

# Resilient Soils and Water Quality Act

## 2023 Annual Report



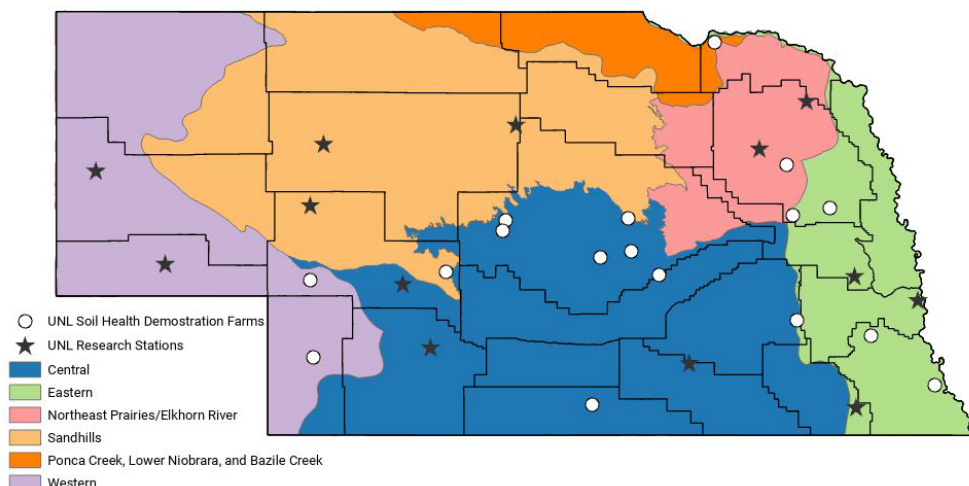
This annual report is submitted according to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 2-409(4), which requires the Department of Natural Resources (Department) to report annually, beginning in 2022, the status and progress of implementing the RSWQA.

### **Background**

Introduced by Senator Tim Gragert of Creighton, LB 925 created the Resilient Soils and Water Quality Act (RSWQA). The Act serves to accelerate the use of best management practices for healthy soil; protect and improve soil and water quality; protect the public's health and enhance agricultural production and profitability; address soil health economics, resource stewardship, and environmental issues; increase awareness, education and promotion of best management practices for healthy soils through producer-to-producer, peer-to-peer, and mentoring relationships; and provide proof of healthy soil benefits through demonstration and research farms.

### **Current Activities to Develop the Producer Learning Community**

Under LB 925, the Department provides support and assistance in the formation of a producer learning community (PLC). The PLC will foster the sharing of knowledge to carry out the purposes of the RSWQA. These efforts are to be broad-based and work to recognize the diversity of soils, topography, rainfall, and cropping systems across the state. The Department established regions, depicted on the map below, in which to focus demonstration and outreach events and to establish research farms that are representative of each diverse region's agriculture.



The Department identified the use of an electronic platform as being the most cost-effective means of engaging producers across the state. After reviewing similar platforms other states are using, the Department contracted with a group that has performed similar design work South Dakota to begin building a Nebraska RSWQA website. This website's design is similar to other states' that have seen success reaching and engaging various target audiences.

The Department identified and created a small working and advisory group with members from various commodity groups, NRCS, NRD organizations, UNL, and other agriculture and natural resources not-for-profit conservation organizations, each working to implement goals like those of the RSWQA. This small working group is currently; 1) collaborating on the website's content, 2) preparing for a non-producer stakeholders' meeting in early 2024, and 3) planning several producer stakeholder meetings to be held across the state later in 2024.

The Department is working to establish and/or expand six producer demonstration and outreach events in 2024, with the first scheduled in February. The Department is also evaluating opportunities to collaborate with a private group of stakeholders attempting to form a soil health not-for-profit organization with goals to facilitate local small-group, in-person soil health discussions.



### **Planned Activities for the Upcoming Year**

- Host several stakeholder workshops in conjunction with the small working group to further stakeholder engagement for implementation of the electronic platform.
- Making the Nebraska Soils website live to the public.
- Continue to develop and expand outreach and field demonstration opportunities for producers.
- Begin to develop the next phase of the electronic platform focused on peer-to-peer communication opportunities.
- Attend, support, encourage, and promote other activities and events related to six purposes of the RSWQA.