

**By Russ Pankonin**

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Colorado flood waters flowing down the South Platte River will get put to some beneficial use in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reached agreements with a number of surface water irrigation districts to fill their canals and store water in their reservoirs.

Jesse Bradley, head of DNR's Integrated Water Management Division, said the flood waters will help recharge underground aquifers below the irrigation canals.

He said DNR attained agreements from six irrigation districts from the Nebraska/Colorado state line to central Nebraska to divert flood waters from the South Platte and Platte into their canals.

Some of the districts have their own reservoirs which will also be used to store some water for the time being.

Bradley said the unlined canals of the districts will allow for water to percolate down, which will help recharge the aquifer below.

He said most all of the irrigation district lay south of the South Platte or the Platte. The South Platte and North Platte join east of North Platte in Lincoln County.

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's canal system in central Nebraska is the largest system taking water.

Bradley said the Republican River Basin will also benefit from the diversion to the system.

Seepage from that system feeds a large underground mound of water underneath the Platte and Republican River Basins.

Use of the water that comes into the Republican Basin from the mound does not count against Nebraska in terms of compliance issues with Kansas.

Presently, there is no way to deliver flood waters directly into the Republican Basin, Bradley noted.

In addition to aiding aquifer recharge, diversion of the flood waters also helps mitigate some of the effects of the flooding.

Flows on the South Platte River measured at the Colorado state line peaked at 21,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) on Sept. 18. While flows are slowly receding, they are expected to remain elevated for several weeks.

The diversions will continue as long as these excess flows are available in order to maximize the aquifer recharge benefits.

This effort is similar to the diversion of flood waters carried out along the Platte River in 2011 by DNR, local natural resources districts and irrigation districts, which also provided significant flood mitigation and aquifer recharge benefits.