

North Platte Natural Resources District Irrigation Newsletter

Issue 4

The NPNRD is in the final stages of reviewing the Rules and Regulations adopted in 2019. It is expected that the new Rules and Regulations be approved at the November 14, 2024, board meeting and will go into effect immediately. There will be a public hearing before the board meeting on November 14th at 2:30 pm providing the public a chance to offer written or verbal testimonies about the proposed Rules and Regulations.

The public is welcome to attend all board meetings and the Water Resources Committee meetings. The North Platte Natural Resources District conducts its Board Meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 3 pm. The meetings are held at the office located at 100547 Airport Road, Scottsbluff. We welcome your thoughts and opinions on upcoming projects.

There is a statewide concern about Nitrate contamination. The NPNRD is committed to addressing this issue. If the local governing office (NRD) does not start to combat the issue, there could be other state or federal agencies charged with handling the regulation of Nitrate contamination in groundwater. Many of the practices being considered have already been adopted by producers throughout the district. The intent of the North Platte NRD is to keep local control. The best way to do that is to show improvement in the Nitrate contamination.

The NPNRD is primarily focused on groundwater. However, due to the nature of Nitrate application, **the NRD is including Surface Water acres in the new rules** concerning Nitrate Application. We understand that this includes landowners who have not been regulated by the NRD previously. We hope you contact the North Platte Natural Resources District with any concerns, questions, or support. We want to make improvements to the groundwater with as little disruption to farming practices as possible.



North Platte
NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

Welcome to Issue #4 of the Irrigation Newsletter! This newsletter is intended to inform **groundwater and surface water irrigators** within the District. The information included in this newsletter is made possible with the help of the University of Nebraska Extension and USDA-NRCS.

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Rules and Regulations Changes

Nitrogen Application

The Nebraska Legislature has stated that the levels of nitrogen in groundwater is increasing. They have also determined that Natural Resource Districts have the legal authority to regulate certain activities that may contribute to groundwater contamination.

The requirements for Nitrogen Management for the District are being modified.

- The new rules require all land served by a ground water well or a surface water right have annual soil samples taken.
- Annual water samples are also required to be taken on lands irrigated with groundwater.
- These soil and water samples must be provided to the district annually.

The proposed guidelines for soil samples are:

- Samples must be taken on at least every 80 acres.
- Each sample site must be georeferenced.
- The minimum allowable depth for each sample must be 24 inches.
- Sample analyses must be conducted by a licensed laboratory that offers soil testing services.
- Results must be provided to the District no later than December 31st for the prior year.

The proposed guidelines for water samples are:

- Surface water-only Applicators will be exempt from water sampling.
- Annual water analysis of nitrate-nitrogen content taken from either each well or at the final point of distribution.
- Samples taken from the final distribution point must be georeferenced and identify each well that feeds into the final distribution point.
- Sample analyses must be conducted by a licensed laboratory that offers water testing services.
- Results must be provided to the District no later than December 31st for the prior year.

There will be cost share available for soil sampling. More information will come out at a later date.



Surface Water Registration

The NRD will be working with the Surface Water only irrigators in the next few months to register their surface water acres. The purpose of registration is to have land associated with the annual samples sent in for nitrogen management in the District database. Registration of the acres will not affect the water right or any agreements with the Surface Water Districts. The District will be sending out papers for registration for landowners to sign and return. Beginning January 1, 2025, all acres irrigated with surface water shall be registered and approved by the District according to the new rules and regulations.



This will not have any impact on the water rights themselves. This information will not be shared with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as they already have the information. The registration of the acres is to help NPNRD keep a record of the nitrate sample data.

Allocations

A pilot study will be initiated in the Pumpkin Creek Basin to allow an annual base allocation increase of 2 inches. This pilot study will last 5 years, from Water Year 2025 to Water Year 2029. There will be a 14-inch allocation per year beginning in Water Year 2025. The District will evaluate the effects of the 14-inch allocation on groundwater and stream flow, as compared to the 12-inch allocation.



