



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Neb. Water Use Drops in 2014, Aquifer Conditions Sustainable**

Water used for crop irrigation dropped by nearly 28% across a wide swath of Nebraska in 2014 and a recent report indicates that, on average, the condition of the Ogallala Aquifer in Nebraska is stable and significantly healthier than in all other states overlying significant portions of the massive aquifer.

Water use data from Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) that track water use on all or some irrigated acres in their Districts averaged 7.3" per acre in 2014. That's approximately 28% less than in 2013 when average, per acre use among the same NRDs was approximately 10.1" per acre. The NRDs that reported water usage that are used in the statewide average cover all regions of the state, including the Panhandle, portions of the Sandhills, southwest, south-central, northeastern and eastern parts of Nebraska.

"The decline in water use is of course partly due to increased precipitation in parts of Nebraska last year compared to 2013," said Terry Martin, President of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD). "But Nebraska's management of groundwater use is also partially to credit; it tends to mitigate increases in water use during dry periods and significantly decrease water usage in years with moderate increases in precipitation, resulting in a sustainable balance over the long term."

To protect the sustainable balance, the state's 23 NRDs manage agricultural water use in all of their Districts. Water-use limitations in some NRDs are triggered when groundwater levels drop to certain levels; in other NRDs limitations are always in place. The multitude of NRDs and fact that their boundaries generally follow river-basin boundaries instead of political boundaries allows them to impose regulations that fit local hydrologic conditions across the state.

Nebraska is the only state with such a management scheme, and it has produced more groundwater regulations and monitoring than any state in the country.

Of the 6 states that overlie a significant portion of the Ogallala Aquifer, Nebraska has experienced the smallest decline in water in storage from predevelopment to 2013, according to a report released last month by the U.S. Geological Survey, "Water-Level Changes and Change in Water in Storage in the High Plains Aquifer, Predevelopment to 2013 and 2011-13". Based on data from the report, the amount of water in storage in the Ogallala in Nebraska had decreased just 0.1 percent from the 1950's to 2013. A depletion that small could be wiped out by a cycle of higher-than-average precipitation. For example,

a similar report by USGS showed that Nebraska in 2011 had more groundwater than it did before groundwater irrigation began.

The average water-level change in Nebraska's portion of the aquifer from pre-irrigation to 2013 was -0.3 feet. Comparatively, the average water-level declines in the other five states that overlie a significant portion of the Ogallala were: -41.2 feet in Texas; -25.5 feet in Kansas; -16.5 in New Mexico; -14.3 in Colorado; and -12.3 in Oklahoma.

The USGS report said that in 2013 there was approximately 2.92 billion acre feet of water in the aquifer. That's enough to cover the United States with more than 15" inches of water. Roughly 2/3 of the water in the Ogallala Aquifer, or 1.9 billion acre feet, is believed to be in Nebraska.

"With continued local management of groundwater Nebraska will be able to retain its position as the national leader in irrigated agriculture while also preserving groundwater for generations to come," said Terry Martin, NARD President.

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The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD), the trade association for Nebraska's 23 natural resources districts, works with individual NRDs to protect lives, protect property, and protect the future of Nebraska's natural resources. These districts are unique to Nebraska. NRD's are local government entities with broad responsibilities to protect our natural resources. Major Nebraska river basins form the boundaries of the 23 NRDs, enabling districts to respond best to local conservation and resource management needs. To learn more about Nebraska's NRDs visit [www.nrdnet.org](http://www.nrdnet.org). Or you can head to the Natural Resources Districts' Facebook page at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) or follow NARD's Twitter page at [@nebnrd](http://www.twitter.com). NARD is located at 601 S. 12<sup>th</sup> St. Suite 201, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508. Email NARD at [nard@nrdnet.org](mailto:nard@nrdnet.org) or call NARD at (402) 471-7670.