

# Natural Resources News



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## **Multiple NRDs in Platte and Republican Basins Partner to Provide Required Enhancement for Rivers**

The Twin Platte Natural Resources District is working with other NRDs in Nebraska to launch the largest stream flow enhancement project of its kind in the state. The landmark conjunctive management project is considered the most cost-effective way to aid and protect the Platte and Republican Rivers, the agricultural economy across one of Nebraska's most productive ag regions, and taxpayers statewide by ensuring long-term compliance with Integrated Management Plans and inter-state water agreements.

The project will transport water, via a pipeline, to the Platte and Republican Rivers that otherwise would have been consumed by crops on a large swath of irrigated land in the sandy soils of southern Lincoln County. A significant amount of engineering design must still be completed, but it is expected that the project could add a total in excess of 15,000 acre feet of water to both the Platte River and the Republican River in years when needed to maintain compliance with both the Republican River Compact and the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program. In the Platte, NRDs are responsible for returning that basin to water supply-and-demand conditions that existed in 1997 and ultimately reversing an over-appropriated designation to fully appropriated status under state law.

The amount of water available under the project should provide enough water for the Twin Platte NRD to fully meet its efforts to return river conditions to 1997 levels and assist the State of Nebraska obligations under the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program. The project would be enough to close most of the gap between supplies and allowable use under the Republican River Compact that historically has existed in the Republican Basin during exceptionally dry years.

In order to participate in and benefit from the project, the Twin Platte NRD Board of Directors on October 18, 2012 approved an inter-local agreement to create the Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement Project (N-CORPE) to purchase more than 19,500 acres, approximately 15,800 of them irrigated, in southern Lincoln County. The NRDs participating in the project are expected to contribute equally to the \$83 million purchase of the property and improvements. The project will be financed and an occupation tax of approximately \$4-\$6 per irrigated acre over the life of the financing will to be levied by each of the NRDs to pay off the project. The project could be paid for in a shorter time frame, of course, if a higher occupation tax was levied.

Kent O. Miller, general manager of the Twin Platte NRD, called the proposed project "a once in a lifetime opportunity." The location of the project and the amount of land available in one location makes the project very cost effective. This project also meets the desires of the stakeholders within the Twin Platte NRD who assisted with the development of the Twin Platte NRD Integrated Management Plan. The stakeholders desire was that offset water be found to return the Platte River Basin to fully appropriated so that costly regulations could be avoided.

Continued on Page 2

The Twin Platte NRD Board of Directors have taken a significant step of reversing an over-appropriated designation to fully appropriated status.

Brian Dunnigan, Director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, said, “Cooperative, proactive efforts among NRDs present the state with the best opportunity to comply with interstate water agreements, and this project exemplifies those efforts. The state is committed to complying with these agreements and sustainably managing natural resources, and this project meets both of those objectives,” Dunnigan added.

The NRDs expect to close on the property purchase in November. The 15,800 irrigated acres will be retired from irrigated production. Approximately 10,400 of the irrigated acres are located within the Middle Republican NRD; another 5,400 irrigated acres are in the Twin Platte NRD.

By retiring all of the acres, the NRDs will be able to store underground water that otherwise would have irrigated and been consumed by crops on the large farm. That “saved” water will then be transported to the Republican River, and the Platte River. Possible pipeline lengths will vary depending on routes, but it is possible that approximately 17 miles of pipeline will be needed to transport water to both rivers.

It is anticipated that the property will be reseeded to native vegetation for livestock grazing.

Dean Edson, executive director of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, called the proposed water project “historic.”

“This historic water project is unprecedented in Nebraska,” Edson said. “The proposal addresses the most serious water availability issues facing the region. A project of this magnitude would probably not have been realistic a few years ago. I applaud the leadership of local NRD boards and staff for seeing the potential for stream enhancement in both the Platte and Republican Basins and making the idea a reality. This is a long-term solution that will benefit each and every Nebraskan no matter where they live.”

The property being purchased is located in a region of plentiful groundwater where the saturated thickness of the groundwater aquifer is approximately 600 feet. It is expected that less water will be pumped as part of the stream flow enhancement project than what otherwise would have been pumped had the ground remained in irrigated crop production.

The project will be funded with an occupation tax on irrigators that NRDs are authorized to levy if it is included in their Integrated Management Plan developed in cooperation with the state. The authority to levy the tax was granted by the Nebraska Legislature approximately six years ago; currently the Lower, Middle, and Upper Republican NRDs are the only NRDs in the state that levy the tax on irrigators. State law outlines that the tax is supposed to be used to help enhance stream flow. The Twin Platte NRD is revising its Integrated Management Plan that will allow an occupation tax to be levied.

Other water-supply alternatives to meet the legally mandated objectives in both the Platte and Republican Basins could be much more expensive than costs associated with the project now being pursued by the NRDs. Including land, project development and operations, producing water under the project for both river basins could cost between \$300 and \$500 an acre foot.

