



Little Blue Natural Resources District

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Voluntary IMP Scheduled for Public Hearing

For Immediate Release

On May 14, 2019, the Little Blue Natural Resources District Board of Directors approved a motion signifying that the District has reached a consensus with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to adopt the draft Integrated Management Plan (IMP). The District with the Department will be hosting a joint public hearing on June 13, 2019, in the Little Blue NRD board room in Davenport, Nebraska starting at 6 pm.

Water resources in the Little Blue River Basin are critical for the long-term viability of the agricultural economy, business and industry, municipalities, fisheries and wildlife, and the society of the river basin as a whole. The District's Board of Directors recognized the value for joint management of groundwater and surface water and initiated the voluntary IMP with the Department, who agreed to work together with the District to develop the IMP. This plan will serve as a road map for jointly managing hydrologically connected groundwater and surface water in the District for the short-term and the long-term. It further serves as a framework which enables the District and the Department to coordinate management actions and monitor groundwater and surface water, in order to better protect water resources for future generations.

Blue River Compact administration for the Little and Big Blue Basins is tracked as a part of the Department's Fully Appropriated Basins Evaluation. If available surface water is insufficient to sustain 65 percent of the net corn crop irrigation requirement over the long-term (20 years), then that Basin may be subject to a Fully Appropriated Basin Designation. In the Little Blue Basin, surface water must be available for 26 days of irrigation between July 1 and August 31, averaged over 20 years, to maintain the beneficial irrigation use. As of 2018, surface water was available an average of 53 days (9 days of closure for surface water administration), which is far above the 26-day threshold that could trigger a fully-appropriated basin designation. As our District is currently not considered fully-appropriated, we are able to file a voluntary IMP in lieu of a mandatory IMP when a basin is fully-appropriated.

The IMP process relies on collaboration between the NRDs (groundwater) and the Department (surface water), in consultation with a diverse and broad-based stakeholder group. As a part of voluntary IMP development, the District and the Department convened a group of stakeholders that represented a wide array of water interests including agriculture, industry, public water supply, environment, recreation, and county and city officials. The stakeholders' input was invaluable to the development of the IMP, and both the District and the Department greatly appreciated their volunteered time and energy. It provides ideas and opportunities for the development of projects which capture available supplies and, for example, re-time releases to enhance streamflow and groundwater recharge. It helps to establish a framework where data collection, monitoring, water supply calculations, and procedures are coordinated to assure sustainable water supplies.

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee met a total of seven times from 2016 to 2018. They worked together to identify issues within the Basin and subsequently developed the goals, objectives, and action items of the IMP. The stakeholder group also helped to prioritize the action items, thus providing a robust set of recommendations for the consideration of the District and Department. The first and the last stakeholder

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meetings were held jointly with the Little Blue Basin stakeholder group from the Tri-Basin NRD to address water management at a Basin-wide level, while still maintaining local control. Stakeholder meetings were publicly noticed and included a public comment period as a part of each session.

The Little Blue NRD IMP is unique in the fact that it covers two management areas: 1) The general IMP area, which includes all water users and, in effect, covers the whole District, and 2) The Platte River Special Management Area. During the development of the IMP, new data and science on the Platte River revealed that water uses in the Platte River Basin were causing more significant impact to streamflows than previously indicated. As a result, the area is subject to management under the Nebraska New Depletions Plan. Instead of writing a separate IMP for that area, the subject matter is incorporated as Chapter 8 of this IMP.

The District and the Department carefully evaluated and considered all recommendations, including the feasibility of action items over a series of meetings. The final goals, objectives, and action items are a carefully constructed mosaic of stakeholder ideas combined with Department and District knowledge, which provide a path forward for effective, long-term management of groundwater and surface water.

The Little Blue NRD would like to extend an invitation to the public to voice any concerns they might have at the Public Hearing on June 13th, 2019 at the Little Blue NRD board room in Davenport, Nebraska.

The full draft IMP can be viewed on the Little Blue NRD website at https://littlebluenrd.org/2019_vimp.