

Central Platte NRD Partners with Cozad Irrigation Canal Company



Phase 1 of the Cozad Canal before clean up.



Phase 1 of the Cozad Canal after tree removal and cleanup.

“It looks like a whole new system with trees being removed and the debris being cleaned out of the canals,” said Ron Stear, President of the Cozad Ditch Company. “This will make the canal more efficient and easier to maintain,” said Stear.

Project benefits include:

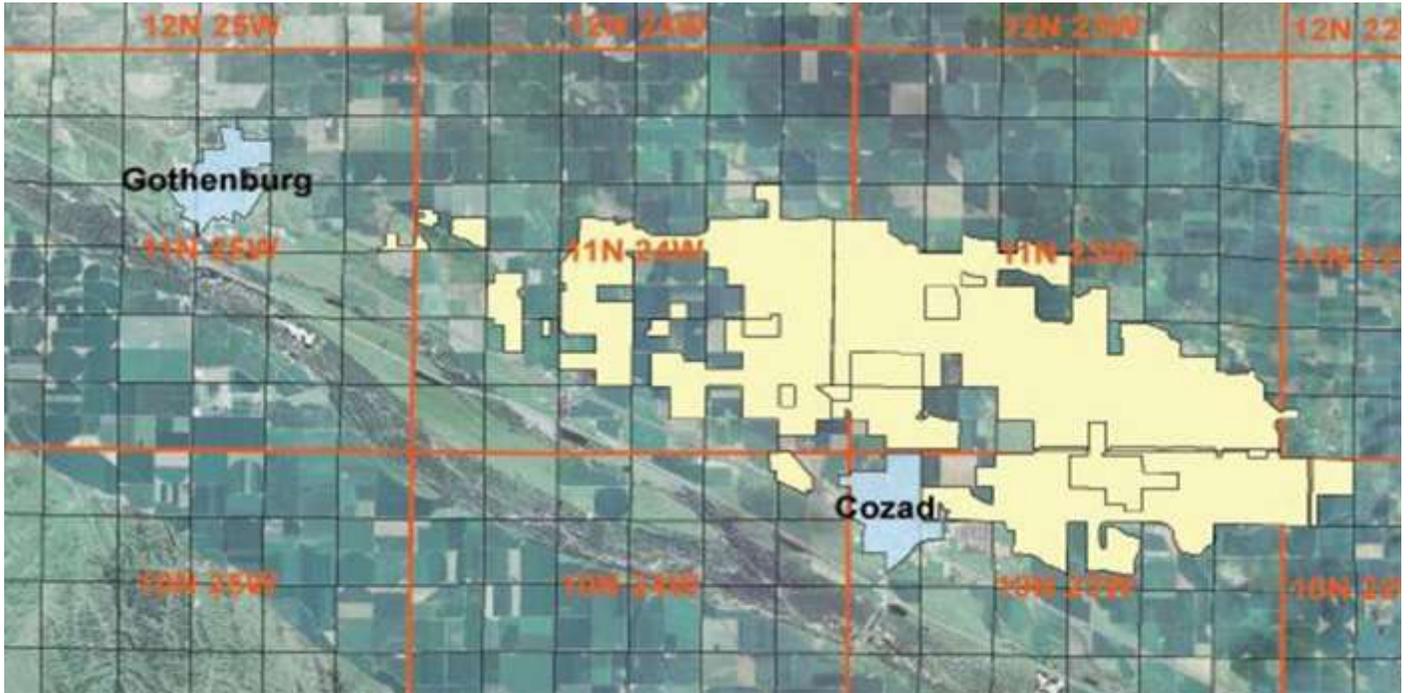
- Provides groundwater recharge that protects supplies and protects quality.
- Provides enhanced flows to the Platte River by returning excess flows to the river during times of need and returning excess natural flow irrigation rights to the river for enhanced flows.
- Protects water supply for the surface water and groundwater users.
- Helps meet the requirements of the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) agreement between Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, and the U.S. government.
- Helps meet the requirements of LB 962 to return the Platte River to its 1997 level of use (3,400 acre-feet).
- Helps meet the additional requirement of LB 962 to return the area above Elm Creek to a “fully appropriated” condition from the current “over-appropriated” condition.



“This project helps secure water for agriculture uses which is great for the local community and economy,” said Bill Vasey, CPNRD director and landowner.

The Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD) is partnering with the Cozad Ditch Company to manage the canal and to lease surface water as part of its efforts to increase Platte River flows and protect endangered species. The increased flow levels are required under the three-state Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) and state law. The lease will divert unused surface water flows from the irrigation canal back into the Platte River. CPNRD will also utilize the canal after irrigation season to store excess Platte River flows, when available. By diverting the excess flows into the canal, water will recharge the aquifer and will filter back into the Platte River.

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The Cozad Irrigation Canal has been in place and diverting Platte River water since its water right was approved by the state nearly 120 years ago on December 28, 1894. The Cozad Ditch Company had water rights to irrigate over 25,000 acres of land in the area between Gothenburg and Lexington in Dawson County. Photo, above, was taken in 1925 at the Diversion Point of the Cozad Canal.

“Landowners and farmers along the Cozad Canal are eager to improve the efficiency of the canal, recharge the aquifer and help protect river flows,” said Jim Brownfield, Cozad Ditch Company board member and landowner. **“This partnership helps keeps the canal viable while still providing water to the service area and at the same time help keeps the Platte River in compliance with the state agreements,”** said Brownfield.

The NRD has negotiated a lease of 117.22 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water from the company that was previously used for irrigation by landowners who were serviced by the canal and now use groundwater. The CPNRD has applied for water rights from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for excess flows for recharge and to increase river flows. This project allows CPNRD to return water to the river which will help protect endangered species, manage high river flows and recharge the aquifer.