

Water issues on table at summit

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Platte Institute meets at Monsanto Learning Center.

First of two parts

Describing water as Nebraska's oil, Pete Ricketts kicked off the Platte Institute's Water Management Summit last Thursday morning.

About 150 people from around the state gathered at the Monsanto Water Utilization and Learning Center to hear water experts, state senators and others discuss ways to better balance the state's resource among private, environmental and economic interests.

Ricketts, who is president and director of the Platte Institute, said now is a good time to talk about water issues since policy makers are not under the pressure of drought.

Jane Griffin, president of The Groundwater Foundation, said just as we Nebraskans rely on groundwater to sustain our lives, groundwater relies on us to make sound management decisions so the resource will be available for future generations.

Griffin suggested a holistic approach when making decisions about water.

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Educating people about water, where it comes from and inspiring action to ensure sustainable, clean groundwater for future generations is a priority of the institute, she said.

“Since groundwater plays a critical role in our lives, we all play a part in protecting it,” Griffin said.

Texas attorney Mary Kelly, a national water expert, said there have been enormous innovations in Nebraska water law.

Kelly noted that the state has developed a fairly comprehensive water management framework for the use of surface and groundwater.

Nebraska relies on prior appropriation of surface water which means those with first-time appropriation rights have priority.

When those rights are exercised after years of non-use, however, she said litigation

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Editor's note: A look at economic issues, river and groundwater measurement, endangered species and the future of water in Nebraska will be featured in next week's issue of The Times.