



Summer 2012
Volume 26, Issue 3

Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

TBNRD Celebrates 40 Years of Protecting Natural Resources

The year 2012 marks 40 years of Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) protecting the state's natural resources. This system for managing natural resources through locally elected officials is unique to Nebraska.

In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced, and the Nebraska Legislature enacted Legislative Bill (LB) 1357, to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts. The NRDs' boundaries were organized based on Nebraska's major river basins, which allows for management practices to be applied more efficiently to similar topography. In 1989, the Middle Missouri NRD and the Papio NRD merged, becoming the Papio-Missouri NRD, which resulted in the current 23-NRD system.

Locally, Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD) was formed by consolidating the Phelps, Gosper, and Kearney County Soil and Water Conservation Districts. TBNRD is unique among the 23 NRDs, as it encompasses portions of three different river basins: the Republican River Basin, the Platte River Basin, and the Little Blue River Basin.

The first official board meeting of Tri-Basin NRD was held in the basement of Bethel Lutheran Church on July 5, 1972. The original Executive Committee consisted of: Russell Edeal, Chairman; William Umberger, Vice Chairman; Osee Newbold, Secretary; and Millard Johnson, Treasurer. Directors from the Soil and Water Conservation Districts served as the first directors of Tri-Basin NRD. In November of 1973, board members voted to set a board membership with 13 directors (two directors from each of the six subdistricts and one director-at-large). The members of the newly-created board were selected in the November 1974 election.

Hazel Claar served as the first TBNRD secretary, moving over from the Phelps County Soil and Water Conservation District. Wages for a technician and office clerk were set at the first official meeting, too. In February 1973, directors began the search for a General Manager for TBNRD, as a



Conservation Day has educated 8th grade students in Tri-Basin NRD for nearly forty years. This tree planting demonstration was part of the 1988 Conservation Day.

result of which Gene Stoklasa was hired to start in July 1973.

The list of the first equipment purchased for Tri-Basin NRD consisted of a secretary desk, desk lamp, three folding chairs, a secretary chair, manager chair, Remington Adder, file cabinet, and a large desk. The total cost of the equipment was \$945.04.

Tri-Basin NRD began its efforts to educate area residents about natural resources early on. On October 4, 1973, the first 8th Grade Conservation Day was held. This annual program, now called Rainwater Basin Conservation Day, continues to educate district students today.

Over the past 40 years, Tri-Basin NRD has built a strong tradition of protecting the natural resources of Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties in south central Nebraska. Though the specific work of the district has evolved over time, Tri-Basin NRD's vision, set forth by the board of directors, has remained constant: "To work cooperatively with District residents and others to promote good stewardship of land and water resources." By implementing measures to protect soil and groundwater quality and quantity, as well as educating our youth about natural resources conservation, TBNRD is assuring our area's rich natural resources will be conserved for many generations to come.

In honor of the district's 40th anniversary, Tri-Basin NRD will host the Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce's Coffee AM on Friday, July 27 at 9:30 a.m. Everyone is invited to stop for refreshments and visit with district staff.



Dedicated to Conservation of our Natural Resources

<http://www.tribasinnrd.org>



Manager's Message

by John Thorburn

For this special 40th anniversary edition of the *Tri-Basin Topics* newsletter, I decided to talk to someone who was there at the moment of creation of our district. Russell "Russ" Edeal was the first chairman of the Tri-Basin NRD

Board of Directors. He served on the NRD Board from 1972 until 2001, but his interest in soil and water conservation dates back to his youth in Dawson County, where his father and grandfather served on the board of directors of the Dawson County Soil and Water Conservation District, or SWCD, a predecessor of today's NRDs. "It was in my blood," says Russ.

Russ moved to Phelps County in 1962, with his young bride, Kay, to farm some of his aunt and uncle's land. He was recruited to serve on the Phelps County SWCD by Loren Johnson in 1968. SWCD directors had to be "cooperators", landowners or operators, they weren't elected by the general public. The SWCDs were local "promoters of soil and water conservation. Looking back on what the NRDs do now, [the SWCDs] were just sort of smaller, didn't have any money. They were the hands-on local people that helped the natural resources agency people promote windbreaks and terraces...[UN-L Cooperative] extension was more involved in those types of things in those days" along with the USDA Soil Conservation Service, or SCS, said Edeal.

Legislation was drafted in the late 1960s to combine 154 local SWCDs, drainage districts, watershed districts and other local special-purpose districts into regional natural resources districts. "Warren Fairchild [Director of the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Commission at the time] and Dempsey McNiel from this area, he served on the [Soil and Water Conservation] Commission, and Mr. [state senator Maurice] Kremer, he was our leader in the state legislature" were three people who were instrumental in creating LB 1357, the bill that authorized the NRDs. That bill passed in 1969. "I first learned about politics, about how

things get done in the legislature, during the formation of the NRDs," commented Edeal.

Central NE Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) played a key role in the creation of Tri-Basin NRD in particular. "Our area was unique because of the [groundwater] mound, so there were efforts made to keep Tri-Basin as a separate entity, because all of the other NRDs went off [surface] water basins," Edeal explained.

"Don Long [CNPPID Assistant to the General Manager at the time] was a big help," said Russ. "He seemed to have a lot of friends, both rural and urban" among the senators. CNPPID Engineer Frank Dragoun was also instrumental in helping organize Tri-Basin NRD. "He was very involved with the formation of the NRDs... he was a big promoter of the

Tri-Basin area," according to Edeal. Dragoun was appointed to the TBNRD Board in 1972 as a director "at-large" and served until 1987.

