

Resources

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NPNRD Reminders...

NPNRD Meetings

Regular monthly NPNRD board meetings are held at 7 p.m. at the Gering Civic Center on the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting will be November 10. Meetings are open to the public. District landowners and water users are encouraged to attend.

More volunteer RAIN catchers needed!

More volunteers are needed in the Banner, southern Sioux, northern Morrill, and northern Garden County areas to collect and report precipitation accumulations. North Platte NRD Resources Coordinator Greg Jackson said the job is easy and participants get a free rain gauge.

"All you need is access to the Internet, collect

See RAIN page 4

Windbreak cookbooks are now available

"Fruits of Your Labor," a unique cookbook featuring windbreak fruits, is now available from the Colorado State Forest Service. Stop by the NPNRD office, 1054 Rundell Road in Gering, for your free copy.

Check out our updated Website

Cosmetic and content changes are being made to the district's website weekly. For more information about the NPNRD's purposes and projects, visit www.npnrd.org.

Be thinking about trees

It's not too early to be thinking about your spring conservation tree and shrub planting needs. NPNRD Soil Conservation Coordinator Roy Lyles has just released the 2006 order list. Twenty three varieties are available at a cost of 65 cents per tree for multiples of 50. Cost share assistance is also available for conservation tree purchases. Visit with Roy for early orders or view tree information on our website.

Incentives available

Groundwater consumption in the North Platte Natural Resources District continues to be a major focus for directors and staff. The most effective way to manage groundwater is to have a good understanding of its levels of use. This can be achieved through the use of flow meters.

In the NPNRD, flow meters are now mandatory in two groundwater management sub-areas, the Pumpkin Creek (PC) Basin and Lisco-Oshkosh-Lewellen (LOL) area. Currently flow meters are optional on the other approximately 2,500 registered irrigation wells located in the district (Banner, Garden, Morrill, Scotts Bluff and southern Sioux counties). However, NPNRD staff and directors, including manger Ron Cacek and board member Jerry Dillman, believe flow meters are the best way to manage the use of groundwater.

"I'd like to see more guys voluntarily put them on," Dillman said. "I think it's (flow meter use) the best way we can get a handle on knowing how much water we're using in the district."

To encourage the installation and use of flow meters, the NPNRD has available a cost share program to assist with the expense of flow meter purchase and installation. According to Cacek, money is available now to reimburse landowners fifty percent of their cost up to \$700 per flow meter. The money is available on a first come-first served basis. Applications can be made through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Scottsbluff, Bridgeport, Harrisburg or Oshkosh.

See FLOW METER, page 2

Stakeholders review FA basins, work on requirements of integrated management

The North Platte Natural Resources District board of directors and Stakeholders group are making slow progress toward developing an Integrated Management Plan as part of requirements of LB962—the collective effort between the state's 23 Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR) to establish a working management plan for groundwater.

Since 2004 the Upper North Platte River Basin above the Kearney Canal, has been designated as over appropriated, that is, existing uses exceed the supply. The DNR will make its annual determinations by Jan. 1, 2006.

The NPNRD has also been designated among eight NRDs



NPNRD Watershed Coordinator Dennis Beyer examines a sample of macroinvertebrates with Minatare biology students during a field trip to the Nine Mile Creek watershed area Sept. 29. See full story on page 2.

statewide to be fully appropriated, that is, areas which are currently sustainable over long periods of time and the existing irrigation rights can meet the minimum percentages of use required. Other fully appropriated districts neighboring NPNRD are the Upper Niobrara White NRD (Chadron), South Platte NRD (Sidney), and Twin Platte NRD (North Platte). Each district is now in the process of writing its own Integrated Management Plan.

For a fully appropriated district, such as NPNRD, LB962 requires that no new surface water rights, no construction of new wells, or no increase in irrigated area shall occur. NPNRD has been under these stays and moratoriums since 2002.

See STAKEHOLDERS, page 3

Success on Nine Mile

After a summer of tree removal and noxious weed control, the public and area school students are beginning to understand the benefits of practical, planned, and practiced conservation

Area high school students are getting a better understanding of the value of clean water sources and supplies thanks to the educational efforts by the North Platte Natural Resources District.

On Sept. 23, approximately 240 Scottsbluff High School biology students got their hands dirty and feet wet as part of a hands-on lesson in water monitoring. Former science teacher and Nine Mile Creek Watershed council chairman Mike Sarchet planned the data-collecting field trip with SHS biology instructors and NPNRD watershed coordinator Dennis Beyer.

Beyer has worked since 2003 with area landowners on the habitat restoration and conservation project. The program made use of several existing programs, including Continuous Conservation Reserve, WILD Nebraska, and the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program. Participating landowners worked with Beyer, and personnel with the USDA, Game and Parks, and other agencies.

