



## **For Immediate Release**

May 14, 2019

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## **Nebraska's Unique NRD System Key to Addressing Groundwater Quality**

**LINCOLN, Neb.** – Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) are a rare example of a groundwater government whose practices are conducive to positive, sustainable groundwater quality outcomes, according to a new study published in the most recent edition of *Water Alternatives*, an interdisciplinary journal on water, politics and development.

[“Nebraska's Natural Resource District System: Collaborative Approaches to Adaptive Groundwater Quality Governance,”](#) presents Nebraska as a case study for the development of governance regimes that have the potential to address agricultural nonpoint source groundwater nitrate pollution.

The study, led by Gregory Sixt while at Tufts University (now at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Abdul Latif Jameel Water and Food Systems Lab), stemmed from earlier research by [Bleed and Babbitt \(2015\)](#), which demonstrated that the NRDs represent a robust system for the sustainable management of groundwater *quantity*. This research expands upon that analysis to examine the NRD system as it has evolved to include groundwater *quality* in the last 30 years. Other researchers contributing to this study include: Laurens Klerkx, Wageningen University (The Netherlands); J. David Aiken, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Timothy Griffin, Tufts University.

“I hope this paper will increase awareness of the NRD system and highlight to more people Nebraska's unique and special model for managing its groundwater resources,” Sixt said. “I believe strongly that the NRD system has a lot to teach other states.”

Research included 34 interviews throughout June 2017 with a diverse set of experts from various NRDs; the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts; Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and the

Department of Natural Resources; University of Nebraska-Lincoln; agricultural producers; City of Hastings Utilities; Nebraska Extension and the Groundwater Foundation.

The research also focused on three groundwater nitrate management programs in Nebraska that collectively represent the broader NRD system.

1. The Central Platte NRD Groundwater Management Area (CPNRD GMA), which is the oldest nonpoint source nitrate program in the state, and has demonstrated a successful trend in reducing groundwater nitrate concentrations;
2. The Bazile Groundwater Management Area (BGMA), which brings together four NRDs to address nitrate pollution; and
3. The Hastings Wellhead Protection Area (Hastings WHPA), which is a collaboration between two NRDs and the city of Hastings. This project successfully bridges the rural-urban divide to address the nonpoint source nitrate pollution that is threatening the city's drinking water source.

The study concluded that cooperative approaches are important to nonpoint source pollution program development and management, stating that Nebraska is in a unique position to showcase how local water management plans can be successful. The NRD system has been in place since 1972, and districts have been developing groundwater quality plans since the 1980s, allowing Nebraska to provide a model for other states beginning to develop their own groundwater governance regimes.

"We've been successful working with agricultural producers to reduce nitrate levels to protect water while still maintaining farm profitability," said Lyndon Vogt, Central Platte NRD general manager and research participant. "We're proud to set an example of how public and private partnerships work together to protect Nebraska's vital resources from overuse and pollution."

To read the full study, visit: [Water Alternatives: Volume 12, Issue 2](#)

*The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD), the trade association for Nebraska's 23 Natural Resources Districts (NRD), works with individual districts to protect lives, property and the future of Nebraska's natural resources. NRDs are unique to Nebraska, and act as local government entities with broad responsibilities to protect Nebraska's natural resources. Major Nebraska river basins form the boundaries of the 23 NRDs, enabling districts to respond to local conservation and resource management needs. Learn more about Nebraska's NRDs at [www.nrdnet.org](http://www.nrdnet.org).*

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