

UNL tour to examine limited Platte Basin water supplies

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A four-day July water and natural resources tour will examine the challenges of sharing limited water supplies in the North and South Platte River basins in Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming.

The tour includes a visit to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's (USBR) North Platte irrigation project.

The tour is July 12-15, beginning and ending in Kearney. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Water Center, Kearney Area Chamber of Commerce, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District and Nebraska Public Power District jointly sponsor it.

"The tour will take an in-depth look at North and South Platte River basin issues and how they that effect Nebraska from a number of perspectives," said tour co-organizer and host Michael Jess.

Tour stops will be along the North and South branches of the Platte River.

"A tour highlight will be visiting the USBR's North Plate Project, which is one of the most historic and famous federal impoundment projects in the western states and something that everyone interested in Nebraska water issues needs to see," said tour co-organizer Steve Ress of the UNL Water Center. "Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado are highly dependent on irrigation water and hydropower generated in the North Platte watershed and are legally tied to sharing its waters."

USBR Project construction began more than 100 years ago under then-President Theodore Roosevelt. Water impounded in its series of reservoirs irrigates a large swath of cropland in western Nebraska, above Lake McConaughy.

First day stops and topics include progress of the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, Colorado's Tamarack wildlife area and water augmentation program, water supply and use challenges from continuing urbanization of Colorado's Front Range, and allocation of

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stream flows among irrigators in Nebraska and Wyoming.

There also will be talk of water for wildlife habitat, water well moratoriums and efficiency measures and their impacts on generation of hydroelectric power.

Afternoon discussion turns to Colorado/Nebraska interstate water compacts, a visit to Colorado's Tamarack water augmentation project for the Platte River and recent water well shutdowns in eastern Colorado that have left many groundwater irrigators high and dry.

Overnight is in Fort Collins, CO.

On the morning of July 13, the tour visits the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation at Colorado State University before driving north through Cameron Pass and over the continental divide on the way to Wyoming and stops at Seminole Dam, Fremont Canyon power plant and Pathfinder reservoir, all features of the USBR's North Platte irrigation and hydropower project.

Overnight is in Casper, WY.

The following morning, John Lawson, area manager of the USBR in Mills, WY., will explain operations of USBR's North Platte, Kendrick and Shoshone projects before the tour proceeds to Glendo reservoir and power plant for a picnic lunch and then continues down the North Platte River to Guernsey Dam, near the Nebraska border, which is used to regulate water releases to reservoirs and irrigated lands in Nebraska.

Once in Nebraska, tour participants will hear from local irrigation district managers and examine the Fort Laramie and Interstate canals, as well as the Whalen and Tri-State diversion dams. Discussions will include operations in the Farmers Irrigation District, near Scottsbluff, and the importance of return flows for surface irrigators in western Nebraska.

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Overnight is in Scottsbluff, where a western barbeque near Chimney Rock is planned.

On the tour's last day, July 15, discussion moves into controlling water-robbing invasive species that choke many reaches of the Platte River. Steve Brill of the Goshen County Weed and Pest Control District, Torrington, WY, and Extension educator Gary Stone of UNL's Panhandle Research and Extension Center in Scottsbluff will lead those discussions.

The tour then proceeds to Bridgeport for an overview of North Platte River operations by Tom Hayden of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

The tour's final stop is in Sidney before returning to Kearney.

Cost is \$600 single occupancy or \$500 double occupancy. Registration includes all food, motel, and motor coach expenses. Registration is through Jennie Dickey at the Kearney Area Chamber of Commerce at (800) 227-8340. Those interested in attending are encouraged to register soon as the tour is expected to sell-out quickly.

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