

New Incentive Program to Reduce Fertilizer Use

This year, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 1368, establishing the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NIRIA). This state-funded program encourages producers to reduce their use of commercial fertilizers by offering financial incentives. To qualify, producers must verify a reduction in nitrogen fertilizer application rates by the lesser of 40 lbs per acre or 15% of their baseline rate. The program is designed to promote more sustainable practices while supporting Nebraska's agricultural community.

Target areas and criteria were developed by the Department of Natural Resources (NeDNR), the Natural Resources Districts (NRDs), and feedback from producers and industry representatives. Producers within the Central Platte NRD are eligible to participate. NIRIA will be available starting in the 2025 growing season and will run through December 31, 2029. The program is currently capped at \$1 million in total funding.

Priority Areas and Incentive Payments

The program will focus on three priority areas targeting corn, sugar beet, and potato producers:

Priority A: Wellhead protection areas and NRD Phase II and III areas established for water quality management will receive incentive payments of \$15/acre.

Priority B: Statewide certified irrigated crop areas will receive incentive payments of \$12/acre.

Priority C: All other areas of the state, including dryland will receive incentive payments of \$10/acre.

To learn more and to determine which priority area you're in visit:

www.cpnrd.org/water-resources/groundwater-quality

Your CPNRD Contact: Courtney Widup (308) 395-7605 | widup@cpnrd.org

Get Ready to Grow: Tree Orders Accepted November 1

Order Trees and Shrubs: November 1 – April 1.

Order by December 31 to receive a 10% discount on trees, weed barrier and planting services.



CPNRD will begin taking tree and shrub orders through the Conservation Tree Program on November 1st. Trees are delivered to the CPNRD office in Grand Island, stored in a climate-controlled cooler, and typically ready for pickup by mid-April. You will be notified when your order is ready for pickup at our office or your local NRCS office.

COST: \$31.25 for 25 trees | \$125 for 100 trees Sold in bundles of 25
Cost-share is available at 50% for trees and weed barrier. You must order 200 or more trees to be eligible for cost-share funding.

Trees & Shrubs Available

Shrubs: American Hazel, American Plum, Amur Maple, Black Chokeberry, Caragana, Chokecherry, Common Lilac, Elderberry, False Indigo, Golden Currant, Peking Cotoneaster, Red-Osier Dogwood, Sandcherry, Serviceberry, Silver Buffaloberry, Skunkbush Sumac

Deciduous: Black Cherry, Black Walnut, Bur Oak, Catalpa, Cottonwood, Hackberry, Manchurian Apricot, Midwest Crabapple, Red Oak, Silver Maple, Swamp White Oak

Conifers: Black Hills Spruce, Colorado Blue Spruce, Eastern Red Cedar, Jack Pine, Norway Spruce, Ponderosa Pine, Rocky Mountain Juniper, Southwestern White Pine

SMALL ACRE PACKAGES COST: 50 seedlings for \$65 (10 of each tree)

Eastern Nebraska Bur Oak, Peking Cotoneaster, Swamp White Oak, Midwest Crabapple, Red-Osier Dogwood-

Western Nebraska Ponderosa Pine, Bur Oak, Rocky Mountain Juniper, Silver Buffaloberry, American Plum

Flowering Package Serviceberry, Midwest Crabapple, Common Lilac, Red-Osier Dogwood, Caragana

Wildlife Package Silver Buffaloberry, American Plum, Elderberry, Golden Currant, Red-Osier Dogwood

To learn more or to print a tree order form visit: <https://www.cpnrd.org/conservation/trees-weed-barrier>

Your CPNRD Contact: Kelly Cole 308-395-7134 | cole@cpnrd.org

Important Dates

January 1 Nitrogen certification test due

February 11 CPNRD's Water Programs Update - Grand Island

March 31 Crop Report, water and soil samples due

June 1 Chemigation renewal permits due

June 15 CPNRD-Ron Bishop scholarship apps due

July 4 Office closed

July 27 2025 Budget Hearing & Board Meeting

Sept 1 - March 1 Irrigation transfer apps accepted

Sept 15 Chemigation reinspection deadline

November 1 - April 1 Order trees and shrubs

November 28-29 Office closed

December 25 - January 1 Office closed

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- 2 Dwayne Margritz, Lexington
- 3 Marvion Reichert, Elm Creek (Treasurer)
- 4 Lon Bohn, Gibbon
- 5 Deb VanMatre, Gibbon
- 6 Jerry Milner, Grand Island
- 7 Jerry Wiese, Grand Island (Vice-Chairman)
- 8 Todd Arends, Grand Island
- 9 Ed Kyes, Central City
- 10 Chuck Maser, Grand Island

