

Water funding a necessity

Written by Lyndon Vogt
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The Central Platte NRD is one of 23 NRDs that rely on state funding to study water management issues, develop management plans, and construct flood control projects to protect urban, residential, commercial properties and agricultural land.

Two water funding bills currently being debated by the Nebraska Legislature (LB 940 & LB 1046) may seem to have a hefty price tag, but the funding is essential in order to maintain the quality of life that we enjoy in Nebraska. The bills would provide resources now, and in the future, to sustain and improve water management.

Currently, the State of Nebraska funds just over \$3 million a year to the Nebraska Resources Development Fund, which assists in sharing the cost, with other entities, of vital water-related projects in the state. The \$3 million annual allocation is not sufficient to address current projects already under construction and doesn't begin to address the long-term water resource needs identified by the Water Funding Task Force.

Water quality and quantity affect every single person statewide and in our local Natural Resources District. A few reasons adequate funding is needed here in central Nebraska:

~Flood Control- The Central Platte NRD lies in the south central part of Nebraska, straddling the Platte River, from Gothenburg to Columbus. Prior to the NRD constructing over 30 flood control projects, flooding caused millions of dollars in damage to property and infrastructure within the NRD. Currently, funds already approved by the Natural Resources Commission are needed to complete a large-scale project- the Upper Prairie/Silver/Moores Creek Flood Control Project in Buffalo and Hall Counties. Construction on the project started in 2007.

This project has the highest rate of return ever funded by the Resources Development Fund at 34.61%. The Resources Development Fund has provided nearly \$6.7 million towards the project, with an additional \$10.6 million required from the Fund to complete the project that the state has approved and is obligated to fund under state statute. The passage of the bills would also ensure that the local partner resources in the amount of \$12.8 million already expended for this project will be utilized to complete the established project goals.

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Funding is also needed to maintain current flood control projects that have been successful in preventing damage such as the Wood River Floodway in Hall County, Warm Slough/Trouble Creek Floodway in Merrick County, and Kearney Northeast Floodway in Buffalo County.

~Water Quality- The CPNRD is just over 2 million acres in size, with over 1 million of those acres irrigated. Funding would allow continued management of Nitrates in our drinking water, which has decreased since the NRD's Water Quality Management Program was implemented in 1987. Although landowners have implemented successful management practices that have contributed to nitrate levels decreasing, certain areas within the NRD still have average nitrate levels above EPA recommendations.

~Water Quantity- NRDs have implemented numerous water quantity plans across the state addressing the use of groundwater and surface water within each district; however, sufficient funding would allow better planning from basin to basin to ensure the most water availability for all areas of the state. Existing plans with the federal government and other states, such as the Platte River Implementation Recovery Program, are in the first phases of long-term plans with future funding needed.

The reality is that there are \$488 million of existing projects in Nebraska being tackled without state funding and another \$907 million of proposed projects as identified by the natural resources districts, the state's irrigation districts and Nebraska municipalities.

Lyndon Vogt, general manager

Central Platte Natural Resources District