



## NPNRD Reminders...

### NPNRD Meetings

Regular NPNRD board meetings are open to the public and held the second Thursday of each month at the NRD conference room, 100547 Airport Road, Scottsbluff unless otherwise announced. Our next monthly meetings will be **May 14, and June 11, 7:00 p.m.**

### Get Your NRD Trees Now

Orders are now being taken for 2009 conservation trees. We have 28 varieties of two-year-old bare-root conifer and deciduous trees and shrubs and eight varieties of potted trees available. Trees are sold in bundles of 50 at 75 cents each for conservation purposes only. We also offers landowners several services to help get conservation trees established and improve survival rates such as tree planting at 75 cents per tree and chemical weed control for 15 cents. Trees ordered through the NRD are shipped from the nursery and stored at the district's tree coolers until planting time. Customers can either pick up the trees themselves and plant them, or take advantage of the NRD's tree planting services.

Tree order and tree planting/spraying request forms are available at our office in Scottsbluff or from our website <http://www.npnrd.org/trees.htm> and mailed in.

### Tree Pruning Workshop to be held April 23, 10 a.m. at NPNRD

More details will be given in local media and on our website.

### Full Scholarships Available to Attend 2009 Youth Range Camp

We want to send students to State Range Youth Camp! The 46th Annual Range Youth Camp will be held in June 2009, at the State 4-H Camp in Halsey. All youth at least 14 but not over 18 by October 1, can attend. As part of their commitment to the management and care of natural resources, the North Platte NRD will pay the full camp fee of \$275 for four students who reside in Scotts Bluff, Banner, Morrill, Garden, or southern Sioux counties. The camp fee covers meals, lodging, recreation, books, and camp insurance.

**Scholarship application deadline is May 8.** For more information, contact Kay Grote at (308) 632-2749 or go to <http://www.npnrd.org/camp.htm>

## Groundwater Allocations now in effect

The North Platte NRD's ground water allocation rules went into effect January 12, 2009 with a base allocation of 18 acre-inches per acre per water year. The allocation rules and regulations apply to the entire overappropriated (OA) area of the District, with the exception of the Pumpkin Creek Basin Ground Water Management Sub-Area, which has been managed under an allocation since 2003 and this year is under a 12-inch allocation. The OA area includes all areas adjacent to the North Platte River Valley from the state line to the District line east of Wellen. A copy of the OA map is posted on our website.

Any ground water use that has not been certified will not receive an allocation unless an offset is provided. Ground water use in excess of the available water will be penalized. The allocation will be reviewed annually by the Board.

Each certified irrigated acre is granted a base allocation of 18 acre-inches per certified irrigated acre per water year. All water (including any ditch water) measured through a flow meter will be considered ground water regardless of the source of the water.

Certified irrigated tracts which are not being irrigated while enrolled in federal or state programs that require participants to set aside crop land for other uses or otherwise remove such land from crop production (CRP, CREP, EQIP, etc.) shall not receive a total current rental allocation while the land is enrolled unless the program

guidelines allow irrigation for purposes such as establishing vegetative cover.

In the event of an available water overdraft, the District shall reduce the following water year's total current allocation by the amount of the available water overdraft plus the amount of the available water overdraft penalty.

Each livestock operation certified by the District is hereby granted an allocation equal to twenty (20) gallons per day per animal unit of certified capacity per water year.

See *ALLOCATIONS*, page 3

## Why Allocations?

The NRD Board's decision to use allocation as a resource management tool comes after several years of reviewing ground water levels data throughout the District. Due to the onset in 2000 and subsequent continuation of a severe drought, which has adversely affected all portions of the District, the Board and NRD staff determined it necessary and in the District's best interest to quantify the use of ground water. The first steps in quantifying ground water uses was the certification of all ground water uses in 2007-08 and the installation and use of flow meters on all regulated wells in 2008.

The move also complies with provision of LB962, requiring natural resources districts to collaborate with the state's Department of Natural Resources and surface water users in developing an effective integrated management plan (IMP) for ground and surface water. The District is currently working with the DNR to finalize the development of the IMP. This plan will include the allocation of ground water as part of its management plan. See Page 3 for a summary of the IMP status.



