



# NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCES DISTRICTS

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**April 8, 2005**

**TO: NARD Board, NRD Managers and Conservation Partners**  
**FROM: Dean E. Edson, NARD Executive Director**  
**RE: April 8 NARD UPDATE**

**North Platte River Basin Snowmelt Runoff Forecast** – According to the Bureau of Reclamation, the April 1 forecast of the spring snowmelt runoff for the North Platte Basin is below normal.

Total expected April through July runoff in the North Platte Basin above Glendo Dam is expected to be 620,000 acre feet (AF) or 69% of the 30 year average of 897,000 AF. Approximately 490,000 AF (69% of average) of the runoff is expected to enter Seminoe Reservoir with an additional 70,000 AF (109% of average) being provided to Pathfinder Reservoir from the Sweetwater River, and the balance of 60,000 AF (48% of average) coming from the basin between Pathfinder Reservoir and Glendo Reservoir. The water in storage for delivery to North Platte Project contractors is 323,000 AF or 50% of average. The Bureau of Reclamation is advising North Platte Project water users that there may be a need for an allocation based on existing data. With reservoir storage well below average, and below average inflow forecasted for April through July of this year, water users will need to take measures to conserve the available water supply. With the current forecast, river flows throughout the system are expected to be much less than average and similar to last year's flows. The Bureau of Reclamation will update the inflow forecasts again in May.

A public meeting has scheduled a North Platte River Water Information meeting in at 10:00 a.m., on Thursday, April 14, 2005, at the Scottsbluff Panhandle Station Auditorium, Scottsbluff, Nebraska. The meeting is being held to apprise water users and the public of the current water supply conditions and the affects that the ongoing drought is having on reservoir storage and water availability. Information regarding snowmelt runoff and expected reservoir operations for water year 2005 will be presented. A discussion will be held regarding the availability of storage water during the coming irrigation season.

**CREP Signup Very Active** -- Signup began Monday, April 4 for the new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the Republican and Platte River Basins. The drought obviously has taken its toll over the past 5 years as signup activity has been active, with reports of producers even camping out in the parking lot of the Scottsbluff FSA office Sunday night to be the first in line for the program.

The new program proposes to convert 100,000 acres of irrigated farmland into wildlife habitat along the Platte and Republican River basins. The first-year goal is to enroll 15,000 acres. Preliminary reports from several officials in the area indicate this should be an attainable goal.

Land in CREP must be within two miles of the North Platte, Platte and Republican Rivers in western and central Nebraska. The program pays farmers the average of the irrigated cash rental rates in their counties. The average producer would receive about \$125 an acre to turn their cropland back to grassland for 10 to 15 years.

**Johanns Lauds Voluntary Conservation on Private Lands** -- Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced major conservation achievements in 2004 resulting from USDA voluntary conservation programs for private lands in remarks to attendees of the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Legislative Conference this week. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are in charge of USDA's conservation programs for private land management and environmental stewardship. National performance highlights of key conservation programs and initiatives include:

- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):** First established in 1985, CRP protects natural resources and enhances the environment by allowing eligible farmers and ranchers to voluntarily establish long-term conservation practices on highly erodible and environmentally sensitive cropland. In fiscal year 2004, CRP paid farmers approximately \$1.8 billion in rental and cost-share payments. Trees, grass and soil on CRP land remove an estimated 17 million metric tons of carbon per year from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. Land enrolled in CRP reduces wind erosion by 212 million tons per year. The program has reduced soil erosion by more than 443 million tons per year. During 2004, 76 percent of all applicants were accepted into the program, the highest acceptance rates in the program's history. As a result, the total acreage of CRP will rise to 35.6 million acres, or 90 percent of the total 39.2 million acres authorized under the Farm Bill.
- **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP):** CREP is a federal-state partnership that targets additional resources in defined geographic areas for conservation practices such as wildlife habitat, buffers and filter strips.
- **Conservation Security Program (CSP):** During the first year of the program, more than \$35 million helped nearly 2,200 producers conserve and improve soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life on nearly two million acres of tribal and private working lands. Environmental enhancement activities offered by applicants included improving wildlife habitat, air quality management and on-farm energy management.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** Nearly \$720 million helped almost 46,500 farmers and ranchers improve soil, air and water quality and related resources on private working lands. About 62 percent of EQIP funds were associated with livestock concerns.
- **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP):** \$90 million funded 550 conservation easements on nearly 115,000 acres of valuable farm and ranch land to protect it from conversion to nonagricultural uses.
- **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP):** \$56 million funded more than 1,000 private landowners protect and restore grasslands, biodiversity and wildlife habitat and reduce soil erosion while sustaining viable working ranches on 283,000 acres.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP):** Nearly \$275 million helped more than 1,000 private landowners restore, enhance and protect wetlands to maximize wildlife habitat and wetland functions and values on close to 200,000 acres. Restoration projects were completed on nearly 150,000 acres of wetlands and associated upland areas. More than \$4 million was provided for the Lower Missouri River WREP project in Nebraska that will restore and enhance a total of 18,800 acres when the project is completed.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP):** More than \$27 million funded over 3,000 private landowners create, restore and enhance wildlife habitat for upland wildlife; wetland wildlife; threatened, endangered or at-risk species and fisheries as well as other types of wildlife. Of the more than 430,000 acres enrolled in the program last year, 21,000 acres will help threatened and endangered species.

Detailed information and performance data on NRCS voluntary conservation programs at the national and state levels can be found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) and at [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).