

NORTH PLATTE NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
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NPNRD calls for equity in basin-wide plan

NORTH PLATTE – A proposal has been laid on the table of the Platte River Basin Stakeholders group asking for equity among water users.

The seven-point plan submitted by the North Platte Natural Resources District counters an earlier proposal by Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District to reduce groundwater use in the Panhandle by 50 percent in order to replenish levels at Lake McConaughy. The CNPPID plan has been criticized by western water managers and members of the NPNRD Stakeholders group as being one-sided.

The development of a counter-proposal has been encouraged by other NRDs throughout the basin and by Sen. Ed Schrock of Elm Creek, chairman of the legislature's Natural Resources Committee. Both plans were presented Wednesday during the Over appropriated Basin-wide Stakeholders meeting in North Platte.

NPNRD general manager Ron Cacek said the new proposal includes provisions that could be implemented by all Platte River Basin districts and their water users as a more fair and equitable way of protecting groundwater levels and instream flows throughout the entire basin.

Methods include maintaining stays on new well drilling and expansion of irrigated acres, the possible use of regulatory controls including flow meters and allocations, developing a basin-wide drought management plan triggered by calls from

upstream water managers. The plan would allow for the transfer of ground water through the use of offsets. The plan also includes the eradication of water-threatening invasive species Russian olives and Saltcedar along the basin and its tributaries.

Cacek said the key to implementing many of these practices is securing state and federal funding.

The proposal was first unveiled Tuesday during the district's monthly Stakeholders meeting held in Bridgeport. The 23-member group, which includes surface and groundwater users and managers, municipal, industrial and economic development representatives from Scotts Bluff, Morrill, Garden, and Banner Counties, favored the components of the proposal.

Bridgeport area landowner and local Stakeholder member Connie Lapaseotes said the management and removal of Russian olive and Saltcedar trees should be a priority of the plan and a practice that could be implemented on a voluntary basis with funding assistance from agencies like the Environmental Trust.

Cacek and other members of the local Stakeholders group cited the need to protect economic development in western Nebraska.

Lewellen irrigator and Stakeholder member Dennis Miller criticized Centrals plan asking for 50 percent reduction in depletions to the river during drought years.

“We could shut off every well in the district and just the way the cycle works, you still would not see any impact in the flows for several years,” Miller said. “What are we supposed to do economically in the mean time?”

Both proposals did agree on the point of developing a basin-wide groundwater recharge plan, and called for better management of water in the good years to offset the drought years

With two proposals now on the table, the Department of Natural Resources, co-participant in the Integrated Management Plan process through the provisions of LB962, hopes compromises can begin in order to develop one basin-wide plan.

“To develop this plan will take some give and take from everyone,” said DNR acting director Ann Bleed. “We will all need to work on finding what is mutually acceptable.”

Copies of both NPNRD’s and Central’s overappropriated plan proposals can be viewed on the NPNRD website at www.npnrd.org.