*Flow meters will be a valuable tool in 2009 as the NRD begins to enforce its new allocation rules for ground water use. NRD technicians spent all of January and February locating approximately 1,500 flow meters in the OA area of the district. Meters were inspected, initial readings were taken, and their location was entered into the NRD data base using GPS technology. Once irrigation begins, irrigators will be able to calculate how much ground water they are using. The NRD has a calculating spreadsheet available to assist. See page 3 for details.*

## Buffalograss program is back with new enhancements

This year we are offering our buffalograss seed rebate program with new enhancements.

The program will provide reimbursement of up to \$13 per pound for seed purchased to convert up to 7,500 square feet of established lawn. Reimbursement will be based on the recommended seeding rate of three pounds per 1,000 square feet.

These adjustments have been made to reflect the rising cost of grass seed and requests by homeowners to convert larger areas of lawn. The buffalograss seed program is open to all homeowners within the boundaries of the North Platte NRD, including Scotts Bluff, Morrill, Garden, Banner and southern Sioux Counties. **Application deadline for the NRD Buffalograss program is May 1.**

The NRD's buffalograss program reimburses residential homeowners for converting their existing irrigated lawns to either Bowie or Cody brands of buffalograss. Buffalograss is best established in areas with full sun exposure. Recommended planting time is between June 1 and July 10.

University and industry studies have shown that switching from traditional bluegrass lawns to more drought-tolerant buffalograss saves on water usage and lawn maintenance, which in turn saves the homeowner money. Buffalograss is a drought-hardy, native grass species that once established, thrives on only a half-inch of water per week. Most other turf grasses use between 1 to 1 ½ inches per week.

We believe the use of this program will help promote water savings, good land stewardship and help residents adapt to western Nebraska's semi-arid climate.

For complete information on the buffalograss seed program, visit the NPNRD website at [www.npnrd.org](http://www.npnrd.org) or call (308) 632-2749.



*This stand of buffalograss planted at 1201 Primrose, Scottsbluff in June of 2008 is a good example of establishing a native grass in a large, sunny area. Property owners Dan and Linda Peterson said, "We think this will be a really good project for our neighborhood, to show our neighbors that buffalograss will work in our area."*

## Integrated Management Plan update

The NRD staff and Board of directors have been working diligently since January to put the final language and concepts into the Integrated Management Plan. Since January, the stakeholders group has held consulting sessions and meetings with representatives from the Department of Natural Resources' Integrated Water Management Division. Jim Schneider and Jesse Bradley have led efforts in data analysis for determining options for returning streamflow depletions within the District back to 1997 levels. DNR has stated that they will defend the data and proposal as presented and will help the NRD develop and implement practices to reach the proposed goals. Schneider and Bradley both say DNR is prepared to defend its data and recommendations for the IMP. Members of the stakeholders can provide input on the plan, but the ultimate approval is between DNR and

NRD.

At the April 9, 2009, NRD Board meeting, the Board voted to send a letter to the Department of Natural Resources that they had reached consensus on the opinion that agreement had been reached on the integrated management plan (IMP) and the Overappropriated Basin-Wide Plan and that public hearings should be scheduled in the near future to take testimony on the IMP and the Basin-Wide Plan. Once a letter is received from the Department stating their agreement on the IMP and Basin-Wide Plan, hearings will be held within 45 days. Notice of the hearings will be published in the Star-Herald for three weeks prior to the hearings. At this time, the tentative date for the hearings is June 17. The next step following the hearings is for the Board to adopt the IMP and the Basin-Wide Plan. The IMP and the Basin-Wide Plan will be implemented no later than September 15, 2009.

## New Staff members join NPNRD

**Thad Kuntz** is the NRD's new ground water modeler/hydrogeologist. His focus is analyzing and interpreting hydrogeologic data into the Cooperative Hydrological Study (COHYST) western model unit, and determining the impact of ground water use and withdrawals upon the aquifer.

His position is shared between the North Platte and South Platte NRDs and he works with other ground water modelers on the COHYST project. Kuntz has a Bachelor of Science degree in geology from Colorado State University and worked for three years as a consulting hydrogeologist at the Leonard Rice Engineering Firm in Denver. Kuntz is originally from Brush, Colo. and moved to Scottsbluff with his wife Amber.