Participants signed a long-term contract agreeing to implement conservation practices along Nine Mile Creek. Practices that were eligible for reimbursement include installation of grass filter strips, riparian forest buffers, grass seed and its installation; trees and shrubs and installation; fabric mulch and installation; fence and installation; and auxiliary watering facilities.

This summer a timber harvesting contractor was hired to remove approximately 17,500 Russian olive trees and



saltcedar shrubs along the watershed that were depleting valuable ground water sources.

During the Nine Mile tour the students were presented a brief history of the nearly 100-year old manmade drainage system that is Nine Mile Creek, located approximately 10 miles northeast of Minatare. According to Sarchet, the creek in the 1950s was ranked as one of the top cold water areas in the entire Midwest region for trout fishing. Due to increased groundwater use in the area and

several years of drought, the stream's flow has been adversely affected. The local watershed council and NPNRD have taken extra precautions to protect the stream's health and longevity.

Students were introduced to the Nine Mile Project and given a road tour of the area to view farm ground that has been left idle due to water shortages. The students were able to recognize the direct

correlation between water availability and economic sustainability.

Streamside, students measured water temperature, flow, water volume rates, pH, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity in the stream and gathered different plant species.

The tour kicked off the first of many hands-on learning opportunities the NPNRD will conduct this fall in cooperation with area schools. The NPNRD gave World Water Monitoring Day presentations in Scottsbluff, Minatare, and Morrill High Schools and will coordinate additional water monitoring presentations next spring.



NPNRD GIS coordinator Mike Donley, right, introduces Scottsbluff High School biology students to the different species of macroinvertebrates found along Nine Mile Creek during an outing in September. Students learned the correlation between proper conservation management and a healthy watershed.

FLOW METERS: Incentives available for installation

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Cacek said there are several advantages to installing and using flow meters.

"Besides helping you monitor how much water you're using, flow meters are also good indicators if your pump is not running efficiently," he said. "If it's not pumping at its full capacity, that's probably something you want to be aware of."

University of Nebraska irrigation specialist Dean Yonts said proper irrigation system performance is a major advantage to using flow meters. Yonts points out that if it seems to take longer than it should to cover a field with irrigation water, it may not be due to the weather or high temperatures. The irrigation system may be putting out less flow than it used to. This could be caused by a problem, such as worn out bowls in the pump, or it could be the result of changes such as a new nozzle package.

Another advantage of using flow meters is having information vital to good management. Yonts pointed to the old

saying, "If you want to manage it, you have to measure it."

Representatives with meter companies also cite the advantage of increasing irrigation efficiency and helping to avoid over or under watering.

The price advantage of installing a flow meter at approximately \$750 compared to more costly irrigation system repairs or replacement is also a factor.

Yonts reminds irrigators that it is important to match the size of the flow meter with the capacity of the irrigation system, in terms of the minimum and maximum flow range.

For irrigators who are considering buying a meter, Yonts said manufacturers and dealers can provide information about the size, price range and other factors.

For more information about the NRCS cost-share program, contact the NRCS offices in Scottsbluff, Bridgeport, Oshkosh or Harrisburg, or the NPNRD office in Gering at (308) 436-7111.

NPNRD staff available for LOL reports

The North Platte NRD staff is currently working on their season-end crop reports for the Lisco-Oshkosh-Lewellen groundwater management sub-area. The reports are due Jan. 10, 2006.

Reports must include the following information: results of soil and irrigation water tests for residual nitrate; crops grown and yield goal used as basis for determining nitrogen needs; recommended fertilizer rate based on University of Nebraska-Lincoln formula; amounts of fertilizer applied and date of application; estimated tons of manure applied per acre; amount of irrigation water applied; actual yield of the present year's crop; and planned crop rotation for the following year.

To assist L-O-L area landowners and to avoid a last minute rush, NPNRD Resources Coordinator Greg Jackson will be in the Oshkosh NRCS office each Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. through Nov. 16. Jackson invites all area LOL area landowners to visit with him directly about their resource management plans or other questions and concerns they might have.

"Stop in on Wednesdays or call Marilyn to set up an appointment," Jackson said.

Appointments can also be made by calling the NPNRD office in Gering at (308) 436-7111.

Well registrations should be updated

The North Platte Valley, served by the NPNRD, is noted for its historic irrigation wells, some dating back to the early 1900s. But many landowners need to make sure that their wells are registered with current information. Inaccurate information on registered wells can hinder landowners' ability to qualify for incentive programs including CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program).

NPNRD manager Ron Cacek said some wells within the district are showing up to be registered in the wrong name, registered with incorrect acres, or registered in the wrong location.

"A lot of people had trouble getting into CREP last year because they did not have the proper well registration information," Cacek said. "It will get increasingly more and more difficult to qualify for these programs if their well registration information is not up to date."

