

Central Platte NRD Newsletter



215 Kaufman Ave

Grand Island NE

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cpnrd.org

What's New for CPNRD Cost-Share Programs in 2026/2027

The Central Platte NRD Board of Directors approved several changes to its 2026/2027 cost-share budget, including two new programs designed to improve water quality and protect drinking water supplies. The following updates will take effect July 1.

New Chemigation Incentive Program

The Chemigation Incentive Program provides reimbursement of 50% of actual costs up to \$3,500 per field with a lifetime maximum reimbursement of \$7,000. Participation is limited to two fields or a maximum of 320 acres/landowner.

Eligible expenses include chemical injection pumps, interlocks, injection valves, mainline check valves, low-pressure drains, and discharge hoses. To qualify, landowners must also be enrolled in the Sensor-Based Nutrient Management Program. The program is intended to encourage producers to utilize chemigation as a fertilizer application method, helping improve nutrient management and protect groundwater resources.

New Reverse Osmosis System Program

CPNRD also approved a new Reverse Osmosis System Program to help reduce nitrate levels in household drinking water supplied by private wells. The program reimburses 50% of the actual cost of a reverse osmosis system, up to \$750 per home. Applicants must provide a nitrate water test and proof of well registration prior to approval. Assistance is limited to one system per landowner per home.

Tree and Weed Barrier Program

Cost-share assistance for tree plantings will increase to 75% of actual costs, up to \$5,000, for projects that include 200 or more trees. The increase was approved to encourage additional large-scale tree and weed barrier plantings throughout the District. This year, CPNRD sold 24,225 tree seedlings through its Conservation Tree Program, bringing the total number of trees sold since 1972 to 3,974,837. The District also sold 2.66 miles of fabric weed barrier, increasing the total sold since 1991 to 637 miles.

Phragmites and Soil Moisture Sensor Programs

The Board also discontinued the Phragmites and Soil Moisture Sensor programs due to low participation in recent years.

Your CPNRD Contact:

Kelly Cole 308-395-7134 | cole@cpnrd.org



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CENTRAL PLATTE NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Director	Subdistrict
Keith Ostermeier, Grand Island	At-Large
Jay Richeson, Gothenburg	1
Brian Keiser, Gothenburg	1
Dwayne Margritz, Lexington	2
Tom Downey, Lexington	2
Marvion Reichert, Elm Creek	3
Luke Ourada, Elm Creek	3
Lon Bohn, Gibbon	4
Ryan Kegley, Kearney	4
Deb VanMatre, Gibbon	5
Mike Wilkens, Gibbon	5
Jerry Milner, Grand Island	6
Mick Reynolds, Wood River	6
John Stoltenberg, Cairo	7
Ed Stoltenberg, Cairo	7
Todd Arends, Grand Island	8
Kevin Werner, Grand Island	8
Amy Kyes, Central City	9
Doug Reeves, Archer	9
Chuck Maser, Grand Island	10
Barry Obermiller, Grand Island	10

Board Officers

Chairman	Deb VanMatre
Vice Chairman	Tom Downey
Secretary	Keith Ostermeier
Treasurer	Marvion Reichert

Staff Member

Staff Member	Position
Lyndon Vogt	General Manager
Jesse Mintken	Assistant Manager
Tom Backer	Projects Assistant
David Carr	Range Management
Zachary Charity	RWB JV Easement Specialist
Kelly Cole	Administrative Assistant
Darren Cudaback	Precision Conservation
Tricia Dudley	Water Quality Specialist
Brandi Flyer	Hydrologist
Korey Gerken	Cozad Ditch Rider
Jim Harris	TMID Manager
Chase Heck	Prescribed Fire Specialist
Bill Hiatt	Resources Conservationist
Devin Hingst	Resources Conservationist
Dean Krull	UNL/CPNRD Project Coord.
Marcia Lee	Information/Ed Specialist
Shane Max	Resources Conservationist
Cara Crandell	Office Assistant
Marci Ostergard	TMID Office Assistant
Mike Ostergard	TMID Technician
Collin Quandt	Agronomist
Michael Schmeeckle	Cozad Ditch Manager
Brody Vorderstrasse	Communications Assistant
Angela Warner	GIS Coordinator
Courtney Widup	Water Resources Technician
Luke Zakrzewski	GIS Image Analyst

