

# Garrison Diversion Conservancy District Committed to NORTH DAKOTA

By Kimberly Cook

Often when the topic of “Garrison Diversion” is brought up among North Dakotans, the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (Garrison Diversion) is confused with the Garrison Diversion Unit (GDU) Project. Simply put, Garrison Diversion is the local agency responsible for the implementation of a federal project, whose scope has been greatly revised over many years. Read on to learn how Garrison Diversion is committed to improving the quality of life for the citizens of North Dakota.

## Garrison Diversion Unit Project

The GDU Project is the result of a federal plan with roots in the Flood Control Act of 1944 (later renamed the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program), which constructed multiple dams on the Missouri River for the purpose of flood control, navigation, irrigation and hydropower. To compensate North Dakota for flooding prime farmland as a result of the dams, the state was promised over a million acres of irrigation.

However, further studies indicated that the soil in northwestern North Dakota was not suitable for irrigation according to federal irrigation standards. As a result, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) revised the diversion plan proposing instead to take water from the Garrison Dam and reservoir to irrigate other lands to the east, and thus became known as the “Garrison Diversion.”

In 1965, federal legislation called for the construction of the Garrison Diversion Unit Principal Supply Works, which included the McClusky Canal, New Rockford Canal and Oakes Test Area. Congress later halted the project, and

legislation was reformulated multiple times through the 1986 Reformulation Act and the Dakota Water Resources Act of 2000.

In order to establish, construct, develop, maintain and operate the GDU and all its components, the North Dakota legislature created the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District in 1955. NORTH DAKOTA Century Code (CH. 61-24) directs Garrison Diversion to:

- *Promote the establishment, construction, development, maintenance, and operation of the Garrison Diversion Unit, or any part thereof.*
- *To make available ... waters diverted from the Missouri River for irrigation, domestic, municipal, and industrial needs, and for hydroelectric power, recreation, fish, wildlife, and other beneficial and public uses.*
- *To study and provide for the water needs of eastern NORTH DAKOTA communities and water districts and western Minnesota communities through a Red River Valley Water Supply Project.*

Garrison Diversion consists of 28 counties, with each county supporting Garrison Diversion’s operations by issuing a one-mill levy and electing a citizen to serve a four-year term on its board of directors. The mission of Garrison Diversion today is to “provide a reliable, high quality and affordable water supply to benefit the people of North Dakota.”

While reliable water supplies are the core of our mission, Garrison Diversion’s focus goes well beyond a dependable drinking water supply. We also aim to provide opportunities for agriculture, recreation and development of North Dakota’s natural resources.





*Garrison Diversion is responsible for the operations and maintenance on the GDU project facilities, such as the McClusky Canal.*

## Agriculture and Natural Resources

The promised irrigation projects in the original GDU project did not materialize, however, the potential that irrigation holds for building a healthier North Dakota remains as strong as ever. Garrison Diversion works to develop and enhance irrigation throughout the state by investing in agriculture initiatives through partnerships with the North Dakota Irrigation Association and NDSU Extension Service.

The McClusky Canal, an original feature of the GDU, has become a valuable resource to farmers looking to develop irrigation on their farmland. To help guide irrigation expansion efforts along the McClusky Canal, Garrison Diversion developed an Irrigation Master Plan. Since 2010, developing the McClusky Canal Irrigation Project has been a vast undertaking. In recent years, multiple irrigation projects have been developed, currently irrigating 7,200 acres, with an additional 700 acres to come online in 2022.

Along with irrigation development, Garrison Diversion has worked with numerous government agencies and environmental groups to maintain, enhance and protect the state’s natural resources. From wildlife habitat mitigation to the North Country Trail, Garrison Diversion has played a part in keeping North Dakota a beautiful and environmentally friendly place to live and visit.

## Red River Valley Water Supply Project

Garrison Diversion is the state lead in the development of the Red River Valley Water Supply Project (RRVWSP), the purpose of which is to meet the water supply needs of central and eastern North Dakota through providing a supplemental water supply during times of drought.

Surface water supplies in central North Dakota and the Red River Valley are limited and unreliable, especially in drought conditions. With continued growth and industrial development, the RRVWSP is needed to mitigate against drought conditions that would cause costly shortages,

foster economic development by meeting municipal, rural and industrial water demands, and provide for economic sustainability.

