

NEWS RELEASE

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, May 14, 2015, 3:45 p.m. CT

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DNR & Partners Help Divert Water for Flood Mitigation & Aquifer Recharge

Lake Water Diversion Aids Both Flood Relief and Long-term Water Goals

(LINCOLN, Neb.) The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), local natural resources districts (NRDs), and irrigation districts in the Platte River Basin have taken steps to divert floodwaters out of the South Platte, North Platte and Platte rivers as the water is expected to move into Nebraska from Colorado. These efforts will help to minimize flooding, protect lives and property and benefit future water use.

Acting Director of the Department of Natural Resources, Dr. Jim Schneider, said “Working together with our local partners, we are able to capitalize on the high water flows in a way that supports long-term water recharge in the basin. These cooperative efforts are both helpful today and will pay dividends for tomorrow.”

The National Weather Service has issued a warning for flooding along the South Platte River in western Nebraska. The combination of heavy rain in northeast Colorado and snowmelt from the mountains will engorge the river and is expected to cause significant flooding in Keith and Lincoln counties. The DNR is working with several entities to divert water including the Twin Platte NRD, South Platte NRD, Central Platte NRD, Tri-Basin NRD, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, Western Irrigation District, Platte-Valley Irrigation District, Suburban Canal Company, Orchard-Alfalfa Canal Company, Cozad Canal Company, and the Thirty-Mile Irrigation District, among others.

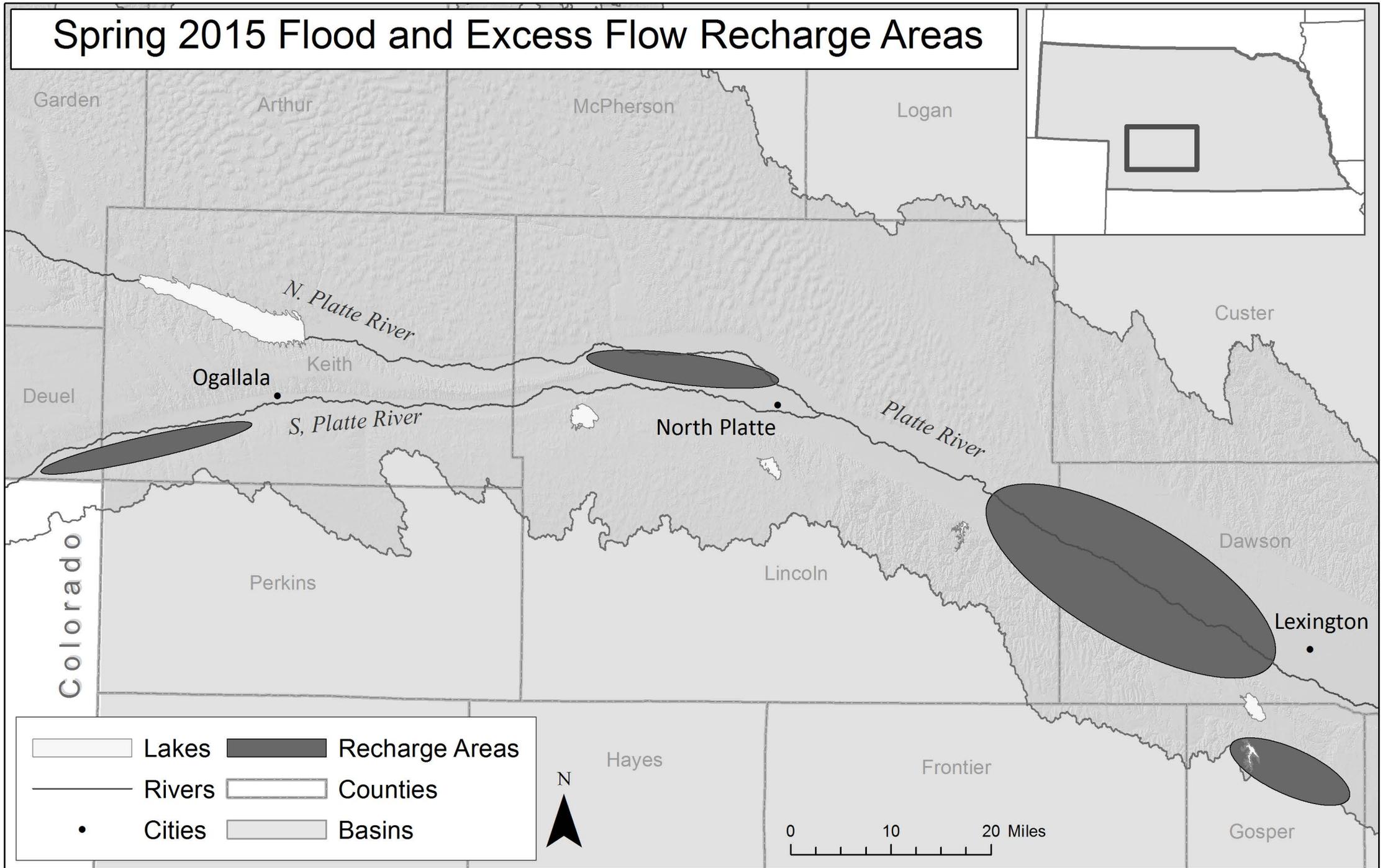
Since last week, the DNR has been in contact with NRDs and irrigation districts discussing logistics and budgets, finalizing agreements and monitoring river conditions. The agreements

allow for coordination regarding timing of the diversions of this flow in an attempt to reduce the peak flows. The diversion of these floodwaters will have the added benefit of recharging the aquifer as these waters seep into the ground beneath the canals and lakes along the South Platte, North Platte and Platte rivers. Recharge is replenishment of an aquifer by the absorption of water. Diverting water into the canals allows the water to soak into the bottom of the canal and travel downward through the soil profile into the aquifer. In addition to the canals themselves, this effort will also divert flood flows into off channel ponds and reservoirs and the water will be allowed to soak into the ground from those areas. Recharge water is important because it increases the water in aquifer storage and results in an increase of groundwater flow to the stream compared to what would have occurred without the recharge event.

These diversion projects are being set up in a very short time frame as Nebraska prepares for the expected high flows. On Wednesday afternoon, the flows on the South Platte River at Julesburg, near the Colorado-Nebraska stateline, measured 10,500 cubic feet per second (cfs). Currently, flows at the stateline are expected to peak at approximate 15,000 cfs with a river stage of 10 feet on May 15. For context, average flow at the stateline is normally 50-60 cfs. The peak is expected to pass with flows receding over the next several weeks. These groundwater recharge benefits will be realized in both the Platte and Republican River basins as this groundwater slowly percolates through the ground into these rivers and their tributaries over time.

These efforts are similar to the diversion of flood waters carried out along the Platte River in 2011 and in 2013 by the Department of Natural Resources, local natural resources districts and irrigation districts, which provided significant flood mitigation and aquifer recharge benefits at that time, as well. The 2011 flooding diversion efforts included 23 participating irrigation districts and 5 participating NRDs which resulted in diverting more than 77,000 acre-feet (ac/ft) in spring and 67,000 ac/ft in fall. The estimated 10-year accumulation of streamflows to the Platte River resulting from the 2011 recharge is more than 15,000 ac/ft. The 2013 flooding diversion efforts included 7 participating irrigation districts and 4 participating NRDs which resulted in diverting more than 44,000 ac/ft in fall. The estimated 10-year benefit to the Platte River from that recharge event is 5,600 ac/ft.

Spring 2015 Flood and Excess Flow Recharge Areas





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