

Spring 2018
Volume 32, Issue 2

Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

Scheele Receives Earth Team Awards

Curtis Scheele, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Irrigation Water Management Specialist (IWMS) in Tri-Basin NRD, recently received three Earth Team Awards from NRCS. Scheele's work with the Nebraska Ag Water Management Network (NAWMN) earned him the 2017 Central Region Earth Team NRCS Employee Award, the 2017 National Earth Team Employee Award, and the Central Region Group Volunteer Award.

The NAWMN is a valuable tool that ag producers can use to estimate evapotranspiration (ET) or crop water use for their own crops. Data from ET equipment at cooperating sites across the district is reported weekly during the irrigation season on the websites of UNL Extension and Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID). Producers can also get NAWMN data by calling the Water Use Hotline at 308-995-2255 or 1-800-993-2507 during the growing season.

Each summer, Tri-Basin NRD cooperates with Scheele and the NRCS staff to allow the TBNRD interns to assist in setting up atmometers at NAWMN sites and collecting the data that is reported each week. In addition, network volunteers throughout the district report data from sites in their own fields each week. The information provided through this network is vital in helping district ag producers evaluate crop water use and scheduling irrigation efficiently, helping them be better stewards of TBNRD's natural resources.



Kevin Breece, NRCS District Conservationist, and Craig Derickson, NRCS State Conservationist, presented the Earth Team Awards to Curtis Scheele, NRCS Irrigation Water Management Specialist (IWMS) in Tri-Basin NRD.



Tri-Basin NRD's summer interns assist with data collection for NAWMN each irrigation season. Pictured with NRCS staff are interns from summer 2017 (left to right): Andrew Yantzie, Curtis Scheele (NRCS IWMS), Dalton Refior, Mikalah Brown, and Kevin Breece (NRCS District Conservationist).

"Dedicated to Conservation of our Natural Resources"

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Manager's Message

by John Thorburn
A Win-Win

Most new water management projects generate some amount of controversy. That controversy can be stirred by those who will lose (or think that they might lose) access to their water supply, those whose land might be affected by the project, or those who generally fear change.

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (NRD) has been fortunate recently to partner with the federal Fish and Wildlife Service's Rainwater Basin Management District (USFWS), the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture (RBJV), the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and Central Nebraska Public Power District (CNPPID) on a habitat enhancement and groundwater recharge project that will divert water from the Platte River to wetlands. This would, on the face of it, seem like a project especially designed to agitate farmers and environmentalists alike. Enhance wetlands? Many farmers have fought wetlands in their fields their entire lives. Divert water from the Platte? The Platte is almost always short of water, isn't it?

Yet this project has been well-accepted, even praised, by those who could be most directly affected by it. This endeavor is widely appreciated because it benefits both wildlife and water users, both surface water and groundwater.

Here's our plan: divert excess flows from the Platte River, route them through the CNPPID canal system and deliver that water to five USFWS wetlands in Phelps County. The water will typically be diverted in the fall, because river flows at that time of year often exceed target flows for endangered species. The window for diverting excess flows is relatively short for a number of reasons, so pipelines and delivery infrastructure are designed to deliver sufficient water to fill these wetlands in just seven days.