Permanently retiring irrigated acres close to streams without piping the water and instead allowing ground water to seep into rivers and tributaries to increase flows can cost \$3,000 an acre foot, or more.

Two primary benefits of the joint project being pursued by the four are NRDs: the benefit of being able to time water releases to the river when additional flows are needed and the certainty of the volume of water added to the stream. The ability to manage and measure the water is invaluable. Manageable stream flow enhancement projects are a good way to provide certainty and peace of mind that obligations will be met, and that we are not at risk of losing our ability to manage and use the water in Nebraska.

**The four NRDs partnering on the project: Upper Republican NRD based in Imperial; Middle Republican NRD based in Curtis; Alma-based Lower Republican NRD; and the Twin Platte NRD, which is based in North Platte. Like other NRDs across the state, they manage groundwater use by balancing environmental, economic, and, in the case of interstate water agreements, legal objectives tied to water supplies.**

## **The New and Improved Tree Program Starting Spring of 2013**

Trees are great for shade, blocking cold winds, protecting livestock, habitat for wildlife, and are aesthetically pleasing to look at. Order forms for farmer hand plants will be available at the TPNRD office November 1<sup>st</sup>. The deadline for ordering trees is March 1, 2013. Order early as some varieties may be limited.

The farmer hand plant part of the tree program will not change. The changes will be with the machine planting portion of the tree program. Starting in the Spring of 2013, the NRD will still design windbreak for landowners and producers, but will no longer be planting them. The hope is to streamline the entire process from planting the trees and installing water conservation mulch (where appropriate) to the billing. The TPNRD will have a certified vendor list from which producers can choose the vendor of their choice. This should help cut down on multiple trips to sites by multiple agencies and contractors. It should help in a more timely process from start to finish, with fewer delays along the way.



## **New Criteria Allows for More Trees to Be Planted in Urban Areas**



The Urban Forestry Program is an initiative that provides an incentive in the form of a rebate to homeowners who plant trees. The rebate will cover 50% of the cost to purchase a trees up to a limit of \$50.00 per tree. There is a maximum of two tree per address location per owner, not to exceed five different addresses. For example if John Doe owns seven different properties, he can get two trees per property for five of the seven locations.

Continued on Page 4

**Twin Platte Natural Resources District**

<u>Board of Directors</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Sub-District</u>
Dennis Schilz (Chairperson)	09-12	5
Doug Stack (Vice-Chairperson)	11-14	3
Jerry Weaver (Secretary)	09-12	3
Jim Meisner (Treasurer)	11-14	5
Robert L Petersen	09-12	2
Joe Wahlgren	11-14	2
Shane Storer	09-12	1
Robert E Peterson	11-14	4
Bob Wiseman	09-12	4
Eric Hansen	11-14	1
John Williams	11-14	At-Large

<u>Staff Members</u>	<u>Position</u>
Kent O. Miller, P.E.....	General Manager
Dave Slattery.....	Conservation Programs Coordinator
Bill Carhart.....	Grasslands Stewardship Coordinator
Glen Bowers.....	Water Programs Field Coordinator
Ann Dimmitt.....	IMP Coordinator
Landon Shaw.....	Hydrologist
Phil Heimann.....	GIS Coordinator
Amy Mapes.....	Administrative Assistant
Noelle Turner....	Field Office Secretary, North Platte NRCS
Jessica Milby....	Range Programs Tech, North Platte NRCS

Natural Resources News is the official publication of the Twin Platte Natural Resources District. If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or would like to be placed on our mailing list, please feel free to submit them to:

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Criteria Continued from Page 2

Historically this program has only allowed for one location per year. This new criteria will allow the NRD to cost-share on more trees on an annual basis.

This rebate program is a great opportunity for homeowners in North Platte, Sutherland, and Ogallala. These communities are qualified for this program because they have met all of the community requirements. This fall is an excellent time to plant trees and there is still plenty of time to participate in this program before winter arrives. For more information on this program, please contact Dave Slattery at the Twin Platte NRD office.



**Upcoming Events:**



**November**

- 8 Board of Director’s Meeting - 3:00 p.m. CST\*
- 12 Veteran’s Day Observed—Office Closed
- 22-23 Thanksgiving Holiday—Office Closed

**December**

- 11 Board of Director’s Meeting - 4:30 p.m. MST\*\*
- 25 Christmas Day—Office Closed



**January**

- 1 New Year’s Day—Office Closed
- 10 Board of Director’s Meeting - 3:00 p.m. CST\*
- 21 Martin Luther King Day—Office Closed

\* Board Meetings are held in the Great Western Bank Center-North Platte  
 \*\* Board Meeting held at the Haythorn Ranch, Ogallala NE

**TWIN PLATTE**

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