



Staff Report December 2018

Manager's Report

The days seem to be pass faster with each month; there is certainly a lot going on. The year-end LB 329 Water Quality Report detailing all groundwater quality expenditures, including cost-share, staff time and other program costs was completed and sent to NARD. The Hazard Mitigation contract was completed and submitted to FEMA for review. The LBNRD and LBBNRDs are planning to have some additional breach route studies completed for several watershed dams so we can work with Planning and Zoning Commissions to limit future NRD liability in those downstream corridors. An amendment to our Hazard Mitigation Contract will be presented to the board this month to provide for these additional services.

Mike provided a presentation for the "Leadership of Fillmore County" (Odegeo) group on November 20th. The group was studying various government entities, their structure, responsibilities and governance. It was a good opportunity to meet the class of 15 members and discuss the role of NRDs and how local constituents can be involved in making a difference in their communities.

The final VIMP Joint Stakeholder Advisory Committees met on December 19th at the Adams County Fairgrounds in Hastings, NE. The meeting was attended by 8 stakeholders and 5 board members from the LBNRD, 2 stakeholders and 3 board members of the TBNRD, 5 members of the public and 5 members of the project team. The objectives of the meeting were to 1) provide a general overview of current conditions in each NRD and any changes in rules and regulations relevant to groundwater management, 2) review and compare the LBNRD and TBNRD stakeholders goals and objectives developed through the VIMP process, 3) provide opportunity for discussion, comments and questions of the goals and objectives, and 4) discuss next steps to complete the process.

The managers of each district provided an overview of the current conditions in their NRD and any new groundwater rules now in place. NeDNR provided hard-copies which compared the two NRDs goals and objectives and discussed similarities and differences. It was interesting that the goals and objectives were fairly similar to each other. The group discussed the goals and asked questions of each other to clarify intent and direction. The discussion was lively but cordial. Although there were similarities and obvious efforts to bring the two Districts closer to uniformity in management strategies, the TBNRD encouraged the LBNRD stakeholders and board to be more conservative in our allocation amounts to preserve the resource for the long-term, and the LBNRD stakeholders encouraged TBNRD to consider metering of all wells as a management tool and way of understanding total water usage.



Following the open discussion, each participant was asked to provide their impressions, level of success of the process and convey any final thoughts or concerns. A copy of the comments from each of the participants is attached at the end of the report.



The first phase of the Blue Basin Groundwater Model effort being led by the Upper Big Blue NRD is completed. The second phase is now under consideration, but we've run into a funding question with the Department of Natural Resources. They have suggested that they will pay for the ModFlow modeling effort which is needed for the next phase, but their share would then be less than the percentage they committed for in Phase I. The sponsoring NRDs are planning to meet with DNR in December to iron out the funding details but that means delaying the next phase of the work until our January board meeting when we can act on the contracted services.

There have been a lot of questions in the office about certification of acres and pumpage reports. I mentioned last month that we had contacted a couple ladies about helping out part-time to assist in record processing for the groundwater department. We did hire Erika Brinegar to assist and she has caught on to the process and BeeHive quickly and is doing an excellent job. I must also report that Alecia, Mandy, Liz, and Dylan are doing an outstanding job of processing the certified

acres appointments. Time is short to get this activity completed before the end of the year but perhaps the wet weather will help us achieve our goal.

Assistant Manager

Lots of training meetings at the beginning of the month is keeping Donnie busy. We finished our Excel and Access training and now preparing for the Beehive training for the 6th and 7th of this month. Also Getting topics decided and how to best utilize speakers for each location for operator training this year and we are hoping for good attendance this year.

Sub Area reports are sent out and look slightly different this year to help us get the info we need to assess what kind of applications are being made and how much actual inputs are being applied. As our nitrates continue to worsen we will need to be having discussions soon about level of actions in our sub areas. That is why we will be having a meeting in January with farmers, consultants, agronomists, and experts to discuss our current situations and find the best approach to this very difficult nitrate problem. We have several farmers coming in and calling about certified acres and the staff is handling everything very well. Proud of our team we have developed.

Also, as a reminder we will be hosting Mike's retirement party here at the office on January 10th from 1pm-6pm. Please join us.