NRD/NRCS Secretary

NRD/NRCS Secretary	County
Lexie Zubia	Hall
Kyla Friedrichsen	Merrick
Lisa Kennicutt	Dawson
Shelly Lippincott	Buffalo

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send your email address to lee@cpnrd.org

Board of Directors Updates

2026 General Election

The following Central Platte NRD Board of Directors up for re-election had no opposition in the Primary.

Subdistrict/Director

- 1 Brian Keiser, Gothenburg
- 2 Tom Downey, Lexington
- 3 Luke Ourada, Elm Creek
- 4 Lon Bohn, Gibbon
- 5 Deb VanMatre, Gibbon
- 6 Jerry Milner, Grand Island
- 7 Ed Stoltenberg, Cairo
- 8 Kevin Werner, Grand Island
- 9 Amy Kyes, Central City
- 10 Charles Maser, Grand Island

At-Large Keith Ostermeier, Grand Island

Directors Serve in State Leadership Roles

CPNRD Chairman Deb VanMatre was elected as Secretary/Treasurer of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) Board and the NARD Risk Pool Board. The NARD Board includes representatives from Nebraska's 23 NRDs and helps guide statewide natural resource policy, while the Risk Pool Board oversees health insurance programs for NRD employees.



Director Tom Downey recently completed his appointment to Governor Jim Pillen's Water Quality & Quantity Task Force as the Nitrate Legacy and Drinking Water Representative. The Task Force delivered its final report in March, outlining 14 recommendations to protect groundwater and surface water resources while supporting ag production and economic growth. Recommendations included new funding sources for water projects, improved nitrogen use efficiency, support for rural drinking water systems, expanded soil health practices, and regional water system development.



Important Dates



July 23

2026-27 Budget Hearing (*prior to Board Meeting*)
Board of Directors Meeting 2:00 p.m.

September 1

Transfer of irrigated acres applications accepted
September 1 - March 1

September 3

2026-27 Levy Hearing (*prior to Board Meeting*)
August Board of Directors Meeting 2:00 p.m.

September 24

September Board Meeting 2:00 p.m.

Starting September 3, the Board of Directors monthly meetings will be held at CPNRD's new office at 9644 W. 13th Street, Wood River.

Water Connections

Below are timely updates on irrigation reminders, water issues, and water policy that may impact producers and communities throughout the Central Platte NRD and Nebraska.

Chemigation

- **Equipment Maintenance**

Irrigators using chemigation equipment should ensure all required safety devices are functioning properly. Routine maintenance, including checking sand traps, seals, and electrical components, can help prevent costly breakdowns during peak irrigation periods.

- **Chemigation Inspections**

System inspections are required every 3 years. If you received notification that your chemigation inspection is due this year, be sure to call the CPNRD at 308-385-6282 to schedule your inspection before September 15th.

Water and Soil Tests

Producers planting corn, grain sorghum, or potatoes in Phases II/III of CPNRD's Groundwater Quality Management Program are required to take groundwater samples and deep soil samples for Nitrogen to include with their annual Nitrogen Management Crop Report.

Water Samples: Groundwater analysis for nitrogen content should be taken on each field. Water sample bottles are provided by your agronomist, crop consultant or lab.

Soil Samples: Deep soils analysis for residual nitrogen (NO₃-N) must be taken on each field or 80-acre tract. The composite sample tested must consist of a mixture from no less than (1) 3-foot probe every 5 acres. The report from the lab must be attached to the annual report.



Mid-Season Irrigation Reminder

As irrigation season progresses, it's important to monitor soil moisture levels and avoid allowing soils to reach critical depletion levels that can stress crops and reduce yields. Track rainfall, irrigation applications, and soil moisture conditions to maximize water-use efficiency throughout the growing season.