**Tina Kurtz** began her duties as NRD advisor for the Integrated Management Plan on March 16. Kurtz brings a wealth of skill and knowledge from her previous position at the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in Lincoln where she was part of the Planning and Assistance Division, working closely with head modeler Jim Schneider and Integrated Water Management analyst Jesse Bradley. During her eight years with the DNR, Kurtz worked with the state's NRDs to develop their groundwater management plans and developed good working relations with western Nebraska water managers and irrigators. Kurtz holds a Bachelor's in geology, a Masters in natural resources, and has many years of experience writing ground water policy compliant with Nebraska's ground water statutes.

### Weather Watchers Wanted

Residents of Scotts Bluff, Banner, Morrill, Garden, and southern Sioux Counties are invited to become volunteer weather watchers.

The Nebraska Rainfall Assessment and Information Network (NeRAIN) is in search of volunteers to check backyard rain gauges and report rainfall on a daily basis. Precipitation reports by volunteers will be transmitted via the Internet to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources each day. Climate analysts will process the data and prepare detailed maps showing rainfall patterns. Scientists and water managers will study these maps to learn how storms develop and move across the region and to make water-use decisions. NeRAIN information will be updated daily and available for public access on this website.

See <http://dnrdata.dnr.ne.gov/NeRAIN/> or call NRD Resources Coordinator Greg Jackson at 308-632-2749.



# Flow Meter status letters to be mailed out

In the coming weeks most people who have certified their ground water use with the NRD will be getting a letter regarding their flowmeter status. This letter will come in various forms.

The majority of certified groundwater users will receive a letter with the initial reading for their flowmeter(s). The initial reading is the number that was on the flowmeter when NRD staff read it in January, February or March of this year. **This is the beginning number that the NRD will use for the 2009 water year 18 inch allocation for the Overappropriated Area.**

Some certified groundwater users will get a letter saying the NRD was not able to find a flowmeter for a certified parcel. This may be because no flowmeter has been installed or because the NRD has been unable to locate the meter.

Finally, a small minority of certified groundwater users will get a letter informing them they will have to move their flowmeter or change the way their property is certified. This is because the meter was installed in place that will not measure water use for all of the property. A common example of this is installing a flowmeter at the pivot point of an irrigation system when the corners of the field, not included under the irrigation system, are also included in the certified acres for the property.

If you have any questions about these letters or would like information about flow meter, certifications, or allocations please contact Greg Jackson or Jeff Sprock at the North Platte NRD

The below table shows the three type of meter reading formats in the North Platte NRD and how to calculate water use for Certified irrigated acres.



Meter Type	Water Used & Conversion	Formula	Example
Acre Inch	Current reading minus initial (beginning) reading (no conversion)	Water used times flow meter factor divided by certified acres	(139,345-000,091) x .01/82.4 = 16.90 inches of water used
Acre Feet	Current reading minus initial (beginning) reading multiplied times 12	Water used times flow meter factor divided by certified acres	(336,813-180,498) x 12 x .001/140.2 = 13.38 inches of water used
Gallons	Current reading minus initial (beginning) reading divided by 27,154	Water used times flow meter factor divided by certified acres	(611,545-382,132)/27,154 x 100/69.5 = 12.16 inches of water used

## Allocations *Continued from pg 1*

To receive an allocation for other uses, the ground water user must submit an application to the District and receive Board approval.

If there is unused available water at the end of the water year, then the lesser amount of the total unused available water or fifty (50) percent of the total current allocation may be carried forward and added to the total current allocation for the next water year. There will be no carry forward of any allocations for livestock operations or other uses.

A full text of these rules and regulations are posted on the NPNRD website at <http://www.npnrd.org/allocations.htm> or call the District office at (308) 632-2749.

## District files response to CNPPID suit, defends allocation decision

The North Platte Natural Resources District responded in Scotts Bluff County District Court March 6 with a Motion to Dismiss a lawsuit filed January 8, 2009 by Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District of Holdrege. Central filed the lawsuit seeking to overturn the 12-inch annual ground water allocation for water users in Pumpkin Creek Basin, and calling for more severe water

restrictions in western Nebraska.

