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Natural Resources District

NEWS RELEASE

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Tri-Basin NRD to Include Observation Wells in Groundwater Quantity Management Data

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD) will begin utilizing data from dedicated observation wells in monitoring groundwater quantity throughout the district following the approval of TBNRD directors at their September meeting. District staff measure water levels in designated irrigation wells each spring and fall. The district also has at least one dedicated observation well in every township in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties. Data loggers in the observation wells automatically measure water levels twice daily. The irrigation and observation wells create an extensive network that provides Tri-Basin NRD directors with data they need to discern trends in water levels and make informed decisions about maintaining adequate groundwater supplies. Previously, only data from the measured irrigation wells was used to evaluate whether a particular township's groundwater levels dropped to a level to warrant groundwater pumping restrictions. Tri-Basin NRD staff and directors believe that adding data from the observation wells to the equation will provide a more accurate picture of groundwater level trends.

"In the process of drilling observation wells, we gain knowledge of the geology of an area before we even see the benefit of gathering groundwater level data," explained Tri-Basin NRD Manager, John Thorburn. "The groundwater data is almost a bonus." Information about the soils and geology of a well site is logged when a well is drilled, giving the NRD information about that area's capacity to store groundwater.

Thorburn also explained that Tri-Basin NRD and Little Blue NRD have jointly applied for a Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund grant that would allow even more observation wells to be drilled. The two NRDs have been working on a plan to cooperatively manage the area of the Little Blue Basin along the districts' border, in order to sustain groundwater supplies in that area indefinitely. Each NRD has budgeted funds to drill four observation wells in that area. The grant money would allow each district to drill eight observation wells.

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Photo cutline: Nolan Little, Tri-Basin NRD Water Resources Manager, measures the spring groundwater level in an observation well in northern Kearney County.