

TOMORROW'S WATER

Building Community Resilience for Leoti & Tribune through Regional Partnerships



A project is underway to build on the momentum achieved by existing water conservation efforts implemented to address declining aquifer levels within focused areas. The economic vitality and resiliency of communities such as Leoti and Tribune are dependent on a clean, sustainable water supply; however, over the years, with the development and widespread use of irrigation, the saturated thickness of the aquifer in this area has declined significantly and the rate of withdrawal continues to exceed the rate of recharge.

To help address the declining aquifer levels, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is investing \$1.4 million in a partner-driven Groundwater Recharge and Sustainability Project (GRASP) to support

Wichita and Greeley Counties through its Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The project has an additional \$1.5 million in partner contributions.

A Regional Partnership to Support Water Conservation

A diverse group of partners are working together to expand water conservation efforts in Wichita and Greeley Counties by adding additional technical and financial resources through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) — a flexible USDA program that uses partnerships to multiply conservation investments to reach local conservation goals. The RCPP supports existing and future conservation efforts, such as the current Wichita County WCA and the potential Local Enhanced Management Area (LEMA) in Groundwater Management District (GMD) 1. Through the RCPP, NRCS and other regional partners will coordinate resources to help agricultural producers engage in and maintain conservation activities in targeted areas, focusing on the voluntary activities described below.

Irrigation Conservation and Efficiency

The voluntary Wichita County WCA management plan defines the scale of the challenge to reach sustainability of the aquifer and lays out a roadmap for how to achieve those goals. To date, this effort has resulted in almost 25% of the active Wichita county irrigators enrolling in the WCA. Western Kansas GMD 1 is currently in the process of implementing a mandatory LEMA for Wichita and Greeley Counties. This will include mandatory irrigation conservation and suggested conservation goals for all other water users including municipal and stock water users.

In addition, much effort is being made to develop technologies and promote water use efficiency. The Kansas Water Office, with help from many public and private entities, develops Water Technology Demonstration Farms to display and promote irrigation technologies that increase water efficiency. GMD 1 provides cost share financial assistance for its stakeholders to accelerate the adoption of irrigation technologies that have proven

more efficient. State and federal agencies provide cost share for technologies and farming practices that promote irrigation efficiency. Adopting new technologies will allow producers enrolled in the WCA and other conservation efforts to be successful. **Contacts:** *Tammy Simons, Wichita Water Conservation Area Founding Member, Leoti KS, 620-874-2499; Kyle Spencer, GMD 1 Manager, Scott City, KS, 620-872-5563.*

Water Retirement

The Kansas Department of Agriculture's Water Transition Assistance Program (WTAP) is a voluntary, incentive-based program that permanently retires privately held irrigation water rights in exchange for payment from the State of Kansas. It is intended to help restore aquifers in critically depleted target areas. Additional funding through this program is being pursued for the RCPP project and will be targeted in areas near municipal water wells. **Contact:** *Steve Frost, Kansas Department of Agriculture, 785-564-6622.*

Conversion to Dryland Cropping

The USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program helps producers address resource concerns. To improve water use efficiency, NRCS can help producers implement a conservation crop rotation plan when converting from irrigation-based agriculture to dryland. This activity would provide significant assistance for producers who are participating in the WTAP program. **Contacts:** *USDA Service Center, Tribune KS, 620-376-4332; USDA Service Center, Leoti KS, 620-375-2332.*

Playa Wetland Restoration

Playa wetlands are a primary source of groundwater recharge and can be an important part of achieving community water conservation goals. A healthy, functioning system of playas can provide high-quality water to help support the needs of domestic and municipal wells. Many playas are not fully functioning, and their hydrology can be restored through the RCPP program. **Contacts:** *Matt Smith, Playa Lakes Joint Venture, 785-420-7000; Abe Lollar, Ducks Unlimited, 620-214-2693.*

Current Partners

- ❖ Local Producers
- ❖ Kansas Assoc. of Conservation Districts
- ❖ Kansas Dept. of Agriculture
- ❖ Kansas Dept. of Health & Environment
- ❖ Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism
- ❖ Kansas Farm Service Agency
- ❖ Kansas Groundwater Mgmt. District 1
- ❖ Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service
- ❖ Kansas Water Office
- ❖ Wichita and Greeley Conservation Districts
- ❖ Ducks Unlimited
- ❖ Kansas Alliance for Wetlands & Streams
- ❖ Pheasants Forever
- ❖ Playa Lakes Joint Venture

Contacts

For more information about the Groundwater Recharge and Sustainability Project (GRASP), please contact one of the people listed below. You can also learn more about playas and the GRASP project at PlayasWorkForKansas.com.

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