The NPNRD Board conducted a hearing on the proposed 12-inch Pumpkin Creek Basin allocation on Oct. 16, 2008 in Harrisburg and subsequently approved the decreased allocation in January.

Counsel for the North Platte NRD in this litigation are Stephanie F. Stacy and Peter W. Katt with the Baylor Even Law Firm in Lincoln, together with the District's local counsel Steven C. Smith of Scottsbluff.

"While Central's filing with the Court is entertaining to read and makes great news, it is short on legal substance," Katt said of the 17-page complaint/petition against the NRD. Katt, Stacy, and Smith maintain that Central is asking the Court to invalidate the amended rules and regulations, which the NRD established pursuant to its statutory and legal authority, something the Court has no jurisdiction to review.

At the heart of Central's claim is the Lytle Report submitted by Central at the October public hearing recommending immediate limit of the entire groundwater withdrawal from the Pumpkin Creek Basin to 8,000 acre/feet. Spread out over the 38,645.43 acres certified and irrigated with groundwater in the entire basin, the result would be about 2 1/2 inches of irrigation water per acre for the crop land in Pumpkin Creek Basin.

"That is not enough to survive in this part of the country," Smith said. "Central seeks to put the water users in the entire Pumpkin Creek Basin out of business immediately."

Smith also points to the fact that water users within the boundaries of the CNPPID irrigate more acres with groundwater than the entire Pumpkin Creek Basin. Those irrigators within Central's boundaries have six to eight additional inches in surface water supply, not available to Pumpkin Creek Basin irrigators, and have received almost twice the average annual precipitation as water users in the Pumpkin Creek Basin.

In responding to the lawsuit, NPNRD's team of legal counsel, along with its Board of Directors, maintains that the NRD has a legal right and obligation to protect the economic viability of residents in western Nebraska.

Balancing competing claims between ground water and surface water uses is to be done through the development of an Integrated Water Management Plan (IMP) by and between the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR) the appropriate Natural Resource Districts (NRD's), and various stakeholders which would include Central. The attorneys pointed out that the NRD is adhering to that process and is scheduled to have its local IMP completed by September 2009.

### Resources

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## Seed, equipment, cost-share offered for wildlife enhancement

The recent spring storms have provided good moisture for seed planting and also serve as a reminder about the importance of providing adequate food and habitat cover for area wildlife and game birds. The North Platte NRD and the Oregon Trail Pheasants Forever chapter together are offering seed, equipment rental, and cost-share to help landowners establish wildlife habitat improvements on their property.

According to NRD Soil Conservation Coordinator Roy Lyles, many varieties of seed mixes, some free of charge, are now available at the NRD office in Scottsbluff. These include the Pheasants Forever Western Mix, available free of cost with a five-bag limit; a food plot seed, also available free of cost, which includes corn, grain sorghum, and forage seed for wildlife and food cover projects; and legume, grass, and wildflower seed mixes, which are eligible for cost-share assistance. Seed is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Quantities are limited.

"We have bags of Western Mix available," Lyles said. "It's free up to five bags. One bag will cover three-to-five acres."

The local Pheasants Forever chapter also has equipment available for rent to help establish wildlife habitat. These include a six-foot no-till grass drill; a 16-foot grass drill; a Vicon broadcast seed spreader; a 1,000 gallon water tank; and a gopher treatment machine. All of these are available to area landowners, with a discount in rental fees given to Pheasant Forever members.

The NRD and Pheasants Forever chapter also offer generous cost-share assistance for establishing wildlife habitat. The Nesting Cover Program will provide the PF Legume Mix, a mixture of alfalfa, clovers, and wildflowers, free of cost for upgrades to an existing grass stand and a one-time payment of \$12/acre for the cost of disking and interseeding. The grass establishment program provides a cost-share up to \$40/acre to establish a PF Chapter approved wildlife grass mixture for a five-year contract. Cost share may be applied to seed, drill rental, or site preparation. The tree and shrub planting program provides various cost-share for planting costs, weed control and fabric weed barrier.

For more information on seed availability, rental fees, program and cost-share details, or to reserve planting equipment, call the NRD office in Scottsbluff at 308-632-2749.