Brian Keiser, Gothenburg
Tom Downey, Lexington
Steve Sheen, Kearney
Ryan Kegley, Kearney
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Kevin Werner, Grand Island
Doug Reeves, Central City
Barry Obermiller, Grand Island

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IN PERSPECTIVE

Volume 28 No. 5
October 2024

Central Platte NRD Newsletter

215 Kaufman Ave Grand Island NE (308) 385-6282 cpnrd.org

15-Year Review of Central Platte NRD's Instream Flow Rights Approved

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NeDNR) recently approved the 15-year review of Central Platte NRD's instream flow rights, ensuring continued habitat protection for threatened and endangered species along the Platte River. In August, NeDNR issued an Order confirming that CPNRD's instream flow appropriations are being used beneficially, serve the public interest, and should remain in effect without modification.

CPNRD remains the only NRD with instream flow water rights on the Platte River, dedicated to protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats. These rights, which prioritize the needs of wildlife, date back to July 25, 1990. CPNRD initially applied for the rights after conducting an extensive study in response to concerns over low river flows, particularly during dry summer periods that pose risks to fish and wildlife dependent on the river. The approval of a series of instream flow rights to maintain minimum flows for these species was granted on July 2, 1992.

The specified flows under these rights play a crucial role in maintaining bird habitats along the Platte, as well as sustaining food sources for the birds. Importantly, these water rights do not impact the levels of upstream storage reservoirs, such as Lake McConaughy, nor do they restrict water availability for existing irrigators. While existing senior water rights take precedence, future projects must meet the minimum flow requirements outlined by CPNRD's instream flow rights before diverting water from the Platte.

The appropriations cover various stretches of the Platte River, generally between Lexington and Columbus, NE, and are vital to preserving habitats for four bird species: the endangered whooping crane, sandhill crane, least tern, and the threatened piping plover. The rights either directly contribute to maintaining the birds' habitat or support the production of food sources critical to their survival.

In 2009, CPNRD completed its required 15-year review, extending the instream flow rights through 2024. With this latest approval, CPNRD's instream flow rights are now secured until the next review in 2039.



Least Tern
Delisted



Piping Plover
Threatened



Whooping Crane
Endangered



Pallid Sturgeon
Endangered

In This Edition

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Groundwater Management Rules & Regulations Updated

After a public hearing in September, the Board of Directors approved updates to the NRD’s Rules and Regulations to align with the Groundwater Management Plan that was updated last year. These updates aim to improve groundwater quality and ensure the long-term sustainability of the District’s water resources. The revised Rules and Regulations will take effect on November 1, 2024. Below are the key changes

Quality Section - Nitrate Management

The nitrate management phase boundaries were based on water samples collected by NRD staff during each irrigation season, supplemented by producer data submitted through annual crop reports. Below are updates to the phase areas: See article “Nitrate Levels Decreasing in Parts of District” on the following page.