Cacek encourages landowners to take time to review their well registration information and make necessary

updates. Cacek invites landowners to visit with NPNRD staff to correct any inaccuracies.

Wells in the state of Nebraska must be registered through the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR). More information about these requirements can be found at the NDNR website, www.dnr.state.ne.us. Cacek said useful information about current well registrations can also be found at this same website. Landowners can type in their name or well registration number and locate the well on a map. Information of that well registration can then be checked.

"If they have access to a computer, they can look the information up using the same data base that we do here at the office," Cacek said.

According to NDNR rules and regulations, each water well completed in this state on or after July 1, 2001, excluding test holes and dewatering wells to be used for less than ninety days, shall be registered with the Department of Natural Resources as provided in this sec-

tion within sixty days after completion of construction of the water well.

Ground water well registrations much contain the owner's name and current address and signature; the well registration number; the pump installer's name, and pump column information; pumping water level; rate and amount of time pumped, and yield of water well in gallons per minute.

Water well registration and pump installation information must be updated by the water well owner when the original information provided is determined to be inaccurate or incomplete; or the water well is modified in any substantial way making the original information inaccurate in its description of the water well. This information shall be submitted to the Department in writing.

Complete information about ground water well registrations can be found at <http://www.dnr.state.ne.us/docs/GWRules.html>

Landowners reminded about Pumpkin Creek incentives

In efforts to better manage the depleting groundwater levels in the Pumpkin Creek sub-area, the North Platte Natural Resources board, as well as local landowners, have taken the directive of self governing.

At a September 1 special budget meeting, the NPNRD board heard a plan from Pumpkin Creek area landowners Leo Hoehn and Kirk Laux to increase taxes on the entire district in order to offer incentive payments to permanently retire groundwater irrigated acres within the sub-area. The board approved the plan in September.

The one-cent tax is expected to raise an additional \$187,500 per year to be used with state matching funds to retire 2,500 production acres annually for the next two years.

The goals of the plan are to maintain economic stability among the sub-area, return to a fully appropriated designation within five years (the basin is currently overappropriated), return flow to Pumpkin Creek, and provide producer's options in the future.

According to the plan, Pumpkin Creek area producers would get \$450 per acre as incentive payment. EQIP or similar requirements would be used to determine eligibility and acre limits.

The plan was devised by an informal seven-member group of Pumpkin Creek area producers concerned about the basin's condition. Members include Art Davis, Todd Faessler, Bob Gifford, Jr., Mark Knaub, Jim Lapaseotes, Leo Hoehn and Kirk Laux. The group has been working with NDNR deputy director Ann Bleed, Steve Chick formerly of the NRCS, and NPNRD manager Ron Cacek.

The state Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has also provided a shot in the arm for the Pumpkin Creek sub-area, committing \$750,000 for each of two years, or \$1.5 million to retire 2,500 acres annually, or 5,000 total, in the basin. The NRCS incentive will be \$100 per acre for three years, or a total of \$3,000 over three years. However, a one-third match of \$375,000 for each of two years, or \$750,000 total, is needed from

another partner. Bleed has indicated that the NDNR is willing to contribute, but it would be January 2006 before anything could be committed from that agency.

The group is also hoping that unused CREP 10,000 acres from below Lake McConaughy could be applied to the Pumpkin creek basin area.

The group would like to see the gradual retiring of excess irrigation acres from the basin with the intent of minimizing adverse affects on the basin and stabilize land values in the area.

Laux is also cooperating with the University of Nebraska on a no-till crop study. He is in the process of harvesting 50 acres of no-till Great Northern dry edible beans on his farm southeast of Bridgeport. Laux, working with UN-L soils specialist Dr. Gary Hergert and limited irrigation specialist Aung Hla, Laux hopes to develop better farming techniques for limited irrigation supplies while still providing cropping alternative for area producers.

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STAKEHOLDERS: Make efforts toward IMP

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The NPNRD's task now is to develop their IMP within the next 2-4 years (one year has passed since the implementation of LB962) to protect existing water uses and manage for new uses. The IMP should determine whether, or under what conditions, new uses would be allowed.

During the Oct. 4 joint meeting of the NPNRD board and Stakeholders group held in Bridgeport, the group fine tuned their goal statement. The group then discussed the possibility of using certified acres as part of their management plan. Currently acre certification is not required by the NPNRD except in the Pumpkin Creek Basin.

DNR deputy director Ann Bleed told the group that under a fully appropriated basin, the following elements must be included: certification of acres, continuation of existing moratoriums, the implementation and enforcement of a monitoring program, offsets, and specific transfer rules. An important key to any IMP is the plan must protect existing users from new uses that would adversely affect their existing use.