Make Dryland Corner More Productive

Dryland pivot corners often experience greater moisture stress than irrigated acres. Options to improve productivity are to reduce seeding rates, plant drought-tolerant crops such as grain sorghum or millet, establish perennial forage grasses, or enroll low-producing acres in habitat and conservation programs.

Perkins County Canal

The Perkins County Canal is a proposed water infrastructure project designed to divert water from the South Platte River in Colorado to western Nebraska. The project aims to protect Nebraska's Platte River water rights and reduce losses caused by upstream water use in Colorado. Project supporters estimate that Nebraska and other water management entities have lost approximately 1 million acre-feet of water during the non-irrigation season over the past 20 years that could have been secured if the canal had been in place.

Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Flows

The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) continues to make progress toward its flow targets. The Program currently provides 112,000 acre-feet of water annually toward its target flow goals for endangered species. Future target flow needs are 120,000 acre-feet annually, requiring an additional 8,000 acre-feet of water to reach the target. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed the target flows used by the program to compare river flows

Learn more: www.cpnrd.org | 308-385-6282

Follow Central Platte NRD:



USDA Drought Assistance Available for Producers

Livestock producers who experienced grazing losses due to drought may be eligible for assistance through the USDA's **Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP)**. Eligible producers must own, lease or contract-grow livestock and provide pasture or grazing land on qualifying drought date. Grazing land must be reported to the Farm Service Agency (FSA), with Nebraska's annual acreage reporting deadline set for July 15, 2026. Applications for 2026 losses are due by March 1, 2027.

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) may help cover above-normal costs associated with hauling water, feed, or livestock during drought conditions. Commercial beekeepers may also qualify for assistance when drought reduces natural forage. ELAP applications for 2026 losses are due by March 1, 2027. Additional drought recovery programs are available through FSA:

- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)**: Helps producers implement emergency water conservation measures
- **Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)**: Assists private forest landowners in restoring drought-damaged acreage.
- **Tree Assistance Program (TAP)**: Orchardists and nursery growers may also qualify for cost-share assistance through the to rehabilitate or replace eligible trees, bushes and vines.
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**: Emergency and non-emergency haying and grazing of CRP acres may be authorized in drought-affected areas outside the primary nesting season. Producers should contact their local FSA office for eligibility requirements and stocking rate information.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help producers improve drought resilience through conservation planning, soil health practices, and water conservation measures. Financial assistance may be available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

For additional information about USDA disaster assistance programs visit [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov) or contact your local USDA Service Center.

Meet Chase Heck - New Prescribed Fire Specialist!

Chase was hired in May of 2026 through a partnership with Central Platte NRD, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture and NRCS as a Prescribed Fire Specialist. A Grand Island native, Chase graduated from Northwest High School (2022) where he then studied at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, graduating in 2026 with a degree in Fisheries & Wildlife and a minor in Water Science.

During his time at the University, Chase was a part of the Center for Grassland Studies burn team where he served as both a burn boss and a prescribed fire educator, teaching future habitat managers the art of using fire as a tool. Chase was also a member of the Tri-County Prescribed Burn Association, president of the UNL Forestry Club, and was goalie for the UNL Men's Club Soccer team.

As he takes on his new role, Chase will be creating prescribed fire burn plans for NRCS easements, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service land, and implementing prescribed burns for private landowners and CPNRD properties. Part of his duties will also include prescribed fire outreach, working with grants in order to assist habitat managers in being able to utilize fire as a management tool all across the state.

Chase hopes to demonstrate how the benefits of prescribed fire can improve landowner operations, help lead the next generation of fire practitioners, create more students of fire, and push back woody encroachment. In his free time he enjoys hanging out with friends, playing soccer, hunting, fishing and smoking meats on his pellet grill.

