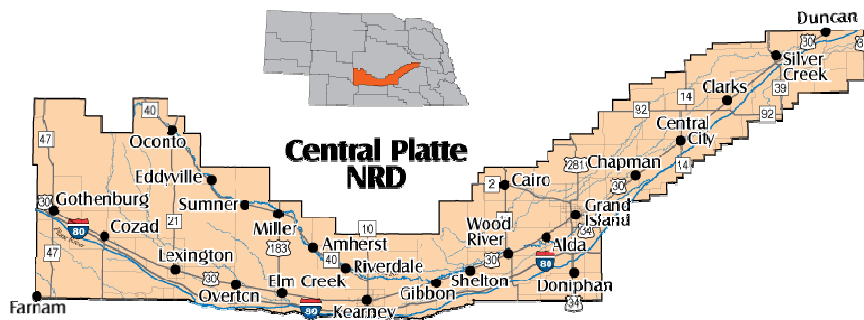


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Central Platte NRD Groundwater Management

Irrigated agriculture provides a large economic base for Nebraska with much of the state's agriculture depending on groundwater to supplement rainfall. This is especially true in the Central Platte NRD area, which contains one of the highest densities of irrigation wells in the state—over 17,000 wells irrigating over 900,000 acres.

In 1977, CPNRD contracted with the USGS to develop its first computer model of the hydrogeologic aquifer system within the District. The model had the capability to evaluate the effects of various alternative management plans on water levels and on streamflow in the District. In the mid-80's, the model was updated by the HDR Engineering to assist with groundwater management plans.

The NRD's Groundwater Quality Management Program was implemented in 1987 to provide a long-term solution for the widespread high groundwater nitrate-nitrogen problems. At that time, average nitrate levels within the District were 19.24 ppm and have since decreased slowly to 15.71 ppm.

Central Platte has been involved in many of the state's water issues due to its location along the Platte River. The NRD, along with a number of other "partners", were awarded two grants by the Nebraska Environmental Trust Foundation to develop the Cooperative Hydrology Study. This state of the art computer model is now used for a variety of water issues, including the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, annual basin determinations by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), as well as the development of the NRD's Integrated Management Plan and the Basin Integrated Management Plan.

In November of 2003, and prior to introduction of LB 962, the Central Platte NRD Board of Directors initiated and implemented the first suspension on drilling new wells and expansion of irrigated acres. The suspension was put in place to allow the Board and the DNR to look over the situation between groundwater and surface water to determine if a problem existed and how it would affect future water supplies.

In 2004, the Nebraska Legislature adopted LB 962 that calls for the integrated management of surface water and groundwater. As part of the LB 962 process, the Platte Basin above Elm Creek, Nebraska, was declared over-appropriated. Columbus to Elm Creek was designed as fully appropriated. Fully appropriated status means any additional uses will cause the water supply to be out of balance with demand.

(continued)

With those designations, the NRDs and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are responsible for developing Integrated Management Plans (IMP) that would call for “no new uses” in the basin above Columbus that would negatively impact an existing surface water right or groundwater use. New uses could be allowed, but any depletion to existing rights and uses must be “offset” with water. A Stakeholders Group is helping to develop an Integrated Management Plan and the NRD is participating in the development of the Basin Integrated Management Plan.

In the April of 2006, CPNRD began the process of certifying irrigated acres. As of July 2008, all irrigated acres have been certified in the Central Platte NRD, which totals 1,013,214 acres, including all variances and water bank transactions. The NRD has 1,013,215 irrigated acres on record, in which 94,205 are able to be irrigated by surface water. The crops being irrigated in the District include corn, soybeans, sorghum, potatoes, alfalfa, small grains and sunflowers.

In the summer of 2006, Governor Heineman signed the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP), which entered Nebraska into an agreement with the states of Wyoming and Colorado and the U.S. Department of Interior. The program calls for no new depletions to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service “target flows” and a return to the 1997 level of depletions. Again, new uses could be allowed, but any depletion must be offset with water.

In January 2007, the CPNRD board of directors approved the first water bank transaction in the district by approving a variance request and the deposit of 2.4 acre-feet per year into the District’s water bank. The Water Banking Policy was approved in May 2007, which defines the process of how a water bank will work. Directors approved the policy that for every acre-foot of water impacting the river that the NRD can acquire, there’s that much less regulation and cutback that the NRD will have to impose. The goal is to diminish the chance of having to regulate irrigators by acquiring water rights from willing landowners. So far, the NRD has purchased 827 acre-feet of water and another 148.5 acre-feet are in planning to be purchased. The NRD has spent \$2.25 million in purchasing water rights to get the over-appropriated area back to a fully appropriated status.