Nebraska rang in 2013 with new laws that will increase county filing fees for mortgages, offer tax incentives for new data centers and allow golf carts to operate on roads near courses. The measures are among 10 Nebraska laws that took effect on Jan. 1.

County Filing Fees

The new year will usher in an increase in county filing fees for mortgages, deeds, wills and other property documents. Some of the increased revenue will help register of deeds offices post more public documents online, while the rest will go to county general funds.

The law ends in 2018, a requirement that lawmakers added to force officials to show that they had used the money as intended and justify continuing the higher fees.

The fees will increase for the first time in 28 years, said Roger Keetle, a legislative aide for State Sen. John Wightman of Lexington, who sponsored the bill.

It's a long overdue increase for counties, Keetle said, because years of inflation have eroded the value of the fees and placed more pressure on counties' general funds.

Counties will charge a $10 fee for the first page of a filing and $6 for each subsequent page, up from the current $5-per-page charge on most documents. The law also will repeal a 50-cent indexing fee for lots that are recorded.

Of the $10 fee charged on the first page, $2.50 will go into the register's technology upgrade fund. For every page that costs $5, the fund will collect 50 cents.

Lawmakers in previous years had resisted the proposal, but the measure gained support this year because it dedicates part of the money for technology upgrades in recorder offices. The money previously funneled into county general funds, allowing county officials to use it however they wanted.

"We're going to do our absolute best to make sure the money is spent the way it's intended," said Scotts Bluff County register of deeds Jean Bauer. "We know that legislators are going to be watching us."

Bauer said she plans to use the revenue to make more property records available to the public online.

She said clerks in her office still record financial transactions by hand, and all of the county's property records are stored on paper in one of six filing cabinets. Some date back as far as the late 1800s.

The fees will generate an estimated $300,000 a year for the Douglas County Register of Deeds, and administrators say they want to use it to post older property records on a county website. Records that were filed before 1993 are not available online, said Douglas County Register of Deeds Diane Battiato.

Single License Plate

Another law will allow special-interest motor vehicles in Nebraska to sport only one license plate. The law is aimed at specialty or classic cars that aren't intended for regular travel.

Tax Incentive Law

A new tax incentive law sponsored by Bellevue Sen. Abbie Cornett is designed to attract data centers to Nebraska and encourage expansions, including one by Internet search engine Yahoo in La Vista. The law offers property and sales-tax exemptions to firms in Nebraska.

Golf Cart Operation

Lawmakers also passed a law this year that will allow motorists to operate golf carts on roads that run adjacent and contiguous to golf courses, if the local county or city government

approves. To use the golf carts on roads, operators must have a driver’s license and liability insurance.