

Resources

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NPNRD Reminders...

NPNRD Meetings

Regular NPNRD board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month and are open to the public. During the winter months, meetings begin at 2:30 p.m. The next meeting will be Jan. 12, 2006. Visit our website, www.npnrd.org, for minutes of previous board meetings.

Win 50 Free Windbreak Trees

NPNRD resource technicians Roy Lyles and Mike Donley will be at the Farm and Ranch Day expo at the Oshkosh auditorium Jan. 25, 2006. They will be available to answer all of your conservation tree planting questions, and will be giving away 50 juniper trees.

Your Post-CRP Options?

With the bulk of Conservation Reserve Program acres set to expire in the next few years, landowners have decisions to make. The National Association of Conservation Districts outlines some of the options available to landowners whose contracts are set to expire. Go to <http://www.nacdnet.org/buffers/> to learn more.

Be a Weather Watcher in 2006

Become a weather watcher in 2006 and get a free rain gauge for Christmas! Residents of Banner, Garden, Morrill, Scotts Bluff 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. To learn more, go to www.dnrdata.dnr.state.ne.us/NeRAIN/index.asp or call Resources Coordinator Greg Jackson at 308-436-7111.

Corners for Wildlife

Corners for Wildlife gives landowners the option of enrolling in a program to help establish wildlife habitat on center pivot corners not capable of sustaining high yields when planted to row crops. The object of the program is to establish new wildlife habitat. Landowners can qualify for cost-share to plant grass seed mixtures OR add 400 or more trees/shrubs to cover the reseeded. Contact Roy Lyles at the NPNRD office, (308) 436-7111, for information.

What do levels mean?

Fall 2005 Pumpkin Creek Basin water levels viewed with optimism and caution

Judging from the initial figures, it appears that the Pumpkin Creek Basin sub-area received some relief from the drought in 2005. Data collected during the Fall 2005 level readings showed significant well level increases in some areas, while little change or even decreases in others.

For the most part, the NPNRD is encouraged by the readings. According to manager Ron Cacek, only time, and ongoing conservation practices, will allow for a continuing positive trend.

In October, NPNRD staff took level readings at 140 monitoring wells throughout the Pumpkin Creek Basin. Preliminary information showed that two-thirds of the monitoring wells showed a rise from the fall 2004 measurements.

The difference in water levels between 2002 and 2005 in most areas has been significant. In the fall of 2002, during the onset of the drought, only 10 percent, or 14 of the NRD's 139 monitoring wells, showed an increase in water levels. In the fall of 2005, