

# NEWS RELEASE

## Nebraska Department of Natural Resources

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## 2013 Preparations for Dry Conditions in the Republican River Basin

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources is continuing to prepare for dry conditions in the Republican River Basin next year. These continued preparations include efforts by the Department to update and refine its forecast for the Republican River Basin for the upcoming year as well as reassigning staff resources to carry out the administration that may be necessary. The preliminary forecast was released on November 16<sup>th</sup> and is available at:

<http://dnr.ne.gov/NewsReleases/NRRMDAPressRelease11162012.pdf>.

In addition to these preparations, Department officials recently met with officials from the United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) in Billings, Montana, to discuss potential impacts and measures that could be available to surface water users next year. Reclamation manages the major reservoirs that supply irrigation water within the basin. The meeting's discussions focused on the opportunity that the Department will provide Reclamation in the upcoming year to reregulate flows in Harlan County Reservoir that would otherwise be required to pass downstream into the State of Kansas. Department Director, Brian Dunnigan said, *"I have made it clear to Reclamation that they have an opportunity to develop a plan that would be beneficial to basin water users while not jeopardizing Nebraska's ability to comply with the Compact."* Actions by Reclamation will play a key role in the need and duration of time that surface water uses would be limited next year.

The Department's current forecast indicates that approximately 20,000 acre-feet of water will need to be put into streams by the Natural Resources Districts in the basin to prevent potential overuse of Nebraska's allocation. The water supplies in the basin that are available to Nebraska are determined by a 1943 Interstate Compact signed by Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado. Brian Dunnigan, Director of the Department, said, *"The forecast is a significant advancement over past tools that were available to the Department and basin NRDs and allows for the greatest opportunity for Nebraska to optimize its use of available water supplies."*

Should the final forecast by the Department indicate a potential shortfall next year, the next steps for the NRDs would be to develop and implement the necessary actions to limit NRD groundwater uses to their water supplies or in the alternative, curtail groundwater pumping within the rapid response area (areas near streams).

Should the final forecast by the Department indicate a potential shortfall next year, the next step for the Department would be to require the issuance of closing notices to all natural flow and storage permits in the basin. Beginning on January 1, 2013, natural flow surface water appropriations would be prohibited from diverting surface water. In addition, reservoirs would be prohibited from storing additional water. These closing notices would not prevent the release of water that has legally been stored prior to December 31, 2012. As a condition of these closing notices, all inflows would be required to be released downstream. Surface water administration would continue until conditions improved. Owners of unpermitted jurisdictional dams that do not have a permit would be required to apply for a permit and receive that permit before water may be stored. Landowners are encouraged to contact the Department if they have questions regarding permitting.

The final forecast by the Department will be completed prior to January 1, 2013.

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