 12-8-2025

# Platte – Republican Diversion Project Board Meeting

Lower Republican NRD  
30 N. John St.  
Alma NE 68920

May 11, 2025, at 2:00 pm

The agenda for such meeting is kept continuously current and is available on the LRNRD website.

All Agenda Items are Considered Discussion and/or Action Items

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## BOARD MEETING:

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER – CHAIRPERSON
2. ROLL CALL – CHAIRPERSON
3. BOARD OF DIRECTORS EXCUSED ABSENCES – CHAIRPERSON
4. BOARD MINUTES – CHAIRPERSON
5. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC
6. TREASURERS REPORT – CHAIRPERSON
7. APPROVAL OF PAYABLES – CHAIRPERSON
8. PRD PROPERTY REPORT – CHAIRPERSON
9. CONSULTING ENGINEER – CHAIRPERSON
10. CLOSED SESSION – TO DISCUSS CONTRACTUAL NEGOTIATIONS AND IMMINENT LITIGATION -  
CHAIRPERSON
11. OTHER UPDATES – CHAIRPERSON
  - Discuss status of water right application
12. ADJOURNMENT

STATE OF NEBRASKA

DEPARTMENT OF WATER, ENERGY, & ENVIRONMENT

ORDER OF SUSPENSION APPLICATION A-19594

WATER DIVISION 1-A, 1-B.

This matter comes before the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment ("Department") upon the Platte to Republican Basin High Flow Diversion Project's ("Applicant") "Motion to Suspend Application" that was filed with the Department on March 6, 2026. The Applicant requests suspension of the Department's review of Application A-19594 for a period of three (3) years so that it can develop and evaluate technical options to address concerns associated with non-native species. Upon consideration of the Motion, the Department finds and orders as follows.

The Applicant's Motion to Suspend is hereby GRANTED with the following conditions:

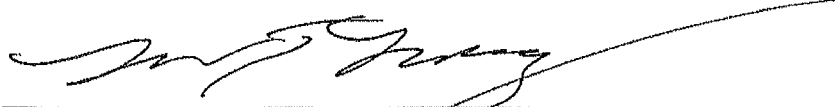
1. Within three (3) years from the date of this Order, Applicant shall supplement the record with a report of its technical options to address non-native species. Upon receipt of the report, the suspension shall be lifted, and the Department will continue its review of Application A-19594.
2. If at the end of the three (3) year period no report is filed with the Department, the suspension shall be lifted, and the Department will continue its review of Application A-19594.
3. During the three (3) year period of suspension, Applicant shall submit progress reports to the Department on December 31, 2026, December 31, 2027, and December 31, 2028 on its efforts to develop and evaluate technical options to address non-native species concerns.

ORDER

It is hereby ORDERED that the Department's review of Application A-19594 is SUSPENDED for a period of three (3) years from the date of this Order.

DATED: March 18, 2026

DEPARTMENT OF WATER, ENERGY, &  
ENVIRONMENT



---

Matthew T. Manning, Chief Water Officer

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

A copy of this Order of Suspension was posted on the Department's website and provided to its Bridgeport, Nebraska field office. The undersigned certifies that the Order of Suspension was sent electronically and by first-class mail on March 18, 2026 as follows:

Platte to Republican Basin High  
Flow Diversion Project  
Donald G. Blankenau  
Dblankenau@woodsaitken.com  
WOODS AITKEN, LP  
301 S. 13<sup>th</sup> St, Suite 500  
Lincoln, NE 68508

/s/ B.J. Green  
B.J. Green, Clerk

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

1723 Burlington St.  
Holdrege, NE 68949

# Invoice

Date	Invoice #
5/8/2026	04222614

Bill To
Lower Republican NRD P.O. Box 618 Alma, NE 68920

Ship To

P.O. Number	Terms	Rep	Ship	Via	F.O.B.	Project
	Net 10th of next month		5/8/2026			
Quantity	Item Code	Description			Price Each	Amount
751.43	Reim Other Organi...	Turkey Creek Augmentation Well 2025-2026 751.43 Ac/Ft x \$54 Ac/Ft Holdrege			54.00	40,577.22
					7.00%	0.00
					<b>Total</b>	\$40,577.22

# NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Resources.

DEPT. OF WATER, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT



Jim Pillen, Governor

April 17, 2026

Dale Klute  
Phelps County Feeders, LLC  
73938 J Road  
Holdrege, NE 68949

RE: Phelps County Feeders - West Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation  
NDEE ID: 69723  
Program ID: NEG21058  
Subject: **NPDES General Permit for Operations Confining Cattle**  
Permit Coverage Application No. NEG021058  
SE 1/4, Section 3 & NE 1/4, Section 10, Township 07N, Range 20W, Phelps County  
Consultant: Settje Agri-Services and Engineering, Inc.

Dear Mr. Klute:

The Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (Department) hereby issues coverage under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) Confining Cattle (NEG021000) to your operation. This General Permit becomes effective April 1, 2026 and will expire on March 31, 2031. It may be modified or reissued to reflect regulatory changes.

Coverage under this NPDES General Permit is for the number of livestock waste control facilities (LWCF) and the number of livestock listed below:

Type of LWCF	No. Each Type
Holding Ponds	7
Debris Basins	9
Clean Water Diversion	1
Equipment Wash Pad	1
Feed Storage Basin	1
Lift Station	1
Digester Tank	6
Influent Buffer Tank	1
Influent Heating Tank	1
Slurry Mixing Tank	2
Separated Liquids Sump	1
Emergency Tank Overflow Sump	1

Species	Number of Head
Feeder Cattle	26,000

Open Lot Area: 162.3 acres  
Total Drainage Area: 196 acres

If your operation is constructing LWCF in a phased approach, only those construction phases that are completed and approved for use are eligible for coverage under this General Permit. As subsequent construction phases are completed and approved, your NPDES coverage must be modified to cover the additional LWCF and livestock.

The calculations and methodology followed in the NMP indicate adequate application area for application of effluent at a nitrogen based rate during normal situations. The Department would suggest the addition of application acres for effluent to account for less than ideal situations which could lead to the over application of nutrients.

Your CAFO shall be operated and maintained according to the approved application, this NPDES General Permit, the site-specific permit terms in Attachment 1 to this letter and the requirements in Title 130, *Livestock Waste Control Regulations*. Please review this permit carefully as you are responsible for your operation's compliance with all permit requirements. Copies of the General Permit and of your Request for Coverage are enclosed for your records. A copy of both documents must be kept on-site at your operation.

This General Permit contains specific recordkeeping, monitoring, operating, maintenance and inspection requirements. Department staff will conduct periodic inspections of your operation to review compliance with permit conditions.

The Permittee, authorized representative, or an employee of the operation is required to obtain land application training within 180 days of receiving permit coverage, unless one of these persons satisfactorily completed such training within the past five (5) years. Department records indicate your current training is valid until February 19, 2029. Additional training must be completed every five (5) years.

