



NEBRASKA'S NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICTS

PROTECTING LIVES. PROTECTING PROPERTY. PROTECTING THE FUTURE.

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Contact

Megan Grimes, Public Relations Director

Office: 402.471.7672

Cell: 402.419.4235

mgrimes@nrdnet.org

Natural Resources Districts Reflect on 50 Years

Throughout 2022, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) will celebrate 50 years of protecting lives, property and the future. During the next 12 months, the NRDs will commemorate breakthroughs and achievements in conservation.

"In the past 50 years, NRDs have adapted while facing changes in technology, funding, legislation, agencies and society," said Jim Eschliman, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts president. "Nebraska's locally led conservation model has been a successful legacy because of our ability to adapt to the local needs of our communities."

After the devastation of the Dust Bowl, special purpose districts were developed to solve local soil and water-related problems. But the puzzle of overlapping authorities and responsibilities provided confusion at best.

In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced legislative bill 1357 to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts by July 1972. In 1989, The Middle Missouri Tributaries NRD and the Papio NRD merged to become the Papio-Missouri River NRD resulting in today's 23 Natural Resources Districts.

Today, Nebraska's unique system of locally controlled, watershed-based conservation is widely admired throughout the nation. In recent years, at least 11 states ranging from Washington to Arkansas and Illinois to California, have inquired about applying a similar system for natural resources management. Despite being the No. 1 irrigated state in the nation, Nebraska's statewide groundwater levels have been sustained at levels less than a foot below pre-irrigation development in the 1950s. In many areas, groundwater levels are higher.

“Many states are facing massive groundwater declines with almost depleted aquifers,” Eschliman said. “NRDs work with irrigators to monitor water use, establish groundwater recharge projects, and implement water-wise programs. Depending on rainfall, Nebraska’s groundwater levels often rise above pre-development levels.”

Across the state, NRDs construct projects, implement programs and offer a major source of assistance to landowners in conservation and natural resources management. When necessary, they enact regulations to protect our resources. While all NRDs share the 12 main responsibilities, each district sets its own priorities and develops its own programs to best serve and protect Nebraska’s natural resources.

Eschliman noted that Nebraska’s NRDs will continue to build upon, refine, and adapt as they look to the future.

“Conservation is something that impacts us all and we need to pitch in and be good stewards of our land and water,” he said. “Locally elected NRD boards across the state are uniquely positioned in their communities to help manage our natural resources for future generations.”

To join in the 50th anniversary celebration and follow the Natural Resources Districts’ special activities throughout 2022, visit nrdnet.org and follow #Since1972 on social media.

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.

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