Tips for Sampling

Soil:

Timing

- Sampling is recommended annually to determine residual nutrients
- Spring sampling is ideal, especially for nitrate-nitrogen testing
- Collect the soil sample after one crop matures and before planting the next crop
- Sampling the same field at the same time every year is recommended for the most consistent results

Location

- Sample sites should be geolocated (assigned a GPS location) so the fields can be sampled in the same spots annually
- Avoid:
 - Abandoned farmsteads or feedlot sites
 - Fence rows
 - Wet or eroded spots
 - End rows
 - Feedlot
- Sample significant landscape areas separately:
 - Soil types
 - Erosion
 - Drainage
 - Crop history

Water:

Timing

- Take samples from irrigation wells at or after the second irrigation event to avoid biases

Location

- Sample from multiple irrigation wells to accurately quantify the nitrogen addition



Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act

The Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) established a state program to incentivize producers to reduce commercial fertilizers' use. The requirements are that producers verify a reduction in nitrogen fertilizer application rates as the lesser of 40 pounds per acre or 15% of their baseline application rate. To become eligible for NiRIA producers must:

- Provide soil samples under Rules and Regulations guidelines
- Use the UNL Corn Calculator to determine crop nitrogen requirement for the crop planted
- Complete the application provided by DNR
- The deadline for applications is January 15, 2025

This program will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The deadline for applications is January 15, 2025. After the District reviews applications, they will be sent to the DNR by March 15, 2025, for final approval. Producers will have to provide fertilizer receipts proving nitrogen reduction, by January 15, 2026. Once this documentation has been provided, sent, and approved by DNR, the District will issue payment to the producer.

Important Dates

- 11/14/2024, 2:30 pm: Public Hearing for pending Rules and Regulations
- 11/14/2024, 3:00 pm: Board Meeting and Rules and Regulations pending approval
- 1/1/2025: All acres irrigated with surface water shall be registered with the District
- 1/15/2025: Application deadline for the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act

Well Registration and Decommission

All water wells must be registered with the Department of Natural Resources within 60 days after construction. A water well is considered any excavation constructed to explore or monitor groundwater, obtain hydrogeologic information, extract water from, or inject fluid into an underground water reservoir. This is so there is complete information on the occurrence and use of groundwater to ensure the development of a sound groundwater policy. Whoever constructs the water well is obligated to register it, whether it is the landowner or the licensed well driller. If there are any modifications to the well the Department of Natural Resources needs to be notified within 60 days by the licensed water well contractor or pump installation contractor.

Decommission Wells

Unused wells that have not been properly decommissioned are a threat to humans or animals that might fall into them. They also allow toxic chemicals to seep into underground water supplies. State law requires all abandoned water wells to be decommissioned. The current landowner is responsible, even if the well was abandoned many years ago.

Cost assistance to decommission abandoned water wells is available to landowners. The District can help with up to 75 percent of the cost of decommissioning, not to exceed \$700 for hand-dug water wells and \$500 for all other water wells. Before any work is completed, all applications must be approved by the District.

YOU ARE INVITED to a *Public Hearing*

November 14, 2024, at 2:30 PM

North Platte NRD

100547 Airport Road

Scottsbluff, NE

This Public Hearing is for the pending Rules and Regulations for the Enforcement of the Nebraska Ground Water Management and Protection Act and the Nebraska Chemigation Act. These Rules will now include requirements for **groundwater and surface water irrigators**.

This is part four of an ongoing series designed to provide education and information to the Landowners and Operators irrigating within the North Platte Natural Resources District boundaries.

Information found in this Newsletter has been reproduced from "Irrigation and Nitrogen Management, User Education/Certification Program" a Nebraska Extension Circular EC2008. If you would like more information, please contact the North Platte Natural Resources District.