Administrative Secretary

Each year all eligible employees are required to update their NARD Flexible Benefits Plan elections. Marie provided the necessary forms to staff to complete their Election for Insured Benefits and Elections for Flexible Spending Accounts. The Flexible Spending Account gives the employee the option to set aside tax deferred funds through payroll to use for out-of-pocket health care costs or on dependent care. The forms are to be sent to Mid-American Benefits no later than December 14.

Changes to the health insurance program effective January 1, 2019 have been distributed. Changes include an increase in the annual Wellness Benefit, an increase in the out-of-pocket cost of prescriptions and the addition of the Teledoc program.

The annual Workers Comp audit request from LARM has been received. The purpose of the audit is to determine the actual payroll for the expired pool year to be used for calculating additional/return contribution adjustments appropriate for the actual exposure, to ensure employees are classified correctly and to verify the division of payroll for each employee's job classification. This audit requires us to provide LARM with a Certificate of Insurance for all Independent Contractor's the District pays throughout the year.

Project Manager

Jim and Jed have been busy this month entering the pumping information numbers as the report come in. A postcard reminder went out to those who haven't sent their info in yet. Unfortunately to date only about a third of the producers have responded. As Alicia works through certifying acres unmetered wells are found. So far all have been out of our District, inactive, or abandoned.

Mike Hoyer, the producer that asked for a variance for a meter where he pumped water into a dam for irrigation has his ordered, we'll check the serial number and installation when it is installed. Two older Rockwell meters weren't working, the use reported was incorrect, we've visited with those producers about getting the meters replaced. The office has fielded several questions concerning new development, mainly through transfers or cooperation with a neighbor.

Only 2 new well permits were approved this last month, one replacement, and the Village of Hubbell is installing a back-up well. Tri-City Meters started their maintenance early in the month, things were moving quickly until this last weather front moved through. Now they're using ATVs to access the meters and are finding a few frozen in the pipe. But overall, they say comments from producers have been positive.

Watershed Coordinator

I met this month with NDEQ, Beatrice Sand & Gravel, and the City of Fairbury at the Boyden Pit. Staff from Beatrice Sand & Gravel has only a couple of years of mining left in the current pit before which is just east of the infiltration gallery at Crystal Springs. They are looking for ideas on what they could possibly do to help with the nitrate issues.

This month I have been putting together materials for the signage at Crystal Lake. There will be three signs at the lake which will talk about the project, the watershed plan, and the benefits of wetland.

Permits and the design for the recharge project have been completed. Easement negotiations and bidding the project will take place in the next month.

Database Specialist

November was another steady month. With harvest winding down, we had quite a few of walk ins and appointments. In the month of November, we received reports from 136 landowners.

Alicia and Erika sent out 745 certified acre packets to the people that we have yet to receive their reports. From that mailing 54 of them were returned right away, bringing the total to 691 landowners we still need information from. The packets have generated a lot of phone calls to make appointments or queries on what is still needed from landowners.

The numbers for the month are 61% completed and 34% not started.

Media & Communications

Liz spent much of November trying to get the word out about certified acres that are due on January 1. She attended the VIMP meeting in Hastings with Mike on November 19th. It was good to see how people of various outlooks and passions can come together for the betterment of our water systems.

She attended Microsoft training with many of the other staff members to work on expanding their knowledge of Excel & Access before they all attend the Beehive training in the first week of December.

RWs asked that the Davenport businesses promo themselves at their Santa's Coming to Town event. Liz

took over some candy and information brochures for the parents as well as conservation coloring books and crayons for the youngsters to occupy them as they waited in line to see Santa.

The KRVN report was submitted for December 5th and included details about Certified Acre deadlines, subarea reports & operator trainings. Newsletter submission deadline was December 3rd, however if you have something you'd like to see entered – let Liz know asap.

Upcoming Events

Dec 12 – Little Blue NRCS Quarterly Meeting
Dec 13 – Operator Training – Deshler
Dec 19 – Hazard Mitigation Planning - Aurora
Dec 20 – Operator Training – Hastings
Dec 24-25 – Office Closed
Dec 31 – Pumpage Report Deadline
Dec 31 – Certified Acre Report Deadline
Jan 1 – Office Closed
Jan 8 – Regular Board Meeting
Jan 10 – Operator Training - Edgar
Jan 10 – Mike's Retirement Party
Jan 17 – Operator Training – Davenport
Jan 21 – Floating Holiday – Martin Luther King Jr Day
Jan 28 – Various NARD Meetings – Lincoln
Jan 29 – 30 – NARD Legislative Conference

Managers' Report Attachment: Comments during the review of goals and objectives:

Little Blue and Tri-Basin NRDs gave brief presentations on current conditions and any new changes to their water management rules and regulations since the last meeting. DNR displayed a comparison of goals and objectives of the two NRDs and there was discussion among the stakeholders.

