

Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts  
Making the Good Life Better Since 1972



## BASIN FACTS:

### NRDs:

*Upper Republican NRD, Imperial Middle Republican NRD, Curtis Lower Republican NRD, Alma Tri-Basin NRD, Holdrege*

1,274,997 Irrigated Acres

55,000 Constituents Across 16 Counties

250+ Miles of River Channel Restoration

## Local Problems, Local Solutions

### Setting A National Standard

The nearly 1.3 million irrigated acres in Nebraska's portion of the Republican Basin represent what is believed to be the largest area of regulated groundwater use not only in Nebraska, but the eight-state region that overlies the Ogallala Aquifer. Water use allocations have dropped an average of 25%, helping produce rising aquifer levels in some regions, stabilized levels in others, and significantly slowed rates of decline in other areas. The first control area, the first and second special protection areas, the first three integrated management plans, and the only joint action plan have all been in the Republican Basin. The first allocations, the first temporary suspension of drilling, and the first moratorium on drilling occurred in the Basin and it's the only Basin in the state to have all high capacity wells metered. The regulations that have been imposed in all or parts of the Basin since

1979 are significantly more stringent than those in other states, including Kansas where the steepest groundwater declines have been more than double those in the Basin. In the Upper Republican NRD, groundwater declines have been 80% less than what USGS predicted they would be without regulations.

### Protecting Your Water

Basin-wide, 655 wells are tested annually for nitrate levels - keeping you and your family safe from contaminated drinking water. Local NRD staff members also conduct community education projects to ensure that adults and children alike are aware of the dangers of high nitrates. On the eastern end of the basin, the Lower Republican NRD provides quality drinking water to 148 households and the village of Guide Rock through a Rural Water Supply project.

### Protecting The River

The Republican River NRDs are

active participants in Twin Valley and Southwest Weed Management Areas. Backed by funding mechanisms in LB701, the weed management areas have removed invasive species such as Russian Olive trees that impede streams.



### Solving Problems, Protecting Resources

Since their inception in 1972, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts have managed resource-related issues in ways that meet the unique circumstances of individual Districts, while helping the state as a whole.

Numerous projects in 2012 have made it one of the most active years in the Republican Basin in recent memory.

**Augmentation** - Together with Twin Platte NRD, the Lower, Middle and Upper Republican NRDs in late 2012 began pursuing an augmentation project in Lincoln County that will further guarantee continued compliance with the Republican River Compact and Platte River Cooperative Agreement. About 15,800 irrigated acres were purchased by the NRDs and retired from irrigation south of North Platte so that water that otherwise would have been used to irrigate crops can be piped into the Republican and Platte Rivers. Construction began in September 2013 and the project is expected to be operational in 2014. Lacking the NCORPE project, more than 100,000 irrigated acres could be shut down in the Republican Basin some years.

**Saving Surface Water** - The Lower Republican NRD saved nearly 1,100 acre feet of water for 2013 through its dry-year lease program. It encouraged farmers to submit bids on acres that they would be willing to receive payment for not irrigating in 2013. Approximately 4,120 acres were accepted into the program. The Middle Republican NRD imposed a hard cap of 18% of irrigators' five year allocation in 2013, which amounts to 60" for most irrigators. The Upper Republican NRD approved new rules that significantly restrict the amount of unused "banked" allocation from previous years that can be used during the current allocation period.

### Protecting The Local Economy

To protect the local economy, the NRDs work together to maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact while minimizing economic impacts. Each year, irrigated land in the Republican River Basin provides roughly \$35 million in tax revenue to support government subdivisions, such as schools, cities and counties. Of equal importance, irrigation produces higher crop yields, boosting economic activity in communities. The NRDs are currently involved in conservation and programs that sustain water allocations for users, management practices that conserve water, and ensure that producers aren't threatened by the loss of water rights. The districts are able to impose an occupation tax on irrigated land that generates revenue that helps pay for water-saving measures that have the potential to greatly aid Republican River Compact compliance.

In late 2011, the Nebraska Supreme Court upheld the occupation tax that so far has generated more than \$25 million for water-related measures that benefit the Basin and state. If residents of the Basin weren't paying the tax, taxpayers across the state could be asked to shoulder more of the burden of maintaining compliance.

Combined with state funding for water issues, the NRDs are well positioned to address myriad water management issues that require funding and have the potential to help sustain water resources for generations to come.

- All irrigation wells currently metered and monitored
- No new irrigated land developed since 2004

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The Republican River basin is unique in that it is a part of a three-state Compact. Enacted in 1943, this agreement allocates 49% of the virgin water supply to the state of Nebraska, 11% to Colorado, and 40% to Kansas.

The Kansas v. Nebraska Settlement of 2002 resulted in a moratorium on new irrigated land and pumping regulations, to ensure that water is conserved within the basin and that Nebraska stays within its annual water allocation.

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The U.S. Supreme Court in 2011 appointed a special master to address legal disputes between Kansas and Nebraska over the Republican River Compact.

### Nebraska's NRDs

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Formed in 1972, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts are local government entities with broad responsibilities to protect our natural resources. NRDs are unique to Nebraska, a state which has a long history of political innovation, providing local control of local resources.

2013