Approval by the Department is required prior to making any changes or modifications from the approved application to the design or operation of the LWCF. **A new application with a \$200 fee is required for any major modification.**

The Department's issuance of coverage under this NPDES General Permit does not relieve you of other duties and responsibilities under the Nebraska Environmental Protection Act, the amended Nebraska Livestock Waste Management Act or Title 130. In addition, this permit does not remove your responsibility to comply with any Natural Resources District, county or local zoning regulations.

If you have any questions, please contact your inspector or myself at (402) 471-0282.

Sincerely,



Brad Edeal, Supervisor  
Livestock & Agriculture Section  
Inspection & Compliance Division  
[brad.edeal@nebraska.gov](mailto:brad.edeal@nebraska.gov)

Enclosures

cc: Setlje Agri-Services and Engineering, Inc.

## Platte to Republican High Flow Diversion Project

## Reconciliation Detail

102.00 · Cash in Bank Checking, Period Ending 04/30/2026

Type	Date	Num	Name	Clr	Amount	Balance
Beginning Balance						10,362.99
<b>Cleared Transactions</b>						
<b>Checks and Payments - 2 Items</b>						
Check	04/23/2026	1146	Lake Seldom Living ...	X	-270.00	-270.00
Check	04/23/2026	1147	Woods Altken LLP	X	-50.00	-320.00
Total Checks and Payments					-320.00	-320.00
Total Cleared Transactions					-320.00	-320.00
Cleared Balance					-320.00	10,042.99
<b>Uncleared Transactions</b>						
<b>Checks and Payments - 1 Item</b>						
Check	02/23/2026	1144	Tri-Basin NRD		-4,735.38	-4,735.38
Total Checks and Payments					-4,735.38	-4,735.38
Total Uncleared Transactions					-4,735.38	-4,735.38
Register Balance as of 04/30/2026					-5,055.38	5,307.61
<b>Ending Balance</b>					<b>-5,055.38</b>	<b>5,307.61</b>

9:13 AM  
05/11/26

## Platte to Republican High Flow Diversion Project Reconciliation Detail

102.00 · Cash in Bank Checking, Period Ending 04/30/2026

Type	Date	Num	Name	Clr	Amount	Balance
<b>Beginning Balance</b>						10,362.99
<b>Cleared Transactions</b>						
<b>Checks and Payments - 2 Items</b>						
Check	04/23/2026	1146	Lake Seldom Living ...	X	-270.00	-270.00
Check	04/23/2026	1147	Woods Aitken LLP	X	-50.00	-320.00
Total Checks and Payments					-320.00	-320.00
Total Cleared Transactions					-320.00	-320.00
Cleared Balance					-320.00	10,042.99
<b>Uncleared Transactions</b>						
<b>Checks and Payments - 1 Item</b>						
Check	02/23/2026	1144	Tri-Basin NRD		-4,735.38	-4,735.38
Total Checks and Payments					-4,735.38	-4,735.38
Total Uncleared Transactions					-4,735.38	-4,735.38
Register Balance as of 04/30/2026					-5,055.38	5,307.61
<b>Ending Balance</b>					<b>-5,055.38</b>	<b>5,307.61</b>



**VILLAGE OF WILCOX**  
**P.O. BOX 88**  
**WILCOX, NE 68982**

Phone: 308-478-5510

Fax: 308-478-5827

March 18, 2026

Tri-Basin NRD  
1723 Burlington St.  
Holdrege, NE 68949



**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Public notice is hereby given by the Planning Commission of the Village of Wilcox, Nebraska, that a public hearing will be held at 7:00 pm on April 14, 2026 at the Wilcox Town Hall, 107 W Sapp St., Wilcox, NE 68982.

Public notice is hereby also given by the Chairperson and the Village Board of the Village of Wilcox, Nebraska, that a public hearing will be held at 7:30 pm on April 14, 2026, at the Wilcox Town Hall, 107 W Sapp St., Wilcox, NE 6882

The purpose of both hearings is to obtain public comment prior to the review and consideration of a proposed amendment to the redevelopment plan for the Village of Wilcox, including a specific redevelopment project.

The property which is the subject of this notice and of the public hearings is generally identified as Parcel ID number 0008163.00 and is legally described as follows:

Lots 1 through 6 and Lots 10 through 12, Einsel's Addition to the  
Town of Wilcox, Kearney County, Nebraska.

All interested parties shall be afforded at each public hearing a reasonable opportunity to express their views regarding the proposed redevelopment plan amendment. A map of the redevelopment area and a copy of the redevelopment plan and cost-benefit analysis shall be maintained in the office of the Village Clerk.

  
Melinda Ferree  
Wilcox Village Clerk

20.5



## ELWOOD OUTLET DESIGN – PHASE TWO MEETING AGENDA

**Project:** PRRIP – Elwood Outlet Design – Phase Two Stream Assessment/Design  
**Meeting Location:** Virtual via Teams  
**Meeting Date/Time:** May 18, 2026 @ 1:30 – 3:00 CT

### 1) Project Status Overview

- Status
- Overall goals
- WAC – October 2026
- GC – December 2026

### 2) Stream Assessment (Inter-fluve)

- Stream assessment game plan
- Data gaps
- Field work schedule
- Property owner coordination
- Design/deliverables

### 3) Pipeline Design (RJH)

- Easement update
- 30% design for extended pipeline to west side of HWY 283
- Data gaps

### 4) General Discussion

- News and notes from Central
- News and notes from TBNRD
- Next steps



Jim Pillen, Governor

May 11, 2026

Brian Johnson  
Bunker Hill Farms, Inc.  
73465 K Rd  
Holdrege, NE 68949

RE: Bunker Hill Farms, Inc. Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation  
DWEE ID: 69728  
Program ID: NEG021080  
Subject: **NPDES General Permit for CAFOs**  
Permit Coverage Application No. NEG021080  
N 1/2, SE 1/4, & NE 1/4, Section 23, Township 06N, Range 19W, Phelps County  
Consultant: Settje Agri-Services and Engineering, Inc.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (Department) hereby issues coverage under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) (NEG021000) to your operation. This General Permit became effective April 1, 2026 and will expire on March 31, 2031. It may be modified or reissued to reflect regulatory changes.

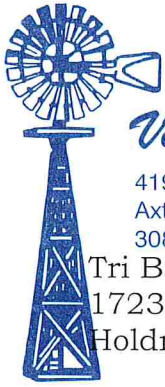
Coverage under this NPDES General Permit is for the number of livestock waste control facilities (LWCF) and the number of livestock listed below:

Type of LWCF	No. Each Type
Holding Ponds	2
Wet Basins	2
Clean Water Diversion	1
Clean Water Pond	1

Species	Number of Head
Feeder Cattle	5,100

Open Lot Area: 40.2 acres  
Total Drainage Area: 100.1 acres

Your CAFO shall be operated and maintained according to the approved application, this NPDES General Permit, the site-specific permit terms in Attachment 1 to this letter and the requirements in Title 130, *Livestock Waste Control Regulations*. Please review this permit carefully as you are responsible for your operation's compliance with all permit requirements. Copies of the General Permit and of your Request for Coverage are enclosed for your records. A copy of both documents must be kept on-site at your operation.