Your CPNRD Contact: Chase Heck | 308-395-7654 | heck@cpnrd.org



Groundwater Levels Remain Stable Across Most of CPNRD

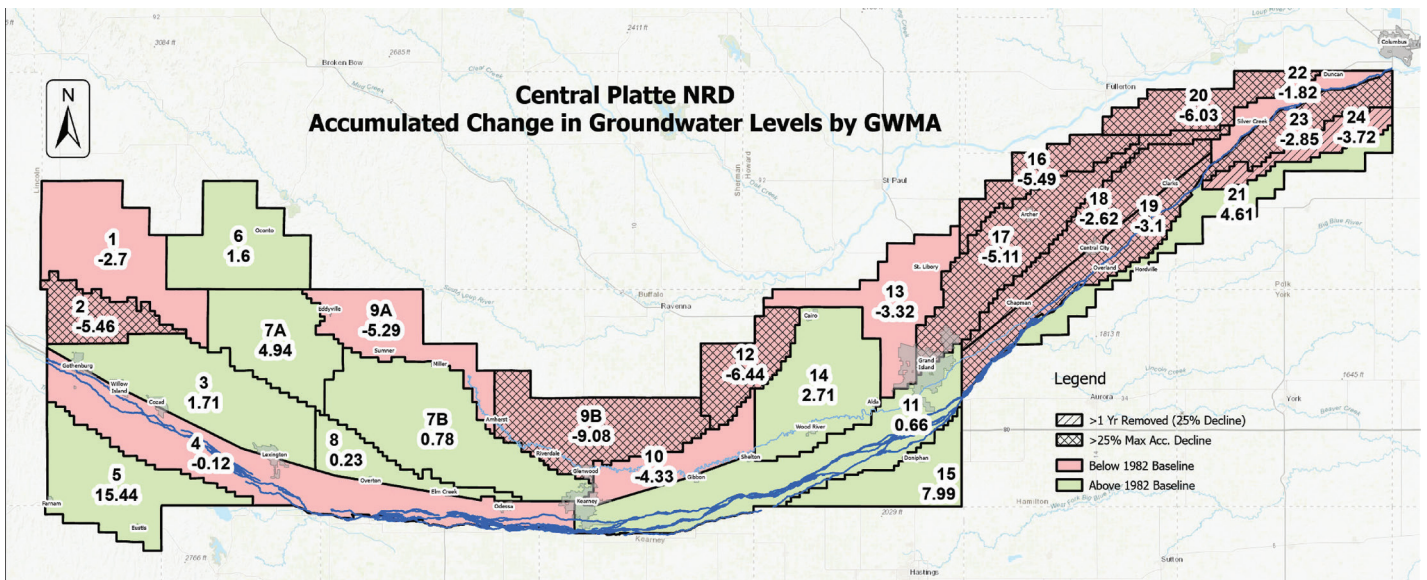
Spring groundwater measurements showed a district-wide average decline of 0.42 feet from 2025 and 1.22 foot decline compared to the 1982 baseline year. CPNRD’s Groundwater Management Plan establishes maximum acceptable groundwater level declines and safety margins for each of the district’s 26 Groundwater Management Areas (GMAs). Based on the 2026 measurements, two GMAs have moved into Phase II management after reaching the 25% decline threshold: GMA 2 in Dawson County and GMA 18 in Merrick County. Phase II management includes restrictions on groundwater transfers and the development of supplemental irrigation wells.

Three areas that continue to experience groundwater declines and will be closely monitored include:

- GMA 9B (Buffalo County): Declined 0.16 feet from 2025 | 9.08 feet below the 1982 baseline
- GMA 16 (Merrick County): Declined 0.30 feet from 2025 | 5.49 feet below the 1982 baseline
- GMA 20 (Nance, Merrick, Platte counties): Declined 0.47 feet from 2025 | 6.03 feet below the 1982 baseline

The NRD’s Static Water Level Monitoring Network consists of 451 wells across the district, including 386 irrigation wells and 65 dedicated monitoring wells. These wells are measured each spring and fall as part of the district’s Groundwater Management Plan. Spring measurements are used to assess long-term groundwater level trends, while fall measurements help staff evaluate annual drawdowns and monitor short-term changes.