Round Table Comments – The following comments were offered by participants in the Joint Stakeholder meeting after comparing and discussing the goals and objectives of the two districts. Comments include those from stakeholders, NRD Board members and other attendees from the public.

- All NRDs need to figure out what consumptive uses can be sustained in their area – watch for changes through time – and how they impact the water users.
- This has been a good process; it created awareness that did not exist before across the county line.
- Maintaining a sustainable water supply goal is consistent across the districts – this is good. We must all work to reduce groundwater declines. Communication between districts is a key.
- The meetings have been good, and participant has a better understanding of the issues. Participant learned that the Little Blue Basin extends beyond the Adams - Kearney County line. Suggests that LBNRD and TBNRD should get together regularly to discuss groundwater matters.
- Communications and technology are causing the world is getting smaller. We're not on our own like we used to be, our actions affect others. Encouraged committees come together across NRDs – to discuss what's fair to both – communication is essential. He said he was concerned about local control if we mismanage our resources. He stated that 12" is too much with 5" in the bank and no moratorium.

- Internet/Google – out-of-state landowners can see what’s going on here – and have concerns about water levels, etc: Transparency; don’t want to be the future story of not taking care of our resources.
- Education regarding consumptive use of crops is important to making informed decisions.
- Concerns about benefit from this process vs the cost for consultants.
- Good to see general agreement in the IMP goals and objectives – it really boils down to ACTIONS and how the boards bring rules together – equality. If actions are taken, greater restriction will not be necessary.
- Participant sees the Little Blue NRD’s current allocation as a starting point; also an education opportunity for farmers.
- Good to have meetings and goals – but it’s fluff, NRD Boards still make their own decisions and have ignored recommendation of the stakeholders. If goal is to preserve groundwater, then our goals and actions should prove it.
- Meters help farmers know what they are using and help educate them on their water needs; it’s a good practice and Tri Basin NRD should also require meters. A 12” allocation is not going to get us where we need to be to protect the resource.
- We’ve come a long way in this process. We agree on more than we disagree on.
- IMP plan is for ALL of the LB basin, not just the area near the county/NRD line. It’s important for the TBNRD to keep pushing the LBNRD.
- It has been a very educational and beneficial process, and I hope it moves forward. I support everything the NRDs have done and the Stakeholders stated goals and objectives. Participant surprised at variability in aquifer. We need to understand groundwater recharge better – it is a wholistic process. It has been a pleasure to participate in this process
- Participant is all for local control. Questioned NeDNR’s intent for the process and an apparent unwillingness to be more proactive in controlling surface water uses.
- Statement was made that participant was pleased that the group could air their difference in an open, yet cordial manner. They were pleased at the process.
- Conservation is critical to the resource. Technical innovation creates efficiency to reduce groundwater pumping – would encourage NRDs to do a survey to assess where/how many more improvements could be made. Would rather the NRDs be proactive than reactive. Water meters are a great way to learn how to improve operation.
- Would like the LBNRD to be more conservative and reduce the allocation in the future. Encouraged by participation here - wish there was more engagement, this small group will need to reach out to neighbors.
- See progress from a few years ago to now – keep going and hopefully we will get there.
- This has been a good discussion and it has been civil. We’re here because it is an issue for all of us. Would like to see this group continue to talk with the NRD boards regularly and neighbors.
- Likes to see NRDs working on GW recharge projects. Believes that NeDNR should stop issuing surface water rights from the river - it is not sustainable. River flows help recharge depleting groundwater supplies during the summer. Doesn’t believe that the 12” allocation of the LBNRD will do anything to stop declines. Believes the board must be more proactive.
- Consumptive use of water and crop irrigation requirement are the best science to support setting the allocations. Folks sitting on the NRD boundary line are being very patient
- Learned a lot; like what’s in the IMP; disappointing that it has no power and that the NRD board has the final decision; but this must have had some influence and got the LB board to take some action, albeit not as progressive as needed.
- Good to hear from those around the table who are serious about saving the water; middle ground is a good start. This group has changed the path forward for both NRDs.