*Village of Axtell*

419 Main Street • P.O. Box 307  
Axtell, NE 68924-0307  
308-743-2437

Tri Basin NRD  
1723 Burlington St  
Holdrege, NE 68949

April 20, 2026



Re: Village of Axtell Annual Report on Community Redevelopment Projects

Governing Body:

Pursuant to Section 18-2117.02 of the Nebraska Community Development Law (the “Act”), the Village of Axtell, Nebraska (the “Village”) presents the following report on the approval and progress of redevelopment projects financed in whole or in part through the division of taxes as permitted by Section 18-2147 of the Act:

**A. The total number of active redevelopment projects in the Village that have been financed in whole or in part through the division of taxes as provided in Section 18-2147 of the Act.**

In the Village of Axtell, there are two (2) active redevelopment projects that have been financed in whole or in part through the division of taxes as provided in Section 18-2147 of the Act, which are identified below:

1. North Subdivision Redevelopment Project; and
2. 2022 Subdivision Redevelopment Project (f/k/a Soderquist Second Addition Redevelopment Project)

(each a “Redevelopment Project” and collectively, the “Redevelopment Projects”).

**B. The total estimated project costs for the Redevelopment Projects.**

The total estimated project costs for the Redevelopment Projects are as follows:

<u>Project</u>	<u>Estimated Project Costs</u>
North Subdivision	Over \$5,000,000
2022 Subdivision	Over \$6,750,000
Total:	Over \$11,750,000

**C. The estimated amount of outstanding indebtedness related to each such redevelopment project and an estimated date by which such indebtedness is expected to be paid in full.**

<u>Project</u>	<u>Est. Outstanding Indebtedness</u>	<u>Est. Paid in Full Date</u>
North Subdivision		
Series 2017A	\$214,598.38	December 15, 2039
Series B	\$400,000*	
2022 Subdivision		
Series 2022A	\$825,455.14	December 15, 2048
Series B	\$220,078*	

\*Authorized TIF Indebtedness that has not yet been issued.

**D. A comparison between the initial projected valuation of property included in each Redevelopment Project, as described in the redevelopment contract, and the assessed value of the property in each Redevelopment Project as of January 1 of the year of the report.**

The North Subdivision Redevelopment Project is the development of a residential subdivision with approximately 20 single family homes. The Project includes the construction of the Public Improvements by the Village and the construction of the homes by third parties. Construction of all 20 homes in the Project has been completed.

<u>Project</u>	<u>Projected Valuation</u>	<u>2026 Assessed Value</u>
North Subdivision	\$5,000,000	\$7,037,895

The 2022 Subdivision Redevelopment Project is the development of a residential subdivision with approximately 27 single family homes. The Project includes the construction of the Public Improvements by the Village and the construction of the homes by third parties. As of January 1, 2026, 8 homes in the Project were partially or fully completed.

<u>Project</u>	<u>Projected Valuation</u>	<u>2026 Assessed Value</u>
2022 Subdivision	\$6,750,000	\$2,993,265*

\*Most of the lots in the Project Site are currently owned by the CDA and, thus, have a \$0 assessed value.

**E. The number of Redevelopment Projects approved by the governing body in the previous calendar year.**

No Redevelopment Projects were approved by the governing body of the Village in 2025.

**F. Information specific to each Redevelopment Project approved by the governing body in the previous calendar year, including the project area, project type, amount of financing approved, and total estimated project costs.**

No Redevelopment Projects were approved by the governing body of the Village in 2025.

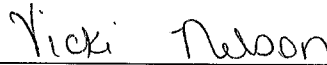
- G. The number of Redevelopment Projects for which financing has been paid in full during the previous calendar year and for which taxes are no longer being divided pursuant to Section 18-2147 of the Act.**

There are no Redevelopment Projects for which financing has been paid in full during 2025, and for which taxes are no longer being divided pursuant to Section 18-2147 of the Act.

- H. The percentage of the Village that has been designated as blighted.**

Approximately 100% of the Village has been designated as blighted.

Sincerely,



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Vicki Nelson, Village Clerk

## **Water planning groups urge conservation**

Holdrege Citizen

5/7/2026

HOLDREGE – The Platte Basin Coalition, The Republican River Basin NRDs, and the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment are urging the public to utilize water conservation best practices due to the ongoing presences of drought conditions through Nebraska.

As of April 30, the National Drought Mitigation Center finds that 2% of the states is experiencing exceptional drought (D4), 55% of the state is experiencing extreme drought(D3), 21% is experiencing severe drought (D2), and 9% of the state is experiencing moderate drought.

While recent rains have been helpful, they have not been substantial alter the drought conditions for many areas of the state.

Nebraska's population relies on surface water and many groundwater well replenished by surface water for agricultural , municipal, domestic an industry, and many other uses.

Nebraska's precipitation is highly seasonal, with roughly two-thirds of annual moisture falling between April and August and less than 10% occurring in winter for the typical year.

The late spring and early summer period is normally critical for replenishing soil moisture , streamflow and groundwater supplies.

Ongoing drought conditions mean that even near normal seasonal rainfall may not be sufficient to fully offset existing deficient and water supply and hydrologic conditions may remain stressed as a result.

According to NOAA's Climate Prediction Centers Seasonal Drought Outlook, on average , drought conditions are expected to persist or likely worsen across the state this spring and summer despite occasional short-lived relief.

To improve drought monitoring across the state, the public is encouraged to submit drought -related conditions using condition monitoring observer Reports system maintained by the National Drought Mitigation Center at

the University of Nebraska:<https://drouhhtimpacts.unl.edu/Tools/ConditionMonitoringObservations.aspx>,

For current information on drought conditions , the public is encouraged to submit the following resources;

- The US Drought Monitor

For weekly updates on drought conditions :<https://drought-monitor.unl.edu/>

- U.S, Department of Agriculture sources including drought program assistance through Farm Serve agency and Natural Resources Conservation Services at <https://www.farmer.gov/protection-recovery/drought>.
- For additional USDA program information, contact your nearest UDSD Service center at: <https://www.farmer.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator>.
- The Nebraska Department of Agriculture Drought Center Page: <http://nda.nebraska.gov/drought>.

The Drought Planning groups will continue to monitor conditions and update the public on the basin's drought status and ongoing effects of the drought.

## **energyRE, donates \$5,000 to water jamboree for fifth , sixth graders**

Holdrege Citizen

4/9/2026

Holdrege – energyRE a leading developer of reliable and affordable energy solutions, announced Tuesday April 7, a \$5,000 donation to support Water Jamboree through Tri-Basin Natural Resources District, reinforcing the company's commitment to support educational opportunities that promote stewardship of natural resources.

The Water Jamboree is an educational and fun two-day event for fifth and sixth grades students from schools across Phelps, Gosper, Kearney, Harlan, Franklin and Furnas counties in Nebraska and several schools in north-central Kansas.

