



Completing Dam Projects

Dams provide a number of benefits, from water for irrigation and livestock, to flood control, and even recreation opportunities. Maintaining or installing dams of all sizes can provide a return on investment for landowners.

The Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District's (NRD) Private Dams Program provides technical assistance and financial incentives to landowners that want to install a new structure or rebuild existing structures that are damaged. The program offers 75 percent of the project costs, up to a maximum cost-share of \$75,000. Eligible costs include construction and design services provided by a private engineering firm.

Two structures were recently completed with the support of this program.

- Private structure rebuild near Sutton, NE (pictured above)
- Private new structure near Ulysses, NE (pictured below)

We are proud to partner with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices to complete these projects. NRCS was responsible for the structure design as well as construction coordination and oversight on both projects.

For information about the program, contact your local NRCS office, the Upper Big Blue NRD office, or visit: <https://www.upperbigblue.org/landtreatment> and look for the "Private Dams Program" tab.



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Buffer strip adjacent to corn field

How Upper Big Blue Can Help You

Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) across Nebraska are committed to helping landowners and producers protect soil, conserve water, and improve the long-term health of their land. One of the most effective ways NRDs support these goals is through cost-share programs—financial assistance that helps make conservation practices more affordable and more accessible.

The Upper Big Blue NRD has several cost-share programs funded primarily by the State and NRD. These programs range from incentivizing reduced nitrogen application to cost-sharing private reverse osmosis systems, but have one thing in common - they were created to support the responsibilities of the NRD and help landowners and operators. Whether you manage cropland, pasture, or acreage, Upper Big Blue NRD cost-share programs can support your goals while prioritizing resource management.

Why Cost-Share Programs Matter

Conservation practices often require up-front investment—materials, equipment, or professional installation. Cost-share programs help reduce those expenses, making it easier for landowners to implement best practices such as erosion control, water conservation, and habitat enhancement. The result is healthier soil, cleaner water, and stronger communities.

Common Projects Eligible for Cost-Share

Upper Big Blue NRD supports a wide range of conservation practices, including:

- Cover crops to improve soil health and reduce erosion
- Tree planting and windbreak renovation
- Irrigation efficiency upgrades, such as flow meters
- Terraces, waterways, and other erosion control structures
- Water quality improvement practices

Ways Get Involved:

- Ask about cost-share opportunities
- Use our water management tools and programs to improve yields and efficiency
- Participate in educational programs and field days

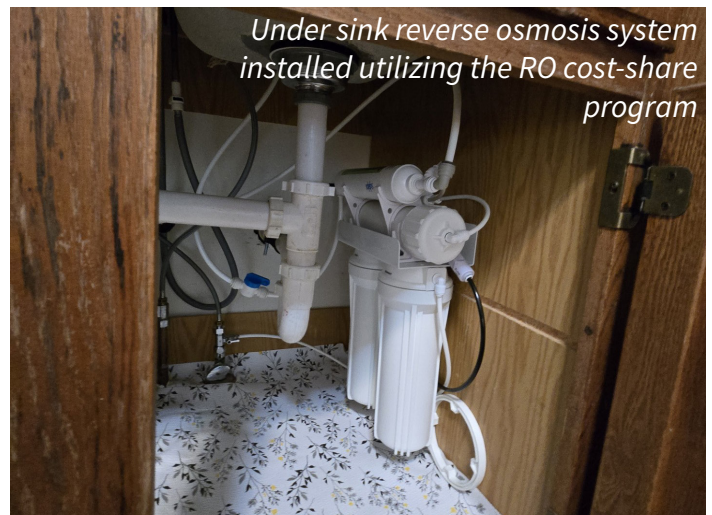
Looking for ways to connect with us?

Visit www.upperbigblue.org/projects to explore our full list of programs and learn more.

Contact our office at 319 E. 25th Street in York, NE.

- » Phone: (402) 362-6601
- » Email: info@upperbigblue.org
- Follow us on social media - Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X.

If you're considering a conservation project this year, now is a great time to explore your cost-share options. Contact the NRD office to learn more, check availability, or start an application. We are proud to work alongside you to protect our resources. Together, we can make an impact.



