



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) -- Recent precipitation has helped alleviate dry conditions in some areas, but much of the Platte River Valley remains in extreme drought, according to the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

During a brief monthly meeting of the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors on Monday, Irrigation Division Manager Dave Ford reported that irrigation demand could pick up somewhat earlier than normal unless the area receives additional precipitation over the coming days.

Ford said that precipitation deficits for the year in the irrigated area range from about 1-1/4 inches below normal in the Minden, to about 3-1/4 inches below normal in the Holdrege and Bertrand areas, and more than four inches below normal in the Elwood area.

"While there's been some improvement since early spring and the area in which drought conditions persist has grown smaller -- particularly in areas east of us -- we still have a way to go before we catch up to normal precipitation levels," Ford said.

He said quite a few pivots in the area have been applying water and he expects to see more demand for water over the next couple weeks as irrigation season begins in earnest.

At Lake McConaughy, inflows have dropped to about 350 cubic feet per second (cfs), far below the 1,100 cfs inflows that are normal for this time of year. The reservoir's elevation on Monday morning was 3240.5 feet, or 25 feet below full elevation. The lake contained about 1.1 million acre-feet of water, which is 63 percent of capacity.

"We're concerned that inflows are so far below normal for this time of year," said civil engineer Cory Steinke. "This is typically when we see the highest inflows of the year, not numbers that are more likely to occur in late July."

Also at Monday's meeting:

- Natural Resources Manager Mike Drain reported that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had personnel on site at Lake McConaughy over the Memorial Day weekend to observe interaction between people visiting the lake and threatened and endangered bird species that nest on the beaches.

Drain said he was not aware of any incidents of nest disturbances by people, but the FWS personnel were concerned by the high number of dogs that were not on leashes.

"Despite a concerted effort to remind people that pets must be on leashes at Lake McConaughy, there were far too many dogs running loose, which was a concern to the Fish and Wildlife personnel," Drain said. "Compliance with the leash law could have been much better."

Dogs and other predators present a danger to nests built by piping plovers and least terns, which are shallow scrapes in the sand. Information about the leash law and reminders about the birds' presence are given to visitors to Lake McConaughy when they enter the camping areas. Central has also conducted a public information campaign through the media to alert the public about the birds and their nests.

- The directors were reminded about the Nebraska Water Center's water and natural resources tour to be held in east-central Nebraska on June 25-26. Tour stops will include the Monsanto Research Center near Waco; the Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center near Denton; UNL's South Central Agricultural Lab and the USDA's Meat Animal Research Center, both near Clay Center; and Reinke Manufacturing at Deshler. For information about participating in the tour, interested parties can call the Kearney Area Chamber of Commerce at (308) 237-3168.

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Contact: Jeff Buettner
Public Relations Coordinator
Office: (308) 995-8601
Cell: (308) 991-3228
E-mail: jbuettner@cnppid.com

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