Since 2000, an average of 405 wells has been measured annually, equating to approximately one monitoring well for every 2,500 irrigated acres within the district. For the 2026 assessment, CPNRD staff collected measurements from 410 wells, consistent with the long-term average. This monitoring network provides critical data for tracking groundwater level trends and supports informed management decisions to help ensure the long-term sustainability of groundwater resources in central Nebraska.



Could Your Photo Be Here?



Do you have a favorite photo that captures the beauty of Nebraska? We’re looking for photos for the statewide NRD calendar and would love to showcase the people, places, and natural resources that make Nebraska special! Photos may include Nebraska landscapes, wildlife, trees, flowers, conservation projects, producers in the field, outdoor recreation or volunteers in action.

How to Submit Your Photo

1. Email or text photo to: lee@cpnrd.org or 308-380-1220
2. Include caption and location of where photo was taken

Send us your best shots! You have plenty of time, we’re accepting submissions through September. Selected photos may be featured in the annual statewide calendar and displayed in CPNRD’s office.

Your CPNRD Contact: Marcia Lee | 308-395-7551 | lee@cpnrd.org

Explore More of Nebraska This Summer

Looking for a fun way to get outdoors and win prizes this summer? Join the NRD Recreation Exploration to discover some of Nebraska's most beautiful outdoor destinations while earning chances to win exciting prizes, including a grand prize of \$1,500 in Scheels gift cards!

The program encourages families to explore Nebraska's natural resources and enjoy quality time together in the outdoors. From the rolling Sandhills to the scenic Platte River, more than 80 NRD recreation areas across the state are waiting to be explored through September 18, 2026.



Central Platte NRD's crane viewing sites near Alda and Gibbon (Richard Plautz Crane Viewing Site), and B-1 Reservoir north of Lexington, are among participating locations. CPNRD's crane viewing sites feature paved trails to enjoy a peaceful walk along the river and observation decks to view wildlife. B-1 offers hiking around the reservoir. All three sites are open year-round and free to the public. Whether you're hiking a trail, fishing at a lake, birdwatching, biking, or simply enjoying Nebraska's scenery, every adventure is an opportunity to connect with nature and create lasting memories.

How to Participate

1. Visit NRD recreation areas across Nebraska. Locations: www.nrdnet.org/recreation
2. Take a photo during your visit
3. Upload a photo using the Recreation Exploration form at: www.nrdnet.org/recreation

All entries will be eligible for prize drawings throughout the program, including the grand prize drawing of \$1,500 in Scheels gift cards. *The NRD Recreation Exploration Program is sponsored by the Nebraska Association of Natural Resources Districts (NARD) Foundation and Scheels.*

Students Discover the Importance of Groundwater

The annual Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival hosted by Central Platte NRD brought 800 fifth-grade students from 23 schools to Grand Island in May for a day of interactive learning focused on groundwater and natural resources.

Held at Central Community College and College Park, the Festival uses hands-on activities and interactive demonstrations to help students understand that groundwater supplies drinking water for most Nebraskans and supports the state's agricultural economy. Throughout the day, students rotate through seven educational sessions led by natural resource professionals, educators, and organizations from across Nebraska. Topics included groundwater, watersheds, agriculture, wildlife, weather, conservation, water quality, recycling, pollution prevention and more.



Some of the engaging activities students enjoyed were groundwater models, stormwater pollution demonstrations, soil infiltration experiments, weather games, geology investigations and water quality testing. The hands-on format encourages students to actively participate while learning how their everyday choices can affect groundwater.

"The Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival gives students the opportunity to experience science and natural resources in a fun and meaningful way," said Marcia Lee, CPNRD Information/Education Specialist. "The enthusiasm of our presenters and volunteers helps students understand how important groundwater is to their everyday lives with the goal to inspire them to be mindful of our natural resources."

CPNRD extends its sincere appreciation to the many schools, presenters, volunteers, sponsors, and partners who helped make this year's Festival a success. Nearly 95 presenters and 80 volunteers assisted with classroom activities, guiding school groups, registration, lunch service, and event coordination throughout the day. **Learn more:** cpnrd.org/education