Students participate in hands-on activities related to aquatic life irrigation, water quality, recreation and conservation. The 2026 Water Jamboree is scheduled for April 28 and 29.

"The Water Jamboree gives students a chance to learn in a hands-on way about our region's water resources," said John Thouburn, General Manager of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District. "We appreciate energyRE's support for a program that helps young people better understand water, conservation, and stewardship."

The donation will help support an educational program that brings together students, educators and conservation partners around the importance of protecting water resources and understanding their role in the region's future.

"Programs like the Water Jamboree help build knowledge and stewardship at an early age, and that has real long-term value for communities and natural resources alike," said Patrick Moore, Development and Community Partnership Manager at energyRE. "energyRE is proud to support their interactive program that connects students to the importance of water in their everyday lives."

"Through this gift, energyRE is helping sustain a regional educational effort centered on conservation stewardship and learning

## **CNPPID Gosper County reach agreement on bridge repairs at Johnson Lake**

Holdrege Citizen

4/9/2026

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors approved an interlocal agreement with Gosper County for bridge replacement during their April meeting that was held April 6 in Holdrege.

In the agreement, Central would agree to begin the process of replacing the Johnson Lake inlet bridge that was forced to be closed by the county in November due to safety reasons.

Currently, that bridge is owned and maintained by Gosper County.

With the new agreement, Central would take over ownership of the inlet bridge and commit to remove the current bridge and start the process of replacing it with a new steel and concrete bridge as soon as possible.

Hydraulic operations Manager Cory Steinke told the board that the initial cost projections for the new bridge will cost \$3 million. He highlighted the importance of the bridge as emergency vehicle route and access for residents and recreation visitors.

Gosper County has agreed to pay \$300,000 toward the cost of removal of the current bridge and location requirements of the new one.

In exchange for taking over and replacing the Johnson Lake bridge, Gosper County would close two of Central's bridges over the supply canal.

Central would handle the removal of the district's two timber bridges located at supply canal mile post 70.7 and at 73.4 which are downstream from the Johnson Lake outlet bridge.

Together, this working partnership provides cost savings for both entities.

Central takes responsibility over the Johnson Lake inlet bridge from Gosper County by installing an updated bridge to meet today's standards and removing the bridges, Central is expected to save \$5 million replacement

Cost and future maintenance of the timber structures.

Also during the meeting:

- The board approved a WaterSmart grant application in the amount of \$5 million for the installation of latera canal automating from Rubico . the action formed the board's Commitment and direction to staff for the submitted grant application and associated project if awarded. As approved , it provides additional directions to prioritize the Phelps Canal system first, followed by the E65 system. Irrigation and Water Services Manager Scott Dicke highlighted he return on investment associated with Rubico, including improvement in the customer satisfaction, water saving and labor costs. If awarded , Central will be responsible for securing the required \$5 million in the matching funds.
- David Jarecke of Woods Aitken law firm in Lincoln presented to the board the strategy for the General Manager search. The board hired the Wood Aiken to assistant in the executive search process. Jarcecke reported the job posting would occur later this month and a national search of applications will remain open until June 5. He presented a list of qualifications and skills that will be included in the description an outlined a timeline of the selection process.
- Nick Simonsom from the Lower Republican Natural Resources District gave an updated to the directors of the proposed augmentation well project. Simonson clarified to Central's board about the environmental assessment that has taken place and the subject matter of the public meeting regarding the Turkey Creek Watershed plan that was held virtually in late March.
- Directors voted to approve an agreement with JEO Consulting Group to conduct a feasibility study about potential residential lot development at Bullhead Point on Johnson Lake in area of Medo's Resort.
- The directors approved a purchase requirement in the amount of \$185,300 with Sahling Kenworth of Kerney Nebr. Or h purchase of a 2027 semi tractor with day cab. In addition, the approved the purchase o s 55-ton lowboy trailer in the amount of \$124,624 from Jim Hawk Truck Trailers of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

- The board gave approval for the purchase of a 2026 6M180 John Deere Tractor in the amount of \$183,380 from Landmark Implement.
- A modification with the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission was approved by the board. The amended agreement allows CPC to manage recreational areas within Central's property, including the newly completed and installed boat ramp at Middle Phillips Canyon. It also includes areas at Gallagher Canyon and midway Schmeeckle area.
- Civil Engineer Tyler Thulin reported that Lake McConaghy's elevation was at 3,321.0 feet on Monday (51.4%). Inflows are approximately 600 cubic feet per second(cfs), while outflows were at 675 cfs. Thulin said that snow in the basins is beginning to melt but remains below average. He reminded the directors the hydrocycling period runs through April 30 so water levels will continue to fluctuate at Johnson Lake

## **Drought worsens across Nebraska amid pleas to conserve water**

Zach Hammack, Lincoln Journal Star

Kearney Hub

5-5-2026

The signs are everywhere.

Livestock ponds in the Panhandle running dry. Winter wheat so poor it's not even worth harvesting. Rivulet-scared sandbars blotching to the Platte River.

After an exceptionally dry and warm winter that helped fuel historic windfires across western Nebraska – the second – warmest in history according to the Nebraska State Climate Office - The state is experiencing some of its worst drought conditions in years, with little hope on the horizon.

New data for the U.S. Drought Monitor, published Thursday, shows 55% of the state, mainly west of Grand Island, in extreme drought. Meanwhile, for the first time in more than two years, exceptional drought has returned to the state in a small pocket covering portions of the Panhandle counties of Morrill, Garden, Cheyenne and Deuel.

Nearly 94% of the state is in some kind of drought or abnormally dry conditions.

Exceptional drought, according to National Weather Service classifications, can include “exceptional and widespread crop/pasture losses” and “shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells, creating water emergencies.”

That stands in stark contrast to the beginning of last fall, when just a sliver of the Cornhusker State, about 9%, was in drought.

Brian Fuchs, a climatologist with the National Drought Mitigation Center and a faculty member of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the last time Nebraska has seen drought similar to current levels is likely back in spring 2013, when Nebraska came off a devastating dry spell the summer before.

“We’re in tough shape overall across the state,” said Fuchs.

The worsening conditions come on the heels of a winter that saw a combination of dry and warm weather not seen in modern times and a historic wildfire season that burned more than 800,000 acres in Nebraska.

In the four-month period from December 2025 through March , Nebraska averaged just 1.05 inches of precipitation, the driest on record, according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data.

Nebraska wasn’t helped by the fact that states like Wyoming and Colorado which are also experiencing widespread drought, had “a very poor winter,” meaning little snowmelt to run into rivers, Fuchs said.

Amid a changing global climate, the winter of 2025-2026 was the warmest month on record for most of the western United States, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Conditions are so bad a coalition of natural resources districts and the state’s Department of Water, Energy and Environment is urging Nebraskans across the state to conserve water.

In Thursday news release, the Platte Basin Coalition, the Lower Platte River Basin Drought Consortium, the Republican River basin NRDs and the state called for “best practices due to the ongoing presence of drought conditions throughout Nebraska.”