Unlike some of the eastern NRDs, where dozens of districts were merged, and their combined boards had "hundreds of members" re-organizing three county SWCDs into Tri-Basin NRD proceeded smoothly. "We didn't have turf battles," Russ said. It was more a question of "what is the NRD gonna be able to do, versus those districts that did have watersheds?" he said. "It was probably an education for a lot of people, the difference between southwest Gosper County

and northeast Kearney County" in relation to rainfall, topography and soils.

One of the NRD's earliest challenges was simply to inventory the soil and water resources of the district. "In the beginning, Frank [Dragoun] and I felt that the money that the NRD was getting from the levy should be used for baseline studies," he said.

Russ and I had a great conversation and we covered a lot of topics that the limited space of my column doesn't allow me to relate in detail. His parting comments to me are especially important to convey, however, because Russ is not one who just reminisces about the past. He is always thinking about the future. Russ said, "We want the younger generation to continue to be interested in the [natural resources] issues and be looking at more win-win solutions, rather than all-or-nothing approaches to problems."



Russ and Kay Edeal

Nebraska Natives

Sandcherry (*Prunus besseyi*)

Sandcherry is a low-growing shrub native to western Nebraska. It has showy white flowers in May and produces small, sweet, purplish-black cherries in July. Sandcherry can tolerate hot, dry conditions, and prefers well-drained soils. The cherries are especially good for making jelly or jam. Young plants need to be protected from rabbits and deer.



Holloway to Retire from Tri-Basin NRD



Richard Holloway, Tri-Basin NRD's Assistant Manager, retired at the end of June 2012. Rich started working for Tri-Basin NRD in February, 1987 as a technician. In 1997, he became the Water Resources Coordinator, then was named Tri-Basin NRD's Assistant Manager in 2001. Holloway has played an integral role in the district's water management programs throughout his 25 years of service.

Rich is well-known to many farmers as our chief chemigation system inspector. His most significant and lasting accomplishment during his tenure with the NRD, however, was overseeing the construction and operation of the NRD's Dedicated Observation Well Network, the most extensive groundwater level measurement system in Nebraska. Over 100 observation wells were drilled and their geologic characteristics were recorded during their construction.

Nolan Little, who is currently TBNRD's Water Resources Technician, will become the district's Water Resources Manager. He and Tammy Fahrenbruch, Tri-Basin's Office Manager, will coordinate the district's groundwater management programs.

Tri-Basin Welcomes New Staff, Summer Interns

The retirement of Richard Holloway and the growth of the district's chemigation and groundwater management programs have led to a few staff changes and additions at Tri-Basin NRD.

Brett Beinke began working at TBNRD in early June as the Water Resources Technician. Brett, from Kearney, has a bachelor's degree in geography from the University of Nebraska-Kearney. His hobbies include hunting, fishing, and boating.

Jeff VanEperen became Tri-Basin's Seasonal Field Technician in May. During the school year, Jeff teaches biology at Holdrege High School. He and his wife, Denise, have three sons, Tyler, Travis, and Marcus. Jeff is a member of Fridhem Lutheran Church and enjoys hunting and fishing.

Andy Miller of Omaha has re-

turned to work as a Tri-Basin NRD intern for a second summer. Andy attends the University of Nebraska-Kearney and is studying geography, GIS, and environmental science. He is a member of Phi Gamma Delta, Loper Legion, and an Undergraduate Research Fellow.

Andrew Tellus from Holdrege is a new TBNRD intern this summer. He is studying pre-professional Music Therapy at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Andrew is a member of Delta Tau Delta fraternity and his hobbies include playing guitar and music.



Andrew Tellus, Andy Miller, Jeff VanEperen, and Brett Beinke

Remember to take irrigation well water samples for Groundwater Management Area reports! Sample bottles are available at Tri-Basin NRD and NRCS offices.



Summer 2012

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

July 4Independence Day
July 10 NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*
July 14-19Kearney County Fair
July 22-26 Phelps County Fair
July 26-28 Gosper County Fair
July 27 Coffee AM at TBNRD, 9:30 a.m.
August 14NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.
Monsanto Water Center in Gothenburg
August 24-September 3.....Nebraska State Fair
September 3 Labor Day
September 11NRD Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
September 12-14Husker Harvest Days
September 20 ... Rainwater Basin Conservation Day

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

TRI-BASIN NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

David Nickel, Chairman Kearney, NE
David Olsen, Vice ChairmanMinden, NE
Todd Garrelts, Treasurer Holdrege, NE
Bradley Lundeen, Secretary Wilcox, NE
Brian Bergstrom Axtell, NE
Ed Harris Loomis, NE
Phyllis Johnson Bertrand, NE
Joe Larson Loomis, NE
David Nelson Upland, NE
David Raffety Kearney, NE
Larry Reynolds Lexington, NE
Ray Winz Holdrege, NE

TRI-BASIN NRD STAFF

John Thorburn General Manager
Charles Brooks Land Resources Coordinator
Carie Lynch Administrative Secretary
Nolan Little Water Resources Manager
Brett Beinke Water Resources Technician
Alex Hasenauer Land Resources Technician
Tammy Fahrenbruch Office Manager
Esther Smith Office Clerk
Nicole Salisbury Information & Education Coordinator
Destinee Steinke Data Entry Clerk
Jeff VanEperen Seasonal Field Technician
Ruth Nielsen Minden Office Secretary
Lori Hagan Elwood Office Secretary
Tami Reese Holdrege Office Secretary

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!

To request an electronic version of this newsletter, send an email nsalisbury@tribasinrd.org.