

For Immediate Release

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Nebraska Moves Forward with First Groundwater Protection Plan of its Kind in Nation

EPA Accepts First-of-its-Kind Plan to Curb Nitrate Contamination in Groundwater

(Lincoln, NE) The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) and Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) are proud to announce the acceptance of the Bazile Groundwater Management Area (BGMA) Plan by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on October 13th, 2016. The BGMA Plan is the first groundwater-focused plan in the nation to address nonpoint source pollution. The plan is the result of a collaborative effort to address groundwater nitrate contamination between NDEQ and four of Nebraska's NRDs: Lewis and Clark NRD, Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lower Niobrara NRD, and the Upper Elkhorn NRD.

"This plan is a big deal in the nonpoint source pollution world," Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, Water Quality Division Administrator, Marty Link, P.G. said. "While Nebraska NRDs have been implementing plans like the Bazile plan since the late 1970s, this is the first groundwater plan recognized nationally – which also qualifies the area for funding previously reserved for river and lake improvement projects."

The BGMA covers 756 square miles in northeast Nebraska and is home to 10 communities and over 7,000 residents. Groundwater in the BGMA is the only drinking water source for communities and rural residents. Extensive row crop and sandy soils make it easy for land-applied commercial fertilizer and manure to leach into the groundwater. The NRDs have collected data on groundwater nitrate concentrations since 1980. During that time, average nitrate concentrations have increased with some areas exceeding 30 mg/L, three times the levels safe for drinking water. While all four NRDs have been implementing their own Groundwater Management Plans, there has always been some confusion over differing rules for people farming in more than one district. Additionally, people in the area are now realizing that the nitrate problem has been building for 50 or more years and that both long and short term goals and actions are needed to address the problem.

The plan focuses on reducing nitrates to safe drinking levels below 10 mg/L in the groundwater by progressively adopting more protective BMPs throughout the BGMA with the communities' wellhead protection areas as the highest priority. The NRDs will utilize a combination of agricultural BMPs required by their elevated Groundwater Management plan phases and voluntary BMPs outlined in the BGMA plan that go above and beyond those requirements. Through the development of the BGMA Plan, the NRDs have created a cohesive strategy to monitor nitrate reductions in groundwater as fertilizer

practices and irrigation methods are improved in the area. This monitoring data will also further refine future versions of the BGMA Plan to ensure its goals are achieved.

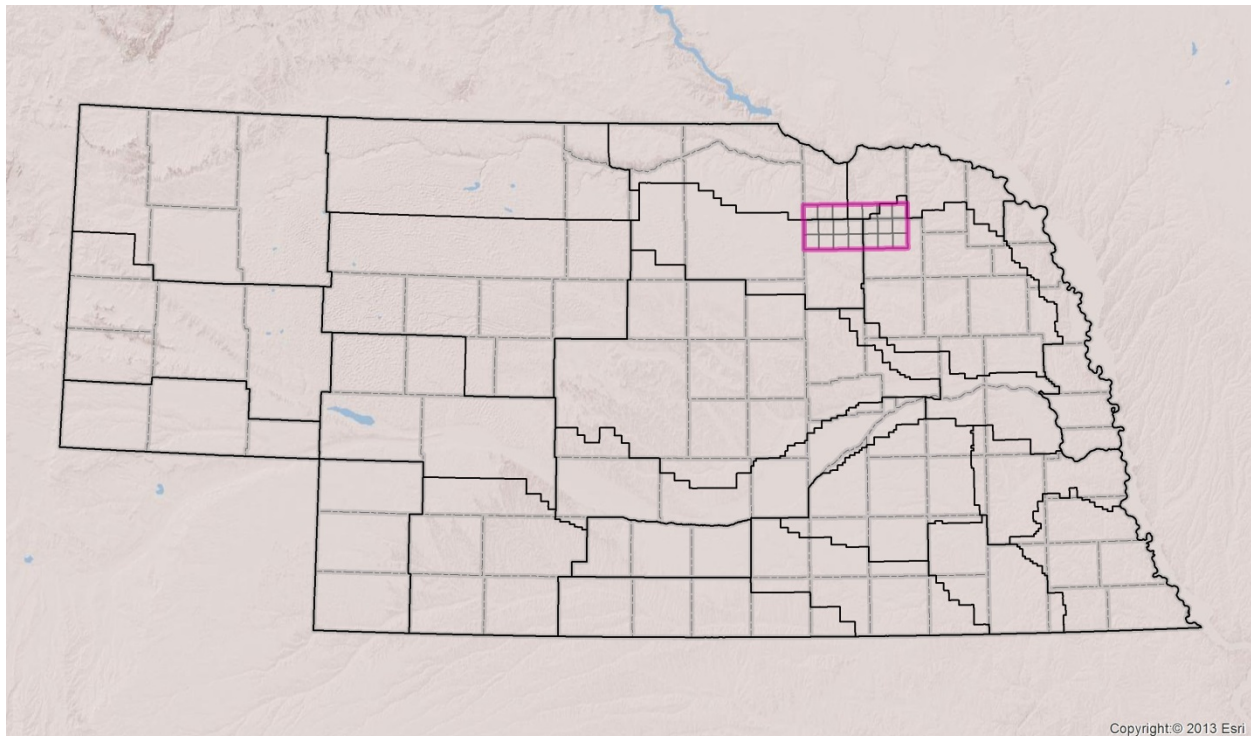
"This focused effort is on a known water quality problem in the area and will provide the local constituents with a plan and financial resources to start reversing the trends in water quality and provide a sustainable resource for domestic, agriculture, recreation and industrial uses," Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District General Manager, Mike Sousek said. "This water resource is paramount to the area for a healthy quality of life which must be protected now and into the future."

EPA's acceptance of this groundwater plan opens up funding from section 319 of the Clean Water Act available each year via NDEQ. Previously, only areas with surface water quality problems have been eligible for this type of funding. NDEQ hopes other NRDs and municipalities will use the BGMA Plan as a template to develop additional groundwater based management plans in the state and nation.

You can view the plan at <http://deq.ne.gov/publica.nsf/pages/16-013> or visit any of the four Natural Resources Districts' websites (Upper Elkhorn NRD at <http://www.uenrd.org/>; Lower Elkhorn NRD at <http://www.lenrd.org/>; Lower Niobrara NRD at <http://www.lnnrd.org/>; and Lewis and Clark NRD at <http://www.lcnrd.org/>).

A special thanks to the BGMA stakeholders and the many individuals from various local, state, and federal organizations for their contributions to the development of this plan. For more information, contact NDEQ at NDEQ.moreinfo@nebraska.gov.

Location of the Bazile Groundwater Management Area:





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The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD), the trade association for Nebraska's 23 natural resources districts, works with individual NRDs to protect lives, protect property, and protect the future of Nebraska's natural resources. These districts are unique to Nebraska. NRD's are local government entities with broad responsibilities to protect our natural resources. Major Nebraska river basins form the boundaries of the 23 NRDs, enabling districts to respond best to local conservation and resource management needs. To learn more about Nebraska's NRDs visit www.nrdnet.org. Or you can head to the Natural Resources Districts' Facebook page at www.facebook.com or follow NARD's Twitter page at [@nebrnd](http://www.twitter.com). NARD is located at 601 S. 12th St. Suite 201, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508. Email NARD at nard@nrdnet.org or call NARD at (402) 471-7670.

