



News Release

June 2015 Water Tour Heads to Republican River Basin

The 2015 Water and Natural Resources Tour will visit the Republican River basin in Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado.

June 23-25 have been selected as the dates for the annual tour that examines current water and natural resources issue that are important to water users in Nebraska and surrounding states.

Only the dates and venue have so far been selected by the tour's two managing co-partners: Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District in Holdrege and the University of Nebraska Water Center, part of the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute. Nebraska Public Power District is also a major co-sponsor of the annual event, which began as UNL Extension "irrigation tours" in the 1970s.

"There are a myriad of water issues in the basin that have remained contentious between Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska for more than 15 years, since Kansas initiated litigation against Nebraska in 1998 for non-compliance with terms of the three-state compact," said tour co-organizer Steve Ress of the Nebraska Water Center.

Litigation stemming from the three-state basin compact has been in-and-out of the news ever since.

The 1943 compact allocates 49 percent of the river's water to Nebraska, 40 percent to Kansas and 11 percent to Colorado.

The river itself starts in the high plains of Colorado, flows east across northwestern Kansas and into Nebraska, then dips back into Kansas where it joins with the Smokey Hill River, forming the Kansas River.

"Basin waters are used by agricultural producers, municipalities and others in all three states and meeting the stipulations of the compact have often been difficult in the often water-strapped basin," Ress said, noting that the tour last visited there in 2008. "It's time we took a close look at the issues again."

This coming June's tour will likely begin and end in Holdrege and there will not be a shortage of issues and points of interest to visit in each of the three states.

Among these could be the implementation of Integrated Management Plans (IMPs) by Nebraska's Natural Resource Districts in the basin, the new NCORPE (Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement) pipeline, Bonnie Reservoir in Colorado, recent U.S. Army Corps of Engineer work on Harlan County Dam near Alma, producer issues in the Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District, how irrigator circumstances and attitudes in the basin have changed in the last 10 years, how groundwater irrigation wells may effect flows in the basin, how the basin effects municipal water use in Kansas, among many other issues.

"Obviously we will want to hear perspectives on basin water and compact implications from each of the three states involved," Ress said.

Joint efforts in the basin by University of Nebraska and Kansas State University researchers could also be part of the mix, as well as work being done there by the Kansas Geological Survey and others.

Detail tour planning will begin in January. Tour host will be Mike Jess, former director of the Nebraska Department of Water Resources and retired UNL faculty member and associate director of the Nebraska Water Center.

Additional information will be posted online at watercenter.unl.edu and at facebook.com/NebraskaWaterCenter as it becomes available.

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