



The Ogallala Aquifer provides about 30 percent of all groundwater used for irrigation in the United States.

Background

Stretching from western Texas to South Dakota, the Ogallala Aquifer supports nearly one-fifth of the wheat, corn, cotton and cattle produced in the United States. Underlying approximately 225,000 square miles of the Great Plains, water from the aquifer is vital to agricultural, municipal and industrial development. Approximately 30 percent of all groundwater used for irrigation in America is drawn from the Ogallala Aquifer.

Current use of groundwater from the Ogallala Aquifer exceeds the amount of recharge through natural processes, leading to substantially decreased water levels in many areas of the aquifer. Additionally, intensive agricultural and industrial practices in some areas threaten the water quality of this important resource.

Goals/Objectives

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is committed to improving water conservation efforts through the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative. The Initiative offers a combination of

technical and financial assistance to landowners and land managers in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, South Dakota and Wyoming to install conservation practices designed to reduce the quantity of water removed from the aquifer, improve water quality and enhance the economic viability of Ogallala Aquifer Initiative-area farms and ranches.

The initiative will:

- Improve irrigation efficiency by a minimum of 20 percent on 3.7 million acres;
- Apply nutrient management and conservation cropping system practices on a minimum of 3.4 million acres;
- Assist agriculture producers in maintaining water quality;
- Help agricultural producers save billions of gallons of water from the Ogallala Aquifer; and
- Assist agricultural producers in developing conservation plans and prescribed voluntary conservation alternatives specific to water quality and quantity resource concerns.

Conservation Funding/Practices

Ongoing conservation activities include:

- Converting irrigated land to dry land farming;
- Planting non-irrigated permanent vegetation;
- Implementing nutrient and pest management;
- Adjusting cropping rotations and perennial vegetation for haying, grazing, and wildlife habitat; and
- Replacing inefficient, flood-irrigated systems with more efficient center pivot and Sub-surface Drip Irrigation (SDI) systems.

Conservation activities are carried out using NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and funding provided by state and local agencies.

Socially disadvantaged and limited resource farmers and ranchers in the project area have access to dedicated funding sources within the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative.

Partnerships

The Ogallala Aquifer Initiative is a partnership effort. NRCS collaborates with local conservation districts, state agencies and land grant universities to complete inventories and determine high priority resource concerns within the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative area.

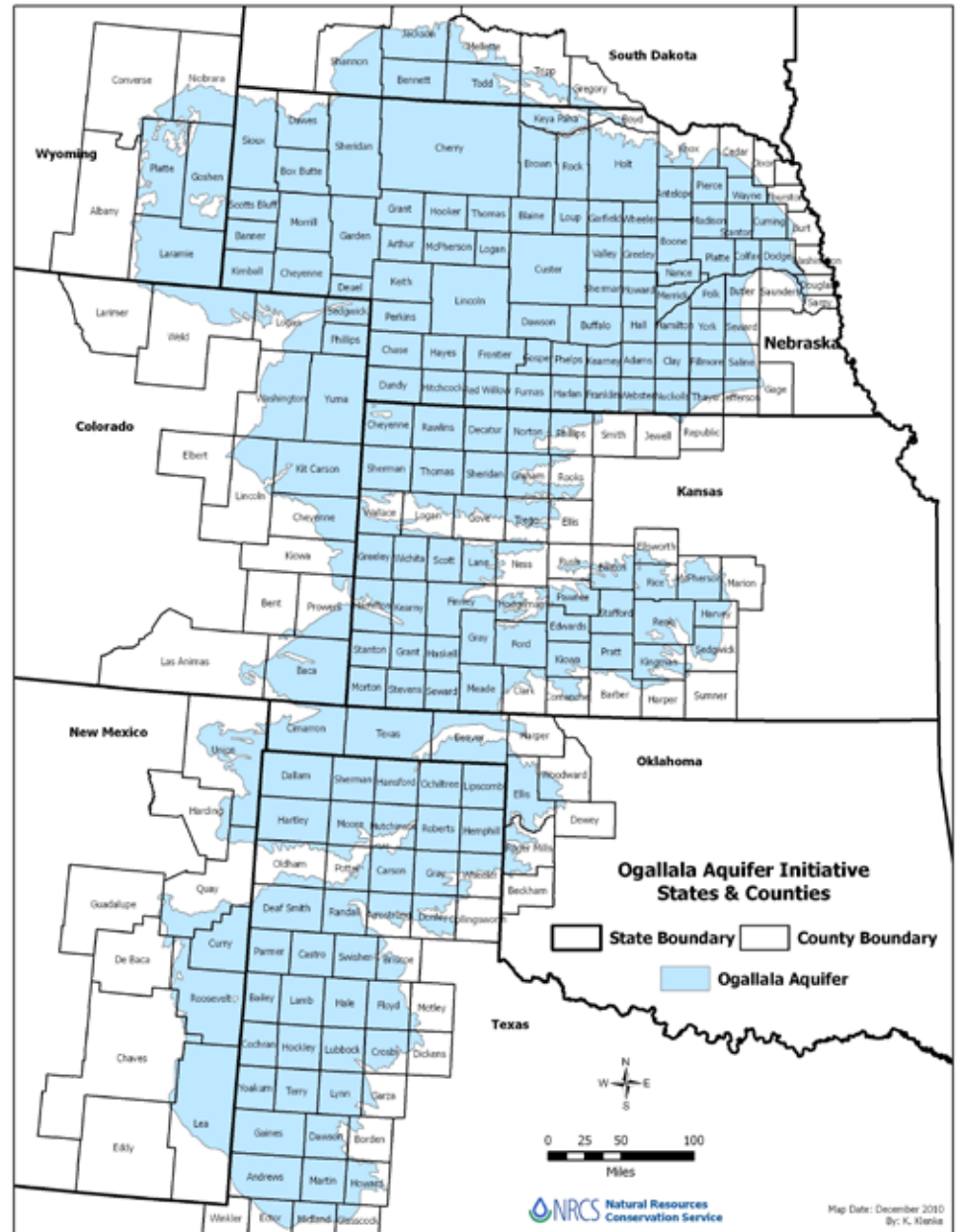
Benefits

The Ogallala Aquifer Initiative will benefit:

- **Water Conservation** - Efficient irrigation systems and water management practices conserve water helping to maintain a clean and abundant water supply.
- **Water Quality** - Improved water management can minimize off-site water quality impacts from irrigation, such as; higher chemical use rates, increased field salinity and erosion due to applied water.
- **Farm Returns** - Water savings can help offset the effect of rising water costs and restricted water supplies. Improved water management may also reduce expenditures for energy, chemicals, and labor inputs, while enhancing revenues through higher crop yields and improved crop quality.
- **Wildlife Protection** - Increased river flow in the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative region as a result of conservation measures will benefit the endangered interior least tern, whooping crane, pallid sturgeon, and the threatened piping plover.

For More Information

For more information on the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative and how you can participate in protecting water quality and quantity in the Ogallala Aquifer, contact your local NRCS office or refer to the NRCS Web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov under Landscape Initiatives.



The Ogallala Aquifer Initiative will provide technical and financial assistance to help farmers and ranchers improve water quantity and quality in the Ogallala Aquifer.



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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