

STAFF REPORT

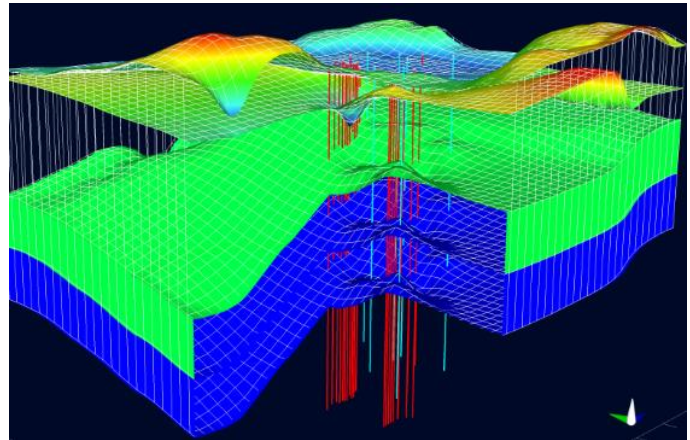
January 2019

Manager's Report – Mike Onnen

It has been a busy month trying to wrap up numerous items before my departure. Requests for proposals were sent out to auditors around the District, and a note requesting a letter of services from our legal counsel. Both will be reviewed at the board meeting.

Mike attended the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meeting in Kearney on December 18th to give a brief status report on the groundwater recharge projects the District has been working on. The NRC continues to push sponsors to get projects underway to avoid a legislative perception that the Water Sustainability Fund is holding too much money, and a reduction in funding for water resources projects.

Mike and Donnie met with the Upper Big Blue, Lower Big Blue, Tri-Basin NRDs and the DNR to discuss the Blue Basin Groundwater Model and terms of the new agreement that is under consideration. DNR has pledged their continued support for the model and assurances that they will accept the model results and tools for appropriate uses once it is completed. They also provided verbal commitment to the 50% level of funding for the model, however they acknowledged that their share may have to be reduced if the legislature administers budgetary cuts to the Department which prevent a full share of the project. The UBBNRD has revised a contract for the next phase of the model to incorporate the agreed upon terms. It will hopefully be available for the Board's action at our January meeting.



Mike and Donnie also met with Dr. Ray of the Water Center to discuss various water quality activities, approaches to addressing those problems and the long-term objectives must be to secure better water quality across the region. It was an interesting discussion and Donnie had an opportunity to discuss the need for a greater University emphasis on soil biological health focus. It was pointed out that that approach is a hard-sell for producers and industry alike but to accomplish water quality goals, it must be in our tool box of proactive measures.

Mike continued to work with DNR on the final IMP text. The process has been a laborious one, with a lot of questions to answer and edits to text. At this writing, I still waiting on the final copy from DNR.

We received notice that Dylan Long intends to return to school to continue his education in GIS mapping. Dylan's departure from the NRD will leave a real void as he was instrumental in getting several projects from the Watershed Plan off the ground, plus he was a real asset in computers, mapping and the Beehive Database. Most recently, he took over the cost-share activities for land treatment and dams. We want to wish Dylan all the best as he begins this new chapter.

Mike has also spent some time cleaning some files and making notes for current staff and the eventual new manager. This will be my last report to the board due to my retirement on January 12th. It has been an interesting and rewarding experience, a job that I dreamed of as a youngster, and have been blessed to devote my life to. I've also enjoyed getting to know the people of the area, work with our staff and board

over the years. We've accomplished a lot, but there is so much yet to be done and when addressing resources issues, I don't believe there will ever be an end to the work. I wish the District, its staff, board and constituents the very best in the future as you strive to Protect Lives, Protect Property and Protect the Future. God Bless!!!

Assistant Manager- Donnie Engelhardt

Our year end has been extremely hectic with our certified acre deadline and pumpage reports being due, as well as Mike and Dylan leaving, there are many things to get organized before they leave. Donnie is very busy fielding questions about rule changes and the New Water Quality Reports, as well as entering them into Beehive.

We have two more operator trainings, one in Edgar and one in Davenport, and attendance has been good for the individuals that have expired training certification. A meeting will be held at the end of this month with some farmers, agronomists, and fertilizer companies to discuss our nitrate issues and rules.