Under sink reverse osmosis system installed utilizing the RO cost-share program

UBBNRD Land Treatment Cost-Share Programs

(continued)

Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District Land Treatment Program					
Practice	ID #	Funding	Cost-Share Rate	Max Payment	Design Life (yrs)
Terrace	NC-1	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	10
Mechanical Outlet for Terrace	NC-2	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	10
Water Impoundment Dam	NC-3	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	20
Grade Stabilization Structure	NC-4	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	20
Diversion	NC-6	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	20
Grassed Waterway	NC-7	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	10
Water & Sediment Control Basin	NC-8	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	10
Pasture Planting or Range Seeding	NC-10	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	10
Windbreak Planting	NC-12	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	15
Planned Grazing System	NC-14	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	10
Windbreak Renovation	NC-16	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	15
Stream Bank Stabilization	NC-18	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	20
Brush Management	NC-20	NSWCP/NRD	75%	\$10,000	N/A
NC-17 Programs					
Subsurface Drip Irrigation System	NC-17	NSWCP/NRD	50%	\$10,000	10
Special Programs					
Buffer Strip	N/A	Neb Dept of Ag	varies	\$250/ac	10
Dry Hydrant Program		NRD	50%	\$1,000	N/A
Private Dams	N/A	NRD	75%	\$75,000	20
Reverse Osmosis Water System	N/A	NRD	75%	\$500	10
Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act	N/A	VARIES	\$10-\$15/ac	\$7,500	1
WQMP Programs – Target Areas					
WQMP Land Treatment	N/A	NSWCP/NRD	90%	\$15,000	Varies
WQMP Cover Crop	N/A	NRD	100%	\$75/ac \$7,500 max	1
WQMP Buffer Strip	N/A	NRD	varies	50% over state rate	10



Phragmites at Teal View Wetland Education Area

Managing Phragmites: What You Need to Know

Phragmites, also known as common reed, is a prominent weed species in Nebraska wetlands. There are two subspecies of Phragmites: Phragmites australis subsp. americanus (native to North America) and Phragmites australis subsp. australis (highly invasive to North America). Non-native Phragmites is a fast-spreading species that is particularly prominent along the Platte River, as well as wetlands, marshes and streams. Once non-native Phragmites invades an area, it quickly outcompetes native species, creating a monoculture and altering hydrology. It is also less desirable habitat for native birds and mammals and can increase fire danger.

Phragmites can spread in two major ways.

1. Phragmites rhizomes or underground stems can grow 10+ horizontal feet per year. These stem fragments can be present in fill dirt and can spread during road/ditch maintenance activities.
2. Also, seed dispersal can occur by wind or bird activities. Each stem of Phragmites has a plume

with thousands of light and fluffy seeds.

These plumes are also one of the main identifying characteristics of both native and non-native Phragmites. Native Phragmites growth tends to be less dense with stem color a lighter yellow-green, whereas non-native Phragmites tends to grow in extremely dense clusters and have a stem color of a darker blue-green.

Management From: (Nebraska Invasive Weed: Phragmites, by Gary Stone)

Phragmites australis subsp. *Australis* is a designated noxious weed under the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Program. Using more than one management option is the key to success.

Prevention, proper identification and early detection are the most effective measures to manage the plant.

Mowing is one method to manage non-native phragmites but it should be done several times during the growing season to be effective. Mowing alone will not provide control.

Both intensive grazing or prescribed burning alone will not control non-

native phragmites. Both will remove top vegetative growth, but both should be used with other management measures.

There are two chemical treatment options available to manage *Phragmites australis* subsp. *Australis* that show the best promise for control. Herbicide products containing glyphosate and imazapyr labeled for aquatic site use, alone, or in combination, have been effective. Spring chemical applications are made when plants are two to three feet tall. Fall chemical applications should be made two to three weeks prior to a killing frost. Monitor regrowth of surviving plants as repeated herbicide applications may be required. Be sure to select a product labeled for the site. Read, understand and follow all label instructions when using any pesticide.



Innovative Pipe Replacement Practices

Upper Big Blue NRD is responsible for maintenance and operation of 51 dams and flood control structures within the district. This includes public recreation areas like Bruce L Anderson Recreation Area (Recharge Lake), and privately owned dams and channels that control flooding and erosion on smaller scales. One of these structures is Bulgrin Dam on Road 8 in York County near Waco.

In 2024, district staff identified degradation of the corrugated metal conduit pipe running through the dam. This is a concern because rusting in the pipe can cause erosion of the dam embankment, voids and eventually dam failure. In 2025, staff published an RFP (request for proposal) for contractors to submit bids to reinforce the conduit pipe with a cured-in-place pipe (CIPP) lining. This is relatively new technology that uses UV light to cure a seamless resin liner within the existing pipe.

The cured resin forms to the shape of the existing pipe without reducing the pipe diameter significantly.

In March 2025, contractors installed a cure-in-place pipe liner in the Bulgrin Dam conduit pipe. This ensures structural integrity of the dam for years to come. Upper Big Blue NRD continues to work with landowners, stakeholders and other agencies to address flood control and erosion control in the district.