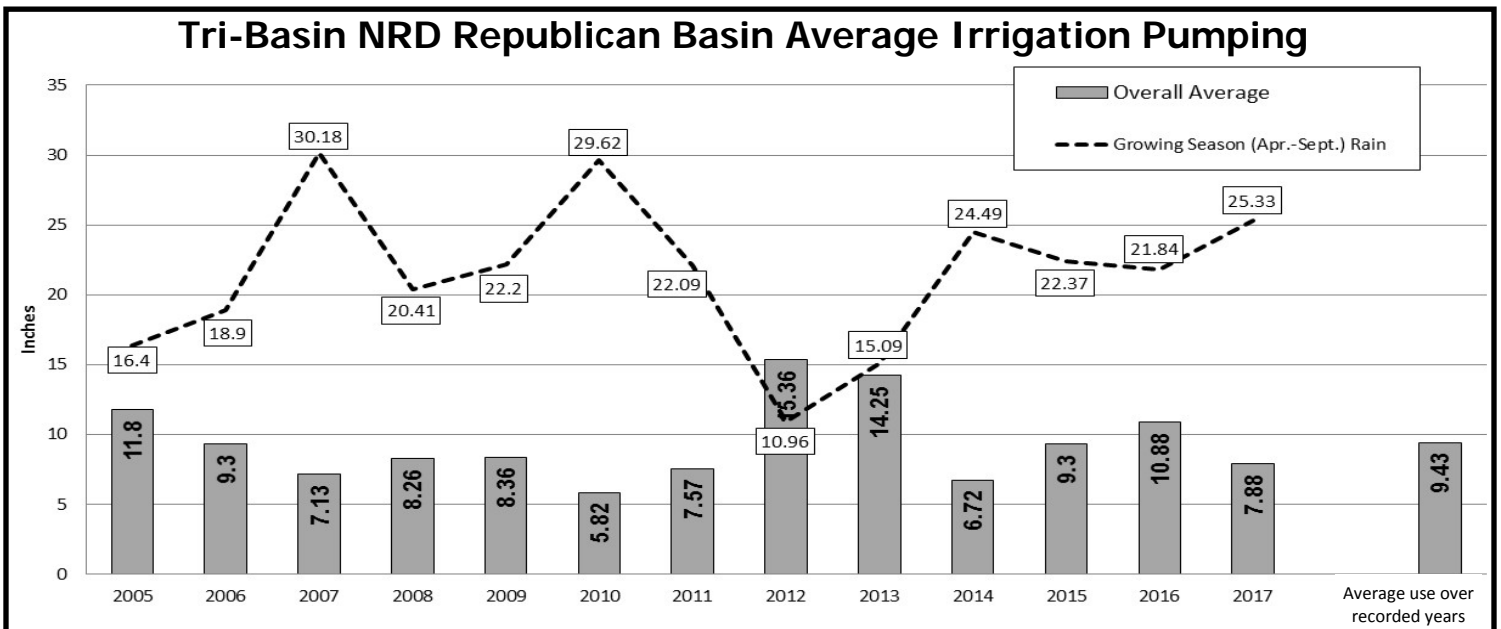
The water we divert will enhance habitat for migratory waterfowl in the fall and some of the water will still be there in

the wetlands during spring migration. While fall is anticipated to be the usual diversion opportunity, we will also divert flood flows at other times of the year, reducing flood damage and utilizing water that would otherwise be wasted.

Even though much of the water that flows into the wetlands will soak into the soil through the fall and winter, that wet soil will also help wetlands retain spring snowmelt and runoff. Even the water that soaks away is not lost or wasted, however. As it seeps down it gets filtered by wetland plant roots and soils. It eventually migrates downward to the groundwater table, recharging our groundwater supplies. This filtered water also benefits groundwater quality by diluting nitrates and other contaminants already in groundwater supplies.

Wetlands naturally function as groundwater recharge focus areas. Landowners who live and farm near wetlands have had problems in the past when combined rainfall and irrigation runoff led to excessive recharge that created perched water tables, saturating otherwise productive soils. Tri-Basin NRD has a network of groundwater observation wells that will enable us to track groundwater levels in the vicinity of USFWS wetlands. If recharge causes the water table to rise, water deliveries will be suspended until groundwater levels have stabilized at a level that won't affect surrounding land. CNPPID, with financial assistance from RBJV and the state, started work on infrastructure improvements this past fall. They constructed a half-mile long, 36-inch buried pipeline to transport water from the Phelps County Canal to USFWS's Funk WPA. An outfall structure designed to slow down water flowing from the pipeline will be constructed this spring. Other wetland pipelines will be constructed this coming summer and fall.

I am hopeful that our habitat enhancement and groundwater recharge project will provide lasting benefits for both wildlife and people. Its success requires cooperation between local state and federal government agencies, working together for the common good. I also hope that this project will serve as an example of how, with all levels of government working together, we can create "win-win" solutions to protect our environment and our economy.



Tri-Basin to Host Arbor Day Celebration

Tri-Basin NRD will host the Holdrege Chamber of Commerce's Coffee Connection from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. on Arbor Day, Friday, April 27. Holdrege area residents are invited to stop in the Tri-Basin NRD office during Coffee Connection to receive a free tree seedling.