Phase I: 0 - 7.5 ppm

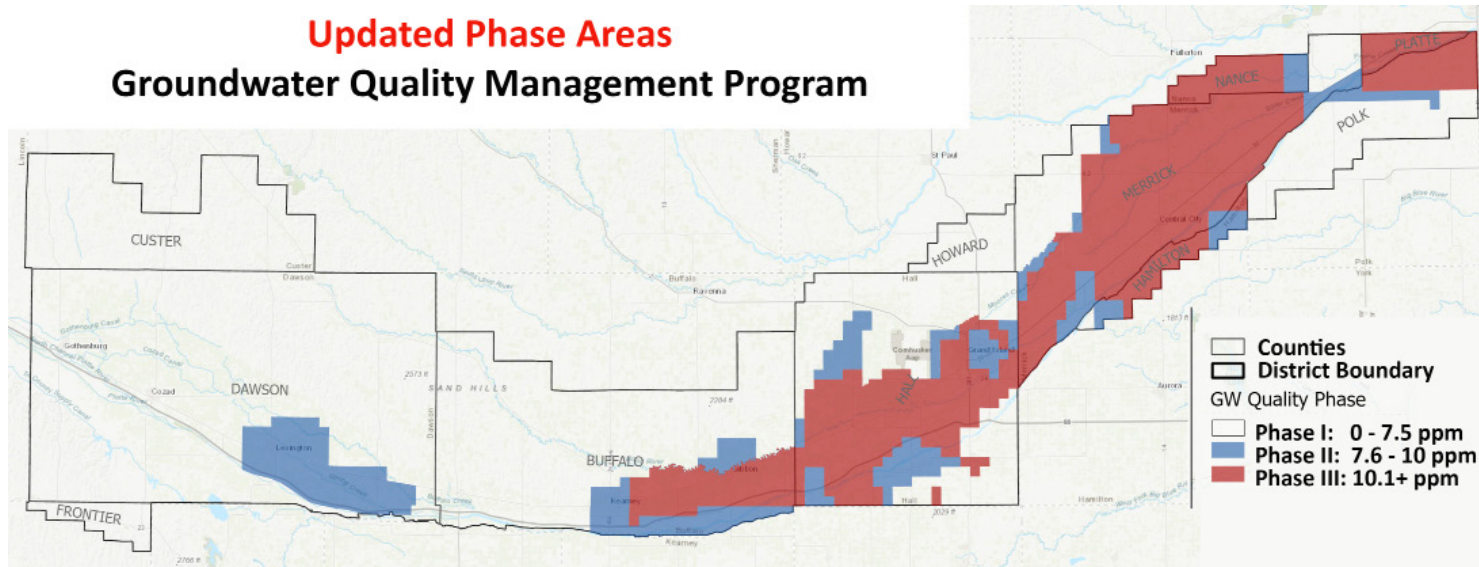
Phase I area was expanded to cover 1,431,327 acres, resulting in 41,641 acres being moved from Phase II to Phase I. This adjustment reduces the number of producers required to submit annual crop reports, soil samples, and water samples.

Phase II: 7.6 - 10 ppm

Phase II area was reduced to 209,836 acres, a decrease of 213,116 acres due to acres moved to Phases I and III.

Phase III: 10.1+ ppm

Phase III area was expanded to 491,380 acres, increasing regulations for 171,405 acres that continue to experience elevated nitrate levels.



Quantity Section - Revisions in red color below

Supplemental to Groundwater Wells: Wells that are used to supplement irrigation wells that irrigate lands already irrigated with groundwater, **and under the same ownership**, provided that the irrigated acres cannot exceed the acres irrigated as defined by Section B, Rule 2.

Procedures for Assignment of Wells to Irrigated Acres: NRD staff will mail to each landowner in the District who owns certified irrigated acres an assignment document, which identifies the well(s) that must be used to irrigate specified irrigated acres. If the landowner accepts the assignment as described in Rule B.3.5.1, the landowner must sign the document and return it to CPNRD within 30 days to complete the assignment process. If the landowner disagrees with the well assignment, the landowner must provide additional information of the appropriate well to assign to those acres.

Transfer Applications Accepted between September 1st and March 1st for irrigated acre transfers. Exceptions will be considered for land purchased 90 days after March 1st. **Addition:** Exceptions will be considered for land purchased between March 1st and May 31st. For such land, transfer applications must be submitted to the District by May 31st of the same year purchased.