Photos: (left) Photo of the installation process. (right) top - before pipe liner was installed; bottom - After pipe liner was installed



Home Reverse Osmosis Funding Available

Concerned about your drinking water? The Upper Big Blue NRD has a program to address drinking water quality concerns in the district. The program will provide up to \$500 per home for a point-of-use reverse osmosis (RO) system on properties where the drinking water quality exceeds 10 PPM of nitrate. Private well users in Nebraska are responsible for maintaining the integrity of their own water supply and should have it tested annually for contaminants—a process that residents of the NRD can do for free. A new program from the State of Nebraska also provides a tax credit for eligible citizens for the installation of a reverse osmosis system. You can find information about this program as well as the NRD program on our website. ♦♦♦

Board of Directors Tour

Each year, the Upper Big Blue NRD's Board of Directors tour aims to provide real-life context for the projects and programs they are responsible for overseeing. The tour rotates to different quadrants each year in order to highlight projects across all nine counties within the district. The 2025 tour was held in August, and directors, staff, and guests toured multiple sites in the southwest quadrant.

The tour included:

- Hastings Aquifer Storage and Restoration (ASR) facility and a nearby well to learn about their process for reducing the nitrate levels in the water using reverse osmosis and dilution.
- First Street Brewing Company in Hastings - their innovative brewing and distribution setup, which focuses on supporting local Nebraska businesses and a commitment to protecting groundwater.
- Presentation from Steve Riehle, City of Hastings Public Works Lead Engineer, about two major projects going on for Lake Hastings – the dam armoring and water quality implementation projects.
- Lake Hastings visit to examine the condition of the dam and discuss the project.
- UNL's South Central Agricultural Laboratory (SCAL) for a tour and discussion about irrigation scheduling technologies
- Site visit near Graft, NE to one of eleven monitoring well sites throughout the district being used to gather data and track trends in nitrate levels over time across the district.



Recognitions & Awards

In September, Upper Big Blue NRD was honored to have two individuals recognized from our District at the annual Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) conference.

1. Hank McGowan was awarded the Outstanding Soil Conservation Award for his continued soil health practices and willingness to share and promote soil health. McGowan is pictured here with NARD President Marty Graff and Upper Big Blue NRD general manager David Eigenberg.
2. Joel Miller was recognized as Educator of the Year for his commitment to ag education. He is pictured here with NARD President Marty Graff and Upper Big Blue NRD general manager David Eigenberg.
3. In June, Paul Bethune was recognized for 10 years of service on the Board of Directors and our engineering technician, Drew ten Bensel, was recognized for five years of service to the NRD. Drew and Paul are pictured with Board Chairman John Miller.
4. Jack Wergin was recognized for 10 years of service to the NRD, where he serves as the projects department manager. Jack is pictured here shaking hands with Board Chairperson John Miller.



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The BLUEPRINT editor may be reached by phone at 402-362-6601; by email at sluhn@upperbigblue.org; or by mail at:

Upper Big Blue NRD
319 E. 25th Street
York, Nebraska 68467

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Better Together

NRD Collaborates with the Nebraska Forest Service

In April of this year, Upper Big Blue NRD welcomed conservation forester, Raymond Asamoah, as part of a collaboration with the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS). He has been working with landowners to renovate and plant new windbreaks, as well as plan their spring plantings. Look for him on our social media throughout the fall and winter on our “Tree Tuesday” series, where he will highlight tree species he recommends and provide tree care tips!

Each year, the district sells more than 20,000 tree seedlings for conservation planting in the district. Most of these trees are planted by individuals, though the NRD provides planting services on large orders such as farmstead windbreaks or habitat improvement projects. The NRD offers low-cost bulk seedlings, as well as cost-

share funding for qualifying projects, making tree planting a very economical conservation activity.

Trees may be ordered from November 17 to March 30 on the NRD’s website. Orders arrive in mid-April, in time for spring planting. An order form has been included with this issue.

Are you interested in planning a windbreak or planting project for next spring? Contact Raymond at (402) 362-6601 or trees@upperbigblue.org. You can also find resources at www.upperbigblue.org/trees.



Education Corner

The Upper Big Blue NRD is dedicated to training the next generation of stewards of the land through educational programs and projects of many kinds. From field trips to the NRD office and Project GROW demonstration fields for college students, to classroom visits and natural resources festivals, to scholarships and investments in capital projects, your NRD is supporting educational opportunities for youth and adults. Learn more at www.upperbigblue.org/education.

1. *A lesson on beekeeping at Pollinator Day*
2. *Recipients of 2025 Burke Scholarships Evan Frink and Sara Weisheit*
3. *Concordia University students at Project GROW*
4. *A lesson on wetlands at the Children's Groundwater Festival*
5. *A groundbreaking ceremony for Hamilton County Inclusive Playground, supported with the **Educational Capital Projects Program***