Also a BIG thanks to Mike for all the hard work he has put into the Little Blue NRD.

Water Department – Kevin Orvis



Kevin reported that pumpage report reminders were sent out on December 28th to 204 producers who hadn't sent their information in yet. I asked that they have their numbers turned in within the next two weeks, so a summary of 2018 water use can be put together for the February board meeting. Staff's main efforts this last month has been working to be sure the pumping data is accurate and correcting status of wells and irrigated acres.

Scott Rosenthal called the office concerning the Karl Wiedel transfer. He is an adjoining landowner who was sent a notice of the meeting but was gone on vacation. He has 3 wells on his quarter for the pivot and loses pressure during peak irrigation demand. He understands the transfer was approved but wanted to note he didn't feel any more demand should be place on that marginal aquifer.

Upcoming Events

- 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
- Feb 12 – Regular Board Meeting
- Feb 18 – Office Closed – President's Day

Media & Communications Specialist - Elysabeth Kierl

December was a hectic time in our office. Certified acre reports and pumpage reports were due on December 31st, which meant we were swamped with appointments and calls. Liz helped handle some of these. After attending training with Beehive the 6th & 7th, she worked within Access to try to create some queries for various reports that the office sends out throughout the year. She attended the operator training and gave a presentation on the new website as well as the Beehere portion of the site for folks to reference their certified acre information themselves. She sent a press release to all the local newspapers discussing how to check their reported acres, deadlines and subarea reports. She continues to update the website with up-to-date info but is always looking for suggestions!

Liz attended the NRCS Quarterly Staff meeting in Nelson on the 12th to update NRCS personnel on deadlines and changes made within the NRD. Donnie and Liz attended the Hazard Mitigation Planning meeting in Aurora on December 19th to try to get a feel for how the process works. We will be starting this process again in 2019.

A conference call was held with the Trailblazers RC&D board to decide how to handle the Household Hazardous Waste grant since they (along with anyone else with the grant) were only awarded 54.2% of their requested funding. This means that we will only be able to hold the event in 3 or 4 locations. It was decided to hold the events in Alma, Red Cloud, Nelson & Clay Center if that works for the company picking up the waste.

She is currently preparing to send out scholarship applications and ACE camp applications to send to area schools as well as free tree order forms for Arbor Day programs. She is also still working on the newsletter and hopes to have that out late January. She is attending a two-day conference in Norfolk to learn how to communicate efficiently before, during and after an incident (emergency preparedness training). Don't forget Mike's retirement party will be on the 10th!

Database Specialist – Alicia Epps

December was hectic!!! Alicia and Erika ended November with Excel and Access training and started off December with Beehive training. They are excited to put the extra training to use. Every day in December consisted of producer appointments all day for Alicia with Dylan and Elysabeth helping with the walk-ins. Erica and Mandy provided some valuable support in helping with appointments, making copies, scanning and helping with file management. We ended December with roughly 114 landowners that did not turn in their certified acres, representing land in all counties.

Administrative Secretary – Marie Herbek

Marie met via teleconference to plan the Administrative Staff meetings which will be held during the Legislative Conference on January 28 through 30. Meetings for the Administrative staff are held on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning.

Work has begun on preparation of year-end tax forms. Using the E-Service account employee and vendor tax ID numbers are checked to ensure they are accurate before the forms are sent out. All are due to be in the mail by January 31st, but the plan is to have them all in the mail long before that.

Watershed Coordinator – Dylan Long

Dylan discussed the cost-share program and some potential changes to the program at the recent NRCS quarterly meeting. Dylan provided updates on various projects going on throughout the district and the cost-share opportunities that are available to producers at the operator training events held this winter. Bids for the oxbow recharge projects were sent out this month and the bid opening will be January 7th. We'll present the bids at the board meeting.

Dylan have also provided assistance to Alicia with certified acres as landowners and producers have been coming in.

Operations Department – Kent Thompson

The Buffer Strip Program contracts have been entered into Beehive to help track producer conservation activities on their farms. This will be a helpful reference of our producer's farm practices in the future.

We are discussing operation and maintenance activities needed for the coming year. The district has also received a few tree planting plans for the coming season.