Other management options that could be included in an IMP are allocations, metering, and reduction of acres. The NPNRD Stakeholders group has asked to review how other fully appropriated districts, including South Platte NRD, are addressing and writing these requirements into their IMP.

The group will meet again Nov. 8 in Scottsbluff to continue work on their IMP.

NPNRD extends hand to help with public water concerns

The North Platte Natural Resources District has offered, and many area communities are considering, the possibility of establishing one or more regional water sources. The idea has been presented as a possible answer to increasing pressure upon communities by the Environmental Protection Agency to meet safe drinking water standards.

Of the 18 public water systems under the NPNRD's jurisdiction, 14 have been identified as having levels of nitrates, uranium, or arsenic higher than EPA standards. The communities of Broadwater, Lyman, Morrill, Oshkosh, Terrytown, and Gering have at least two elements high enough to carry the potential for administrative action by the Nebraska Health and Human Services (NHHS).

What this means to western Nebraska communities is new sources of safe drinking water will need to be located, or treatment of existing water sources will need to be initiated. Several communities, including Gering, have begun the necessary but costly process of establishing new water sources. Mitchell, Morrill, Lyman, and Henry are beginning to explore the possibility of locating a central water source for their communities in western Scotts Bluff County.

NPNRD manger Ron Cacek and Ron Moore with the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) coordinated two meetings Sept. 28 and 29 in Gering and Bridgeport to meet with community leaders

Cacek explained that the NRD has authority in the area to assist with ground water issues, including establishing public water systems and then offering the water at wholesale to communities.

Scottsbluff City Manager Rick Kuckkahn was among the official who showed favor for the plan

"I'll go on record as saying that we need to get this done," Kuckkahn said. "We need an RO (reverse osmosis) plant in a central spot. We need a permanent, long-term solution."

Kuckkahn voiced frustration to the congressional delegates for allowing the EPA to raise drinking water standards without advising communities, especially those in rural areas, about what to do with uranium-rich water and uranium waste from treatment facilities.

Gering Public Works director and state Water Policy Task Force member Pat Heath pointed out that currently uranium does not have a compliance time line, leaving communities guessing when and how to deal with their uranium problems.

Others expressed their concern for a centrally-located water source and treatment facility citing the possibility of major system failure or intentional contamination to the water source, which could cripple all outlying communities. Several community officials said they were more comfortable finding their own solutions to public water safety and supply concerns.

The NPNRD has already offered assistance by contributing \$44,000 to an \$80,000 study by the US Army Corps of Engineers to assess the problem of smaller rural communities exceeding the EPA standards. The study assesses the feasibility of alternatives to meet the pending new drinking water standards for nitrates, uranium and arsenic.

The study indicated that the estimated cost for a single source system shared regionally would be \$17.7 million; a dual source system would cost \$16.6 million; communities developing individual systems would cost collectively \$30.2 million.

"Most communities now are at a point where something needs to be done, but they simply can't afford it," Cacek said.

Funding, Cacek said, will be largest stumbling block for developing such a system. He said funding for such a project would most likely have to come through a special congressional appropriation. Funding possibly could not be secured through conventional methods

Cacek suggested each community take the information from the meetings back to their respective boards, get a feeling from their own communities on the issue, and then begin working with the NRD and congressional representatives to take steps toward regional water source development.

"Most communities now are at a point where something needs to be done, but they simply can't afford it."

*NPNRD Manager
Ron Cacek*

Get Educated

NPNRD staff members and other conservation experts have been working with area schools this fall to teach basic lessons in good land stewardship.



NPNRD Soil Conservation Coordinator Roy Lyles, above, demonstrates to home schooled students with apple slices the percent of the earth's surface that is suitable for food and crop production.

Noe Marymore, right, wildlife biologist with Pheasants Forever and NRCS shows Gering students the proper techniques of planting a nursery tree. The events were held as part of the annual branch Out field day held Oct. 3-4 and 11-12 at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center south of Gering. Over 500 students participated and went away with a better understanding of tree conservation.



RAIN: More volunteers needed

Continued from pg 1

rain and snowfall and record your data," Jackson said. "You get a four-inch rain gauge out of the deal."

Jackson said currently there are approximately 60 volunteers with gauges. Approximately 40 are reporting their information on a regular basis. He reminds those who have volunteered to keep submitting their precipitation reports.

The Nebraska Rainfall Assessment and Information Network (NeRAIN) program, sponsored by 13 of the state's natural resources districts including the North Platte NRD, utilizes the information collected by volunteers to prepare detailed maps showing rainfall patterns across the state. NeRAIN information is updated daily and available for public access at <http://dnrddata.dnr.state.ne.us/NeRAIN>.

To volunteer or learn more about the program, contact Jackson at the NPNRD office, 436-7111, or e-mail to jackson@nprnd.org.

visit our website: www.nprnd.org