The RRVWSP will use a buried pipeline to carry water from the Missouri River to the Sheyenne River, which will provide a supplemental water supply to users in central and eastern North Dakota during droughts. When completed, the RRVWSP could benefit nearly half of the state’s population. The water will also provide opportunities for industrial development, as a current lack of industrial water supply has driven industries to obtain water through less desirable means and/or relocation outside of North Dakota.

Construction on the RRVWSP began in December 2020. “We have been working towards this goal of construction for many years,” says Duane DeKrey, general manager of Garrison Diversion. “I am happy to say the long-awaited Red River Valley Water Supply Project is on its way to serving central and eastern North Dakotans with water for municipal and industrial purposes.”

## Municipal, Rural and Industrial (MR&I) Water Supply Program

Reliable and high quality water is vital to the success of small towns and family farms. Garrison Diversion works to ensure North Dakotans have access to reliable and high-quality water through the state Municipal, Rural and Industrial Water Supply Program. Garrison Diversion is the fiscal agent and, along with the Department of Water Resources, is responsible for administering the state MR&I Program in which \$400 million is authorized in federal funds to help water systems deliver quality water to homes, businesses and farms across North Dakota.

To date, over \$339 million has been awarded for system expansions and improvements across the state. In addition, Garrison Diversion recently developed a Water Supply Assistance Grant Program, designed to provide funding assistance to offset the costs of new customer hookups to a rural water system or district within Garrison Diversion’s

*Garrison Diversion is the state lead in the Red River Valley Water Supply Project. Here, the first piece of the transmission pipeline is being placed.*



member counties. The Water Supply Assistance Grant Program is also in place to aid municipal water systems or districts with extraordinary OM&R projects that will impact the delivery of water to users, introduce health and safety issues, or bring potential harm to other infrastructure if not repaired.



*This park is a recipient of grant funding through Garrison Diversion's Matching Recreation Grant Program.*

## Recreation

The enhancement of one of North Dakota's most treasured resources, our recreational opportunities, is a key initiative for Garrison Diversion. Investing in the promotion, development and preservation of our natural resources is important to ensure the continued and future utilization of these areas.

Garrison Diversion believes in developing recreational opportunities that provide North Dakotans areas to enjoy our great outdoors. For this reason, Garrison Diversion dedicates two-tenths, or 20%, of its one-mill levy to our Matching Recreation Grant Program.

Funds from this program have been awarded to install new playground equipment at parks, develop campground facilities and walking paths, among other facilities. Since the program's inception in 1990, more than \$7 million has been awarded for recreation projects within the district.

In addition, the Chain of Lakes Recreation Area, four in-line lakes on the McClusky Canal, provides numerous recreational opportunities such as fishing, camping, boating, hunting, hiking and more. East Park Lake, West Park Lake, Heckers Lake and New Johns Lake make a popular recreation destination in central North Dakota. The recreation areas are equipped with boat ramps, primitive camping sites and vault toilets for the convenience of visitors.

The McClusky Canal is important to these recreation areas because water is pumped from the canal, as needed, in order to maintain optimal water levels for recreation. Garrison Diversion performs basic maintenance of the Chain of Lakes facilities.

## Operations and Maintenance

Garrison Diversion is responsible for the operations and maintenance (O&M) on the GDU project facilities under a cooperative agreement with Reclamation, which owns the facilities. GDU facilities include the McClusky Canal, New Rockford Canal and Snake Creek Pumping Plant.

Garrison Diversion maintains an impressive staff, with high levels of expertise. The staff includes a professional engineer, master electricians, certified diesel mechanic, painting and coating specialists, vegetative management specialists and multiple heavy equipment operators. O&M employees are located in Carrington, McClusky, New Rockford and at the Snake Creek Pumping Plant in Coleharbor.

A large fleet of equipment is maintained with dozers, loaders, backhoes, trucks and excavators, and many specialized pieces that allow for work in a variety of situations.

Expertise in canal maintenance, earth moving and other construction areas enables the O&M staff to assist federal and state government agencies such as the Department of Water Resources, Reclamation, North Dakota Game & Fish, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These partnerships benefit everybody involved!

Over the past 60 years, we have been committed to building, planning and implementing water projects across the state through our several areas of focus. Looking forward, we are proud to play a vital role in the future of our state. To learn more about Garrison Diversion, visit [www.garrisondiversion.org](http://www.garrisondiversion.org) and follow us on Facebook by searching GDCD.ND.

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