



News Release

(HOLDREGE, Neb.) - The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (Central) recently finalized two long-term agreements to enhance groundwater recharge from its system of canals and laterals in Phelps, Kearney and Gosper counties.

“We believe that these agreements may represent the largest commitment to groundwater recharge ever in Nebraska, possibly the United States,” said Devin Brundage, Central’s general manager. “The agreements will yield significant benefits to the irrigated area, to the Platte River basin and associated wildlife habitat along with all of the stakeholders who rely on water resources in the basin from McConaughy to Minden.”

Under the agreements, the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) will provide \$9.15 million for groundwater aquifer recharge services associated with the Phelps Canal and Elwood Reservoir for up to 20 years. The PRRIP also provided Central \$2 million to assist with the Elwood Dam Seepage Mitigation project to help support those recharge activities.

In addition, the State of Nebraska - through the Department of Natural Resources and partnerships with Tri-Basin and Central Platte Natural Resource Districts - will provide up to \$19.1 million to divert water into the E65 Canal, Phelps Canal, Elwood Reservoir and several Waterfowl Production Areas to provide groundwater recharge over the next 15 years.

Groundwater recharge that occurs from diverting water into Centrals canal system for irrigation deliveries is referred to as “incidental recharge.” Over the last 80 years, this incidental recharge has resulted in an artificially high water table in the area referred to as the “groundwater mound.”

Recharge can also occur intentionally during the non-irrigation season when water that is in excess to target flows (as determined by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) in the Platte River is diverted into the E-65 Canal, Elwood Reservoir and the Phelps Canal. These recharge efforts are the basis for the agreements with the State of Nebraska and the PRRIP.

Maintaining the mound is important to groundwater irrigators because it helps to reduce pumping costs and supports groundwater pumping activities up and down the Platte River basin, said Tom Riley, director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources. “Additionally, recharge helps to support baseflow for both the Platte and Republican rivers. These long-term recharge agreements are a critical water service that establishes a foundational management tool for Nebraska’s water portfolio and solidifies groundwater resources in central Nebraska.”

The two agreements will be carried forward as part of the new Platte River Public Power and Irrigation District (PRPPID) following the approval and implementation of Central’s merger with Dawson Public Power District later this year. It is expected that PRPPID’s greater resources will only further and expand these intentional recharge services in its irrigation service area and the Platte River basin.

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