

## UNL Report Finds NCORPE Has Positive Economic Impact; NRCS Says Range Management/Grass Establishment Successful

Business sales, property tax revenue and jobs would dip significantly throughout the Republican River Basin and part of the Platte River Basin if the NCORPE stream flow augmentation project didn't exist and NRDs instead had to force widespread irrigation shutdowns or severe regulations.

Those are some of the key findings in a report by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Bureau of Business Research on NCORPE, an interlocal agency covering 16 counties and comprised of four NRD's: Lower Republican NRD, Middle Republican NRD, Upper Republican NRD and Twin Platte NRD.

The UNL report is worth noting because it's the first study to compare the economic impacts of the NCORPE stream flow enhancement project in Lincoln County to other regulatory alternatives to comply with the Republican River Compact, and Twin Platte NRD's stream flow obligations on the Platte River.

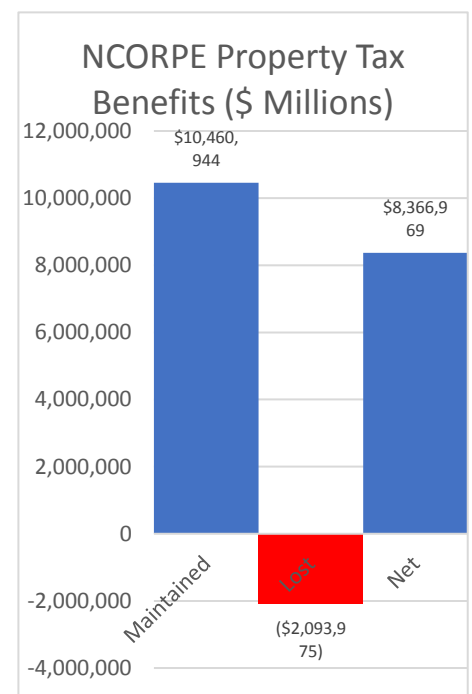
Another study on NCORPE, from Creighton University, compares the economic impacts of NCORPE to not doing anything to meet the Republican and Platte obligations. This would mean Nebraska would quickly fall out of compliance with the Republican River Compact, putting the state at risk of another lawsuit from Kansas and millions of dollars in damages. The "no action" alternative approach in the Creighton study would also mean that Twin Platte NRD could not use NCORPE to comply with its Platte River obligations.

Describing the overall economic impact of NCORPE, the UNL report says, "(NCORPE) can bear the expense of purchasing land, moving it out of irrigated production, and installing and operating wells and pipelines, all for less cost to the economy and property value than the alternative of shutting down irrigation (on a larger number of acres)..."

Following are key findings of the report under scenarios where 50%-70% of water generated to meet Republican and Platte obligations come from NCORPE (since 2014, nearly 70% has come from NCORPE).

### **NCORPE v. Perpetual 60% Irrigation Reduction in Rep. Basin and 50% Reduction in TPNRD**

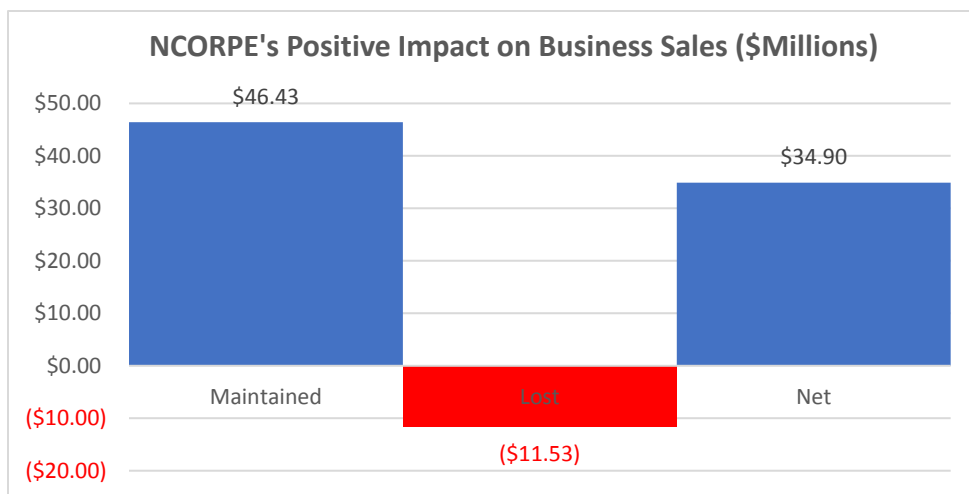
- ***\$5.6 million - \$8.7 million reduction annually in property tax revenue across the 16 NCORPE counties without NCORPE.***
- ***\$61 million - \$89 million annual reduction in total economic output, i.e. business sales, across the NCORPE territory without the project.***
- ***The loss of 126 – 185 jobs across the 16 counties.***



The Republican Basin NRDs have in their water-management plans another alternative to NCORPE: Regularly shutting down irrigation on thousands of acres near the Republican River and its tributaries. Surface water users would also face shut-downs in some years.

**NCORPE v. Rep. Basin Shutdowns Near Streams 1/3 of Time and 50% Reductions in TPNRD**

- ***\$900,000 – \$2.1 million reduction annually in property tax revenue across the 16 NCORPE counties without NCORPE.***
- ***\$22 million - \$35 million annual reduction in total economic output, i.e. business sales, across the NCORPE territory without the project.***
- ***The loss of 49 – 78 jobs across the 16 counties.***



Another NCORPE issue raised recently unrelated to the economic study worth noting:

**Is Grass Being Successfully Established on the Property, and How Is It Being Used?**

NCORPE is the largest known grassland restoration project in the country and has followed recommendations from state, regional, and national experts, namely the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. The NRCS regularly tours the site and assesses its development. In its most recent report, from August 2017, the NRCS provided, in part, the following summary (emphasis added):

“When looking at the project as a whole, **the success rate of the seedings exceeds what we have experienced when seeding other previously irrigated fields.** The CREP program success rate in

many counties with similar soils and climate conditions was around 40-50% and many of those fields required 5-6 years before the stand became established.

**The higher success rate of the NCORPE seedings can be attributed to the active management by NCORPE staff.** Utilizing cattle for early weed control of species such as cheat grass has been instrumental in improving the success rate of this seeding project.”

The project is managed to provide current and future cattle grazing. Early spring grazing is allowed for weed control, and more summer grazing will come on line as grass is established. It is expected that in 2018 approximately 70% of all 17,000 NCORPE acres that have been seeded to grass will be available for grazing.

### NCORPE Property Taxes Benefits in the Republican NRDs and Total in 4 NRDs