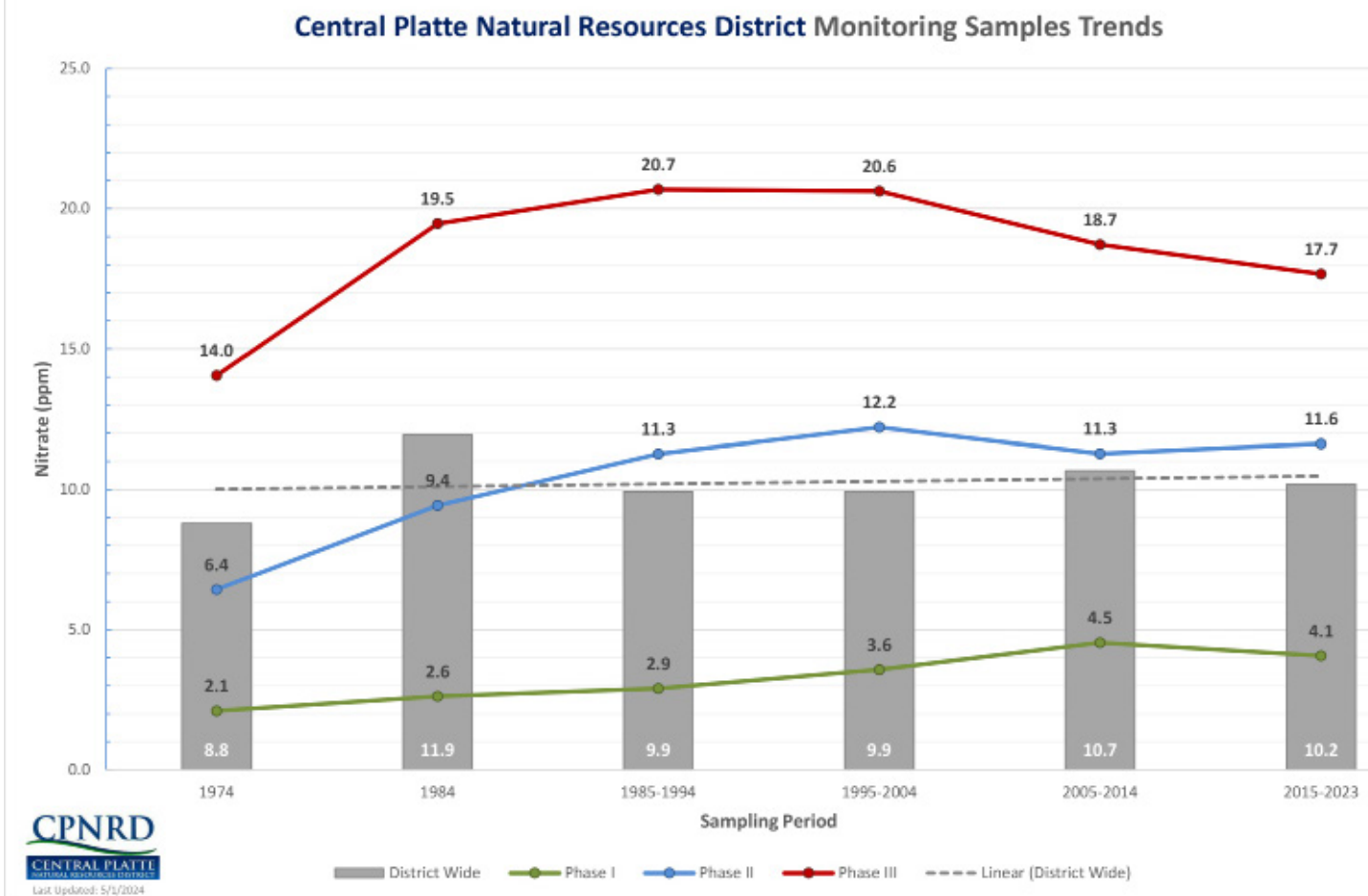
Supplemental Wells Revision: No supplemental wells, as defined in Rule A.3.34, will be allowed into any sub-area if the groundwater declines of such sub-area meets or exceeds 25% of the maximum acceptable decline. This rule will stay in effect until the average water level is less than the 25% decline for five consecutive years, according to spring water levels taken by the District.

Nitrate Levels Decreasing in Parts of District

Although nitrate levels have not significantly decreased districtwide, a downward trend is emerging in the Phase II area, which includes parts of Buffalo, Hall, Hamilton, and Merrick counties near the Platte River. Data from irrigation well samples collected by District staff, indicate this decline, leading to the reclassification of approximately 42,000 acres from Phase II to Phase I. Landowners in these areas are no longer required to submit annual crop reports or nutrient management information.

Recent improvements in irrigation groundwater sampling have further enhanced data collection. Staff use tablets for real-time data entry, allowing for streamlined data collection and immediate access to past results for producers field-side. Additional samples were collected on the routine sample rotation, providing a more complete picture of nitrate trends and guide adjustments to phase boundaries, particularly in data deficient areas. These advancements were used to refine the phase boundaries and target nutrient management and education efforts where they are most needed.

While some parts of the District show slight declines in nitrate levels, other areas still exceed the recommended 10 parts per million (ppm) drinking water standard. After nearly 40 years of water quality and nutrient management, overall nitrate levels have stabilized. The chart below shows the trend from 1974 to 2023.



Planning Changes for Next Irrigation Season?

