

**By Russ Pankonin**

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Recently, a farmer friend of mine unassumingly engaged in a conversation about the water issues facing the Republican River. What he didn't realize was that he was talking to a board member from the Lower Republican Natural Resource District.

As the conversation evolved, my friend was told in no uncertain terms that all the water problems in the Republican Basin come from over-pumping in the Upper Republican NRD.

Wait just a minute there, fellow!

It's just this very kind of rhetoric and finger pointing that keeps this basin from working together towards solutions to the problems faced by irrigators in the ENTIRE basin.

Granted, the URNRD has experienced groundwater depletions compared to pre-development levels. Balance this with the fact the URNRD rests over one of the deepest portions of the Ogallala aquifer.

Early on, people in the URNRD realized the value of its precious resource. As a result, this NRD was among the first in the nation to regulate water use with allocations, well spacing, metering and ultimately drilling moratoriums.

The Upper and Lower Republican NRDs are two distinct, diverse regions where irrigation practices vary greatly.

The Upper relies almost solely on groundwater pumping, complimented by rainfall (hopefully).

The Lower irrigates a large number of acres with surface water from government projects, along with groundwater wells. Plus, the Lower is further east, where rainfall exceeds the Upper by 7-10 inches per year.

Those are differences that make the needs of each district unique. However, after the Republican River Compact Settlement, everyone in the basin must work together to insure that Nebraska remains in compliance with settlement.

There's the rub.

Frankly, each district could point fingers as to what they see as problems in the other districts but what does this get us? Nothing!!!

Nothing but resentment and ill feelings.

The Upper and Middle Republican NRDs have been criticized recently for adopting options put forth by the state to come into compliance in a worst-case, water-short year scenario.

When an arbitrator said the basin NRD's integrated management plans didn't assure compliance in a water-short year, ALL three NRDs turned to the state, asking for possible solutions.

The Upper and Middle adopted options they felt worked for their districts. But the Lower seems to believe the two districts were just kowtowing to the state and doesn't appear to want much to do with the state's options.

That's fine for them. However, they want to adopt a plan that also dictates what happens in the Upper and Middle as well. That's a non-starter. And as a result, friction continues to grow.

If this basin is to continue to prosper and grow, people must get past the finger pointing about

issues long out of their control.

It's likely there's no one-solution-fits-all for the basin NRDs. But if we each look to different solutions that best fit our districts, we must remember we're all working toward the common goal of maintaining compliance with compact settlement. And as such, we should all support those solutions.

One thing is for sure—finger pointing isn't getting it done.