## Arbor Day '09

Arbor Day this year is April 24. The North Platte NRD has long observed "Nebraska's holiday" by paying homage to its founder, J. Sterling Morton, with a series of activities based on tree planting and tree planting education.

The NRD staff will be assisting in various tree planting ceremonies on Arbor Day and in the coming weeks.

On April 18 the NRD will donate 200 nursery trees to be handed out during Panhandle Co-op's spring "green" observance.

One April 22, the NRD will assist with the observance of Broadwater's Centennial by planting trees.

On April 23 the NRD, in cooperation with the Nebraska Forest Service, will host a tree pruning workshop at the District office. At last year's inaugural event, the NRD hosted 43 arborists, landscaping and maintenance workers, and homeowners who learned proper pruning techniques. In May we will once again assist with the annual educational program "Branch Out" held at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center.

Of course, spring is tree planting time at the NRD. The NRD tree crew will soon be in the fields planting conservation trees and assisting landowners with their windbreak planning. Some potted stock and bare root trees are available at the NRD office for direct sells. Call or stop by.

More information on NRD trees and Arbor Day is posted at <http://www.nprnd.org/trees.htm>.

## How to design a better tree windbreak

Tree windbreaks do a lot for protecting homes, people and livestock, but also have an added benefit of supporting wildlife. The color, sounds, tracks and mystery of wild creatures living in and around a windbreak can add enjoyment to people's lives.

"For best wildlife benefits, a windbreak should have a developed tree canopy, and an understory that includes shrubs and herbaceous plants for food and cover. The ground layer is critical in providing winter wind protection, especially for species that nest or feed near the ground. Upper canopy layers provide wildlife with nesting and foraging sites," added Jim Brandle, University of Nebraska-Lincoln forester and co-author of "Windbreaks and Wildlife", an Extension circular.

Design of a windbreak for controlling air movement doesn't have to be altered much to include wildlife benefits. Options to enhance tree plantings for wildlife are:

-- **Including a variety of trees and shrubs in the planting, which also gives a more natural look, reduces disease or insect problems and adds more wildlife values for more species;**

-- **Adding a shrub row to the windward side to trap snow before it enters the windbreak;**

-- **Planting a mixture of grasses, a food plot, or leaving stubble 20-50 feet along the edge of a windbreak provides additional nesting and food sources.**

## Good Luck at State!



In February the Scottsbluff High School Envirothon Team, comprised of (front) Hayley Clark, Nikki Derr; (middle) coach Heather Haberman, Creighton Booth, Leodegario Sierra; and Tyler Soper (back) won the regional Envirothon competition in Gordon. They were high scoring team in the Aquatics, Wildlife and Special Topic divisions. This was their first-ever attempt in the Envirothon contest. The team has been preparing for the State Envirothon contest to be held May 2 at Ponca State Park. The North Platte NRD is pleased to sponsor their registration to the state contest and wishes them the best of luck!

**The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago...  
the next best time is NOW.**

There are several programs to aid landowners in creating wildlife areas near windbreaks. Statedwide, the Conservation Reserve Program offers rental payments, a signing bonus and cost-share for establishing windbreaks and other woodland habitat like riparian forest buffers. One continuous CRP sign-up option (SAFE CP-38) allows partial or whole fields into CRP with acreage size limits. These lands are planted to a variety of grasses,

wildflowers and shrub thickets for upland game birds like quail and greater prairie chickens.

The North Platte NRD, in cooperation with local Pheasants Forever chapters, offers enhanced rental payment, plant establishment cost-share and a sign-up incentive for riparian forest buffers. Pheasants and Quail Forever chapters, in the Corners for Wildlife Program, offer cost-share on grass and wildlife shrubs plus a 5 year rental payment for habitat establishment in center pivot corners.

Planting trees and shrubs for wildlife along side existing windbreaks or adding onto the length of a present windbreak, makes for larger windbreaks that benefit more wildlife than a smaller one.

Planning, design and ordering of trees and shrubs assistance is available at Natural Resources District or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offices. Tree orders are now being taken by NRD's. Most cost-share programs are available through a continuous sign-up process.