Transfer requests for the next growing season will be accepted through March 1, 2025. If you are planning to irrigate acres that are not certified with Central Platte NRD, you must offset the new acres by applying for and completing a transfer request prior to the new acres being irrigated. Producers who fail to obtain an approved transfer from the NRD are subject to penalties.

Purchasing New Land? If you plan to purchase new land be sure to check the certified irrigated acres of the property before making any buying decisions. For more information, call (308) 385-6282.

Your CPNRD Contacts:

Luke Zakrzewski 308-395-7672 | luke@cpnrd.org or Angela Warner 308-395-7595 | warner@cpnrd.org

November 15 Deadline for Soil Carbon & Irrigation Efficiency Funding

Deadline for enrollment in the following programs is November 15, 2024

Nebraska Soil Carbon Credit Project

Team up with 100 producers to enroll 100,000 acres in cost-share programs for soil health practices including adoption of cover crops, reduction of tillage, and/or diversifying crop rotation. Producers will be enrolled on a first-come, first-serve basis until acre quota is met based on remaining funding available.

Public-private partnership: Central Platte and Upper Big Blue NRDs, NRCS, Cargill, McDonalds, Target and The Nature Conservancy provides financial and technical resources to producers through the NRCS field offices.

Your CPNRD Contact: Courtney Widup (308) 395-7605 | widup@cpnrd.org



Ogallala Aquifer and Platte River Recovery Project

NRCS developed this irrigation efficiency program to reduce water consumption from Gothenburg to Elm Creek and in declining status areas. Financial assistance is available through this USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program to implement more efficient irrigation technology, install conservation practices, and convert irrigated acres to non-irrigated farmland. Partners: Central Platte and Twin Platte NRDs, Thirty Mile Irrigation District, Southside Canal Company and Cozad Ditch Company. To learn more and sign up, contact your local NRCS office:

NRCS OFFICES WITHIN CENTRAL PLATTE NRD

Central City (308) 946-2251 Ext. 3 Grand Island (308) 395-8586 Ext. 3 Kearney (308) 237-3118 Ext. 3
 Lexington (308) 324-6314 Ext. 3 Osceola (402) 747-2461 Ext. 3

General Election Candidates

Central Platte NRD’s Board of Directors consists of 21 members, each serving a four-year term. Two directors represent each of the 10 sub-districts, along with one at-large director. Directors from the same sub-district are elected in alternating election years.

SUBDISTRICT	CANDIDATE	SUB-DISTRICT LOCATION
Subdistrict 1	Jay Richeson, Gothenburg	Custer, Dawson, Frontier
Subdistrict 2	Dwayne Margritz, Lexington	Buffalo, Dawson
Subdistrict 3	Marvion Reichert, Elm Creek	Buffalo, Dawson
Subdistrict 4	Ryan Kegley, Kearney	Buffalo, Hall
Subdistrict 5	Mike Wilkens, Gibbon	Buffalo
Subdistrict 6	Mick Reynolds, Wood River	Hall
Subdistrict 7	John Stoltenberg, Cairo	Hall, Howard
Subdistrict 8	Todd Arends, Grand Island	Hall
Subdistrict 8	Kevin Werner, Grand Island	Hall
Subdistrict 9	Doug Reeves, Archer	Hall, Merrick, Nance, Platte, Polk, Hamilton
Subdistrict 9	Andrew Simmons, Marquette	Hall, Merrick, Nance, Platte, Polk, Hamilton
Subdistrict 10	Barry Obermiller, Grand Island	Hall



2025 Operating Budget Down 0.69%

In August, the Board set the levy for the District’s fiscal year 2025 budget. The total assessed valuation of \$22.39 billion required a levy of 0.023890, a slight increase from last year’s 0.023380. The total operating budget for 2024/2025 is \$34.71 million, reflecting a 0.69% decrease from the previous year’s \$34.96 million.

Lyndon Vogt, General Manager, noted that the budget includes \$34.71 million for the general and sinking funds, with a property tax request of \$5.35 million—an increase of \$523,097 from last year.

For a home valued at \$200,000, the property tax will be \$47.78 in support of the Central Platte NRD’s conservation efforts that include flood reduction, water quality management, soil health, conservation cost-shares, forestry, land management, recreation, and natural resources education. The Central Platte NRD serves all of Dawson County and parts of Custer, Buffalo, Hall, Howard, Nance, Merrick, Hamilton, Platte, Polk and Frontier counties.