“Ongoing drought conditions, mean that even near normal seasonal rainfall may not be sufficient to fully offset existing deficits and water supplies, and hydrologic conditions may remain stressed as a result,” the release said.

Brad Rippey, an agricultural meteorologist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture who authored the Drought Monitor’s latest map of the High Plains, said the drought has developed winter wheat crops from Nebraska southward through Texas.

Nebraska has the poorest winter conduction among major production state in U.S., Rippey added, with the latest crop production report showing 65 % of the state’s wheat rated very poor to poor. Part of that is due to significant freezes earlier this month as well.

("It's a ) pretty bleak situation," Rippey said. "Unless things turn around pretty soon, we'll be talking about summer crops a problem as well soon.'

Pastureland in western Nebraska has also been decimated by fires and drought, putting livestock producers in "challenging times,' said Rippey.

With grassland transformed into desert-like wastelands, some ranchers may be forced to cull or sell animals or pay extra to truck in supplies, driving up prices already rising beef prices.

"You talk to 10 different cattle producers, answers on how they're dealing with this," Rippey said.

Hope of a quick turnaround is bleak.

The National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center shows drought continuing and possibly even expanding into areas of eastern Nebraska that are at the moment, abnormally dry. Longer-range patterns through the end of July are "not very favorable for much improvement'," Fuchs said.

Of there is any hint of relief for Nebraska Rippey said, it could be signs of an El Nino pattern shaping up in the Pacific that could bring relief toward the end of the year.

Meanwhile, recent rains in eastern Nebraska have actually led to some improvements despite the worsening conditions out west. As of Thursday, most of Lancaster County, including Lincoln, is experiencing moderate drought , the first levels of drought above abnormally dry. Extreme Dought Nebraska is not considered abnormally dry at all.

In April, the Lincoln Airport notched 2.47 inches of rain, thanks to late-month soakers. That's only slightly below the normal average of 6.69 inches for the month.

Since January , the airport has picked up 4.09 inches, behind the 5.86 inches the city sees by this time of year.

Nebraska and the High Plains are not alone in seeing widespread drought. The Drought Monitor's Thursday map showed that for the fourth

consecutive week, more than 60% of continental U.S. is in some kind of drought , including a vast proportion of the South.

Before 2026, the have been 30 weeks in monitors' entire 27-year history that have met that criteria.

## **Groundwater levels continue to decline amid drought conditions**

Holdrege Citizen

4/9/2026

Groundwater levels throughout Nebraska continued to decline in 2025 following several years of persistent drought.

According to the recently release 2026 Nebraska Statewide Groundwater Level Monitoring Report from the Conservation and Survey Division of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Natural Resources, groundwater levels declined on average, by 0.29 feet. With few exceptions, however, these declines did not impact drinking water-supplies or groundwater for irrigation.

For the new report, nearly 5,000 wells were measured in spring 2024 and spring 2025 to monitor changes in groundwater levels in Nebraska.

Of these wells, 62% recorded a decline. The largest declines, exceeding 10 feet , occurred in the Nebraska Panhandle, an area that has experienced continued drought conditions for several years.

Much of Nebraska experienced some levels of drought for most of the preceding six years.

Above-average precipitation in central Nebraska, generally along the Platte River Valley, resulting in some minor groundwater levels rises, by as much as 10 feet in localized areas.

Most of the groundwater used in Nebraska comes from the High Plains Aquifer, referred locally as the Ogallala Aquifer.

The aquifer spans eight central U.S. states from South Dakota to Texas, and approximately 90% of Nebraska lies on top of it.

As a rule, variations in shallow groundwater levels and precipitation are intimately linked. Precipitation is the main source of aquifer replenishment in Nebraska. It replaces part- but not all, of the groundwater pumped for irrigation and domestic use. Hotter and drier growing seasons drive higher

irrigation demands, but they also entail less precipitation and, in turn, less groundwater recharge.

Both effects lead to groundwater declines levels. Years with above - average precipitation, however, provide more water for groundwater recharge and typically require less pumping for irrigation , and potentially result in rising groundwater levels.

Nebraska's thriving agricultural economy is heavily dependent on groundwater for irrigation. Nebraska producers draw irrigation water from more than 97,000 active irrigation wells statewide.

Pumping groundwater from a vast number of wells can be detrimental to the long-term sustainable use of aquifers, but Nebraska is fortunate to have a nation-leading system of groundwater management in its 23 Natural Resources District.

The NRD's regulate groundwater with comprehensive regional management plans that undergo periodic updates.

Recent and long-term groundwater-level declines in some parts of the state constitute a persistent public awareness . Some wells in these areas will likely eventually go dry or need to be drilled deeper.

The annual report's long-term change maps, which span pre-groundwater -irrigation times through 2025, verify the overall abundance of groundwater in Nebraska.

Nevertheless , high-magnitude local changes in groundwater levels , from declines exceeding 130 feet to rises exceeding 120 feet, have also been apparent in successive iterations of the same map.

Groundwater levels in most of Nebraska have experienced a net change of less than 20 feet, since predetermine and Box Bute counties times.

Parts of Chase , Perkins, Dundy counties, in contrast, have experienced major , sustained declines in groundwater levels due to a combination of factors.

Irrigation wells are notably dense in these counties. Annual precipitation is comparatively low, and there is little or no surface-water recharge to groundwater.

## **Methan-power tractors to be used at UNL research farm**

Chris Dunker, Lincoln Journal Star

Kearney Hub

5/7/2026

Mead – The Eastern Nebraska Research, Extension and Education Center has been proving ground for the technology shaping the future of agriculture.

University of Nebraska -Lincoln researchers and students use a special Spidercam mounted above a test plot to study how different crops grow and change in a field setting.

The brand-new Klosterman Feedlot Innovation Center allows researchers to monitor how cattle perform in different environments and take precision measurements of inputs and outputs of those systems.

Now, the 9,500-acre ENREED will become a world's first test site for a pair of New Holland T6.180 tractors that run exclusively on 100% methane.

The tractors, each with a retail value of \$287,24, can operate in the field using methane or compressed natural gas for 5-8 hours, producing carbon dioxide and water as byproducts.

Both were donated by CNH in Grand Island to give researchers and students the chance to see how they perform in both small-scale and field-scales environments.

Andy Dozler, manufacturing engineering manager at CHN, said UNL students and researchers will now play "a critical role" in developing understanding for how the machines can be used by operations bis and small.

"These students are going to by the key aspect in driving this technology in the future," he added.

As agriculture and industry look for cleaner-burning fuel sources to gas and oil, more have turned to methane or compressed gas, which can be captured form livestock operations or even landfills.

That's already being done in other parts of the country and around the world, said Joshua Richardson, a field representative for the New Holland brand at CHN.

In Europe, dairy operations are capturing manure into digesters that produce methane to power farm, while in Texas, methane captured from landfills has been returned to the pipeline system for use elsewhere, Richardson said.