Tri-Basin NRD will also provide free tree seedlings in other communities throughout the district on Arbor Day. Watch for details on community Arbor Day celebrations in local media outlets, the Tri-Basin NRD website (www.tribasinnr.org), or Tri-Basin NRD's Facebook page.



**Celebrate
Arbor Day!**

Plant a tree

Brooks Retires; Munter and Refior Fill Positions

Charles Brooks served as Tri-Basin NRD's Land Resources Manager for 20 years before retiring in March 2018; he also served as the Phelps County Weed Superintendent. During his employment at TBNRD, Brooks played a key role in planting thousands of conservation trees in windbreaks on farm ground and residential sites across the district.

Nathan Munter is being promoted from Land Resources Technician to Land Resources Manager. He has worked for Tri-Basin NRD since 2015, assisting with the district's conservation tree planting program and maintenance of Improvement Project Areas (IPAs). Munter will also take over as the Phelps County Weed Superintendent.

Dalton Refior of Loomis has been hired to fill the Land Resources Technician position vacated by Munter. Refior graduated from the University of Wyoming in December 2017 with majors in rangeland ecology and watershed management and environmental and natural sciences. Refior is a familiar face to Tri-Basin NRD; he has worked as a summer intern with the district for the past three years.



Charles Brooks



Nathan Munter



Dalton Refior

Tri-Basin NRD Offers ACE Scholarships

Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) is a natural resources camp sponsored by Nebraska's natural resources districts for students who have completed sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. It will be held at the State 4-H Youth Camp at Halsey June 10-13. Cost of camp is \$215.

Tri-Basin NRD is offering up to six scholarships that cover the full cost of registration for students from Gosper, Phelps, and Kearney Counties who want to attend this camp. The deadline to apply for TBNRD scholarships is April 30, 2018. More information about the camp and applying for the scholarships can be found on Tri-Basin NRD's website, www.tribasinnr.org, or by calling Nicole Salisbury at Tri-Basin NRD toll-free at 1-877-995-6688.

Chemigation Permit Renewals Due June 1

Chemigation renewal forms have been sent to producers and are due, along with payment, in the Tri-Basin NRD office by June 1, 2018. Anyone who wants to apply fertilizer or ag chemicals through their irrigation system needs to apply for a chemigation permit for the 2018 season. Landowners and operators should contact Tri-Basin NRD toll-free at 1-877-995-6688 regarding chemigation permits. All newly permitted chemigation systems must be inspected before use. A person who is certified as a chemigation applicator must supervise injection of fertilizer and ag chemicals in irrigation water.

NRD staff do routine inspections on chemigation systems from June until August. Routine inspections are required every three years. If your system is due for an inspection, you will receive a postcard this summer. Routine inspections must be completed for permits to be eligible for renewal the following year. Renewal permits are \$15 and new permits are \$50.

Check Meter Readings Before Starting Irrigation

As you are getting equipment read for irrigation season this spring, we'd like to remind you to record the meter readings on your irrigation flowmeters before you begin irrigating crops. We have your ending readings from 2017 in our records, and will use those as the beginning readings for 2018 on our Irrigation Water Management (Water Use) Forms. However, in the event of a discrepancy in readings or a broken meter, your recorded beginning reading can be extremely helpful in tracking down a problem or estimating water use!



Tri-Basin Topics

Non-Profit Permit
U. S. Postage
PAID
Holdrege, NE 68949
Permit No. 220

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District
1723 Burlington St. Holdrege, NE 68949
(308) 995-6688
email: tribasin@tribasinrd.org
www.tribasinrd.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Nebraska's NRDs: Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future

CALENDAR

April 5.....NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*

April 24 & 25 Water Jamboree at Harlan Co Reservoir

April 27..... Arbor Day
Coffee Connection/Tree Giveaway at TBNRD, 9:30 a.m.

May 8.....NRD Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.*

May 28.....NRD Closed for Memorial Day

June 12.....NRD Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.*

July 4NRD Closed for Independence Day

July 10NRD Board meeting, 1:30 p.m.

* Times are tentative. All meetings are at TBNRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.

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A mailing list is maintained and requests to be placed on the list should be sent to the above address. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to the General Manager.

Get Tri-Basin Topics in your inbox instead of your mailbox!

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