While a digester tank capable of producing methane from manure capture at the feedlot is still in the works, Joe Luck interim head of UNL's Department of Biological System Engineering, said the donation lays the groundwork.

"We're really focused on what does the future of that look like," Luck said. "We know the future of agriculture is going to be high automated, it's to be robotic, and data is going to drive those systems.

"As we look at future of feedlot systems, the opportunity to generate our own fuel source with methane is real and that's one of the type of systems that these tractors can operate in and help our producers with, he added.

ENREEC is uniquely positioned to do both, said director Doug Zalesky. There are approximal 3,500 acres of crop production on the former Nebraska Ordnance Plant, as well as 5,000 head or cattle and a herd or swine.

The results of those field tests will be "applicable to what producers do on a daily basis," Zalesky said.

Derek McLean. Dean of UNL's Agricultural Research Division, said the partnership between ENREEC and CHN is the latest example of university developing new knowledge and practices for ag producers.

UNL puts ideas and concepts into action in the field in its 19 ag research sites throughout the state and disseminates the results among its stakeholders. McLean said, adding partnering with industry is an important piece to that process.

“It represents long-term commitment to advancing agriculture through investments in students, through internship opportunities that build work force, and through continued engagement,” McLean said.

McLean said UNL’s Tractor Test Laboratory will also be able to test the machines at its East Campus facility where it will be put through the paces in order to assess its performance.

UNL is now in possession of two of the three tractors that run on methane currently operating in the state.

The third T6.180 is used by the Lincoln Airport, which has a compressed natural gas facility on its site.

## Mounting Pressure

Kearney Hub

4/17/2026

WAHOO – Strong winds whipped around Doug Bartek, a fifth-generation farmer, as he headed into a grain bin to shovel soybeans onto a conveyor belt onto a conveyor chute. The 60-year-old was anxious at the onset of the spring planting season, rattling off the long list of issues affecting his family's livelihood at their 2,000-acre farm near Wahoo.

The high cost of fuel, equipment, and fertilizer- compounded by the Iran was- and also the tariffs , perceived "price gouging" by suppliers, and low soybean prices driven by global supply gut. All of it weighs on Bartek, who is chairman of the Nebraska Soybean Association.

"Our biggest struggles are our inputs , by it fertilizer, seed, chemical, parts," Bartek said. "There has been so much drastic markup in all of these. And I just kind of feel like the farmer's kind of pointed in the corner."

Bartek's concerns are shared by many Midwest soybean producers. Costs, such as equipment, have crept up over time while soybean prices have stayed low. "Tariffs levied by the Trump administration last year and the resulting monthslong trade war with China only make things worse, they say. Then the Iran wat bottled up shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, restricting global fertilizer supplies and sending fertilizer prices shy high. A ceasefire deal announced April 7 raised hope that bottlenecks in the strait would abate, but the future of the agreement was uncertain.

"A lot producers are pretty nervous going into this year," said Justin Sherlock, a soybean farmer and president of the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association

"It looks like we're going to have another year of negative returns."

### **Years of rising costs, low soybean prices**

Soybeans, which are used for livestock feed, food and biofuels, are among the top U.S. agricultural exports. That hasn't always been the case. Before the 1960s soybeans weren't a major crop in the U.S. according to Chad Hart, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University. It wasn't until the

1990s that soybean production accelerated due to international demand—primary from China – and soybean and corn are now dominant in U.S. agricultural.

But U.S. soybeans farmers, who typically also grow corn, have been facing financial issues for years even before the onset of the Iran war. Soybean prices have been persistently low in recent years. The global market has been awash in soybeans, driven in part by Brazil, which surpassed the U.S. as the world's largest soybean producer years ago.

“If we look at global soybean production over the past several years, it continues to set record, after record, after record” Hart said. “There’s been just large supplies globally, and that has led to depressed prices.”

Meanwhile, Midwest soybean farmers’ cost have risen. Overall farm production expenses, including seed and pesticide, have increased over time, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Operating costs for soybeans production have stayed elevated since 2020 and are projected to increase again in 2026, according to the agency.

The cost of land also is a major issue for farmers, experts say. Midwest crop land value increased. And most regional farmers rent some of their land, according to Joana Colussi, research assistant professor in the department of agriculture economics at Purdue University.

Batek, who rents three-quarters of his land, said landowners are increasing rents, causing further financial strain.

“There’s a lot of what I call absentee landowners that have absolutely no idea what goes on the farm,” he said. “All they know is their taxes went up, and you get to make up the difference, some way, somehow.”

“They’re very concerned about negative margins driven by low prices and high cost.” Said Paul Mitchell, a professor of agriculture and applied economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, of farmers. “There’s just a liquidity cash crunch for a lot of them and they’re just trying to deal out with everything.

The number of farms in the U.S. has shrunk over time and consolidation in farming is a long-term trend, through farmer's financial pressures wrought by high input cost and low commodity prices have contributed, Hart said. Large farms tend to be more competitive and depend on large, expensive machinery.

"The financial reserves need(ed) on a farm are much greater than they used to be," Hart said. "We're a bit more sensitive to the financial conditions these days because so much capital is being utilized within the farm business.

### **Tariffs, trade war have lasting impacts**

Market forces aren't the only issue weighing on farmers. Sweeping tariffs levied by President Donald Trump in April 2025 exacerbated a trade war with China, the top buyer of U.S. soybeans. China responded with retaliatory tariffs and effectively boycotted U.S. soybeans, cutting off a major export market for Midwest farmers and driving the price of soybean even lower.

"When that was announced and soybean prices basically collapsed, if you could afford to hold on to your beans and wait for better times, you were ok," said Mike Cerny, a soybean and winter wheat corn farmer in Sharon, Wisconsin. "If you had a mortgage due or payments due or cash flow needs, and you had to sell at that point, you were taking it pretty rough."

The U.S. and China eventually reached a deal in late 2025. Beijing committed to buying 12 million metric tons of soybeans annually for the next three years. China has since met its initial soybean goal and the Trump administration also rolled out a \$12 billion temporary aid package in December to boost farmers affected by the trade war.

But the damage is already done, experts and farmers say. While China's renewed purchases and the federal payments are helping, it's not enough to recover farmers' losses. Even after federal assistance, farmers still lost almost \$75 per harvested acre of soybeans in the 2025 crop, according to the American Soybean Association. And the trade war further pushed China

toward competing soybeans exporters, such as Brazil – accelerating trend of declining U.S. soybean exports to China.

“When China decided to stop purchasing, we couldn’t find enough other markets to replace those sales,” Hart said. “We’re still feeling the impacts today. When you look at where soybeans exports are today versus where we would normally expect them to be, we’re still running anywhere from 15 % to 20 % behind normal.”

Joseph Glauber, former chief economist at the Department of Agriculture between 2008 and 2014, said global competitors to U.S. soybean farmers gained from the trade war.

“When China has put on tariffs against the U.S., they’ve tended to buy them from Brazil or Argentina, largely Brazil,” Glauber added.

“We’re not nearly as dominant in the world as we used to be in terms of the global markets for soybeans.”

### **Iran war drove up fuel, fertilizer costs**

After the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, a severe slowdown in shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz sent the price of oil soaring. The shipping disruption also largely stopped the export of nitrogen fertilizers manufactured in the Persian Gulf and limited access to key fertilizer ingredients. The price of urea, the most widely traded nitrogen fertilizer, skyrocketed.

Soybeans don’t require nitrogen fertilizer, but it is vital for corn, and most soybean farmers also grow corn. About half the global supply of urea comes from the Middle East, and Qatar and Saudi Arabia are two of the top sources of U.S. fertilizer imports, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The U.S. and Iran agreed to a two-week ceasefire last week that included reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, but traffic remained slowed amid disagreements over Israeli attacks in Lebanon, and the price of urea remains elevated.

Many Midwest farmers bought their fertilizer well in advance of the spring planting season. But some farmers who didn't buy early face elevated prices. Dave Walton, a corn, soybean and hay farmer in Iowa and vice president of the American Soybean Association, said that some of his neighbors didn't have cash on hand last fall to buy fertilizer and were struggling to budget for fertilizer due to high prices.

The war also caused gasoline and diesel prices to surge, causing further headaches for farmers. Oil prices dropped following the ceasefire announcement, but the war and the closure of the strait will have lasting impacts on farmers, said Seth Goldstein, a senior equity analyst at Morningstar, an investment research company. Facilities in the Middle East that are critical for exporting chemicals, oil and other commodities were damaged or destroyed during the war, and it will take time for supply chains to recover, he said.

"Facilities have been hit, like liquid natural gas plants." Chris Gould, a corn and soybean farmer in Maple Park, Illinois. "It's hard to say if I'm gonna come out ahead or behind on this whole deal. But I suspect I'm gonna come out behind."

### **Concerns about the future**

Farmers' financial problems are showing up in some measures. Farm bankruptcies, while still relatively low, continued to climb in 2025, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. In a survey of 400 farmers conducted by researchers at the Purdue Center for Commercial Agriculture in late March, almost half said their farm operation is financially worse off than it was a year ago.

Goldstein, the Morningstar analyst, said farmers' high cost and low revenues contributed to the spike in bankruptcies between 2024 and 2025.

If costs rise faster than crop prices going forward, he added that strain farmers again and likely lead to more bankruptcies.

After 43 years of farming, Bartek said the smell of fresh dirt still gets him excited for spring planting. But he's also heard farmer suicides, bankrupts

and “retirement sales” where farmers are forced to auction off their operations due to financial problems. Bartek compare famers to gamblers who put millions of dollars in the dirt” hoping for returns.

At times, Batek doubts his own decision to go into farming/ He’s also worried about his son, who purchased a farm, a few years ago.

Barek wonders: Did I do the right thing helping him get into faming?”

This story is a collaboration between Lee Enterprises and The Associated Press.

## **Farmers shun USDA surveys as trust in data erodes**

Erin Ailworth & Micheal Hirtzer Bloomberg News

Kearney Hub

5/9/2026

American farmers are ignoring U.S. Department of Agricultural surveys in the latest sign of distrust in governmental data.

Reply rates for the USDA's annual prospective planting report sank in March to a record low, with just over a third of 73,800 farm operations surveyed answering questions on the acres they will plant this spring of everything from corn and soybeans to tobacco and chickpeas. That compares with about 60% of farmers responding in 2018, with replies declining in each year since, according to government records.

Farmers say they are wary of sharing data to inform reports they believe often work against them, especially with abundant harvests in recent years keeping crop prices under pressure.

The mounting skepticism comes as the USDA is looking to become more responsive to farmers through a transformation that relies heavily on shared data. It also echoes a broader loss of trust in government data, particularly as President Donald Trump has called into question federal statistics and information – from jobs reports to voter tallies and even weather maps.

Iowa farmer Ben Riensche says the agency's various surveys are too arduous and the markets often slump after the corresponding reports are released, affecting what they will get paid for their crops.

"I don't trust the data, I don't trust their people," Riensche said. "And they monkey with my business."

The trend may present complications for Trump's efforts to court farmers, a key voting block for him and the Republican Party. He has repeatedly hosted farmers at the White House, unveiling a \$12 billion aid package for them in December, the holding a "celebration of agriculture" – complete with a gold-colored tractor on the White House lawn – in March.

Intelligence from the farm is the lifeblood of the USDA's reports, resulting in finding and forecasts that influence the direction of global crop prices and, how much ultimately, helps determine how much consumers pay for food.

But distrust of the USDA's conclusion is creating vicious circle, with lack of contributions making the agency's reports less accurate and in turn generating more farmer skepticism. That lack of accuracy also is resulting in more volatility in futures markets.

A case in point is the January crops report from the USDA, which surprised the market when the agency unexpectedly boosted its estimate for the corn crop by 1.6 % to a record 17,021 Billion bushels. Most had been anticipating a slight downward revision from the USDA's previous forecast, and futures in Chicago subsequently posted their biggest decline in years.

While it was known that farmers shifted heavily toward corn during the growing season – particularly after China halted its purchases of American soybeans – the unexpected increase in supply blindsided many.

“When the USDA is that far off without much explanation, it creates distrust in future reports,” Darin LaBar, who grows corn, soybeans and wheat in Michigan, wrote to the USDA. He was one of 240 people who answered a request by the agency seeding feedback on ways to improve its data collection.

“You have to be able to trust the information that you're given, and if you can't even trust that, then why even do the report?” he said in an interview.

USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins said after the January report that the agency wanted to ensure it wasn't “driving price outcomes.”

Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden also addressed the issue at the agency's annual spring meeting with its data users.

“We understand that the data we provide mover markets: we understand that it affects individual planning decisions by farmers and, therefore, we know that the data we provide need to be correct,” he said.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service in an emailed statement said it is working to address declining response rate, and ‘remains committed to

proving timely, accurate are useful statistics in serve to American agriculture.”

Montana farmer Sarah Degn said she has little faith in the reports because she knows producers- herself included – often fill them out while pressed for time and distracted by all their responsibilities on the farm. Few have time to sit down and pull out the spreadsheets and other records they need to give accurate answers, she said.

## **Ricketts backs year-around E15 in farm bill**

Anna Kleibwe, Lincoln Star

Kearney Hub

5/7/2026

Republican Sen. Pete Ricketts said the U.S. needs to wrap up its conflict in Iran and work to bring economic relief to working Americans and farmers affected by rising fuel prices.

“Once we can get traffic flowing through the Strait of Hormuz, that should start to bringing some relief to those prices, whether it’s fuel prices or fertilizer prices for our farmers,” Ricketts told the Journal star. “We do need to balance the off with, we cannot allow a country that chants ‘death to America’ to have a nuclear weapon that can reach the United States.”

Ricketts said allowing year-around E15 fuel sales nationwide is one way to help farmers who are facing high input cost and uncertainty on international markets due to President Donald Trump’s tariffs and the war in Iran and to reduce prices at the pump.

“That’s incredibly important because that will help create more demand and bit certainty for our farmers, and we really need that right now,” Ricketts said. “If you fill up with biofuels ethanol you’re gong to save money at the pump. Last time I fueled up on E15, I saved 45 cents a gallon.”

Ricketts said he supports a E15 provision to allow year-around sales of the fuel nationwide in the 2026 farm bill -a mulit-year law that focuses on agriculture, rural development and strengthening food security.

After President Donald Trump’s One Big Bill Act cut \$17 billion from the federal food assistance programs and made a \$65 billion investment in farmer support neural and will no make any major cuts or investments in government programs.

But while a bipartisan group of representatives, including Nebraska Reps. Mike Flood, Adrian Smith and Don Bacon, introduced an amendments aiming to permanently expand year-round E15 sales nationwide to the farm bill, getting the provision through both chambers and included in the

final draft if the farm bill could prove to be a challenge as Republicans split on the issue.

After removing a controversial provision preventing pesticide makers from being sued over cancer warning labeling and decoupling the E15 provision from the farm bill, the House passed its version of the farm bill in 224-200 vote April 30.

The house plans to vote on a separate E15 bill on May 13, then reattach it to the farm bill before sending it on to Senate.

Ricketts said he is “hopeful” the House will be able to get an E15 provision passed and included in their version of the farm bill, but that the provision will likely face additional hurdles in its Senate where bipartisan support will be needed to overcome the 60-vote threshold to end the filibuster.

While E15 sales are usually restricted from June 1 to Sept. 15 over concerns that warmer temperatures could create more smog in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued an emergency waiver in March to allow sales to continue in an effort to increase fuel supply and lower gas prices in an effort to address “ongoing issues in the Middle East, among other events.”

As of 2025, the EPA has approved year-round E15 sales in eight N-Midwestern states, including Nebraska.

In the meantime, Ricketts said Congress is taking other steps to address affordability, including a bipartisan housing package aimed at boosting the supply of housing and increasing affordability.

If signed into law, it would be the first major housing legislation adopted in roughly three decades.

“The housing shortage is not new. This is something that’s been around for several years. We tackled it here in Nebraska very successfully. We need to be able to tackle it at the federal level as well,” Ricketts said.

The 303-Page legislation includes Ricketts’ Streamlining Rural Housing Act, which would reduce regulatory burdens for rural housing development.

## **Ricketts: Congress needs to get immigration enforcement funding passed**

After a nearly 11-week partial government shutdown over federal immigration operations, Trump signed into law legislation funding the U. S. Department of Homeland Security last Thursday.

In a voice vote last Thursday, the Republican-controlled House unanimously passed a Senate-approved bill that conservatives had refused to consider over the past month, clearing the way to fund most of DHS, excluding Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol.

The vote marked the completion of the first part of a two-step plan to get the U.S. Department of Homeland Security spending bill passed. Now, Republicans work to get a reconciliation bill through both chambers to fund ICE and Border Patrol as democrats continue to push for increased oversight measures.

Reconciliation is a standard, rules-based budgetary process that allows the majority party to pass certain spending legislation with a simple majority, limiting the minority party's ability to block it.

After the Senate and House passed a joint budget resolution in April to green-light the budget reconciliation process, Senate Republicans unveiled a \$72 billion package Monday that would bypass Democratic opposition to fund immigration operations in the U.S. through fiscal year 2029.

The package includes \$30.73 billion for ICE and \$22.57 billion for Border Protection, which includes Border Patrol, to cover hiring, paying training and enforcement immigration enforcement personnel.

Additionally, the package includes 1 billion for Secret Service to make security upgrades to the White House related to Trump's ballroom project. Ricketts said the ongoing military operations in Iran and the shooting at the White House correspondents Association Dinner attended by Trump emphasized the importance of getting the reconciliation bill passed as soon as possible.

“The attempt on the president’s life should highlight for Senate Democrats the wee need to fund homeland security and not hold up payments to people like the Secret Service who are protecting the president’s life. Also, with the conflict in the middle East, we are at heightened risk,” said Ricketts. “Republicans are going to take steps to get Homeland Security funded and that’s what this resolution does.”

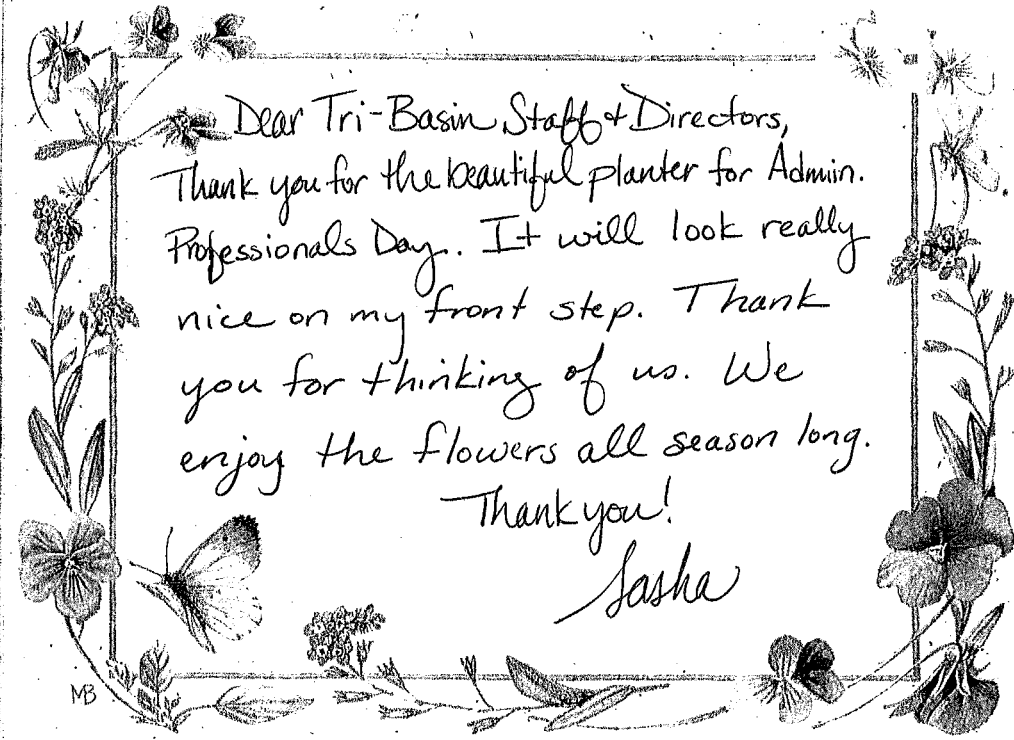


*It really meant a lot!*

Thank you so much for the  
beautiful planter again this year!  
I love working for people who  
care!

Thanks again!

*Lisa*



Dear Tri-Basin Staff + Directors,  
Thank you for the beautiful planter for Admin.  
Professionals Day. It will look really  
nice on my front step. Thank  
you for thinking of us. We  
enjoy the flowers all season long.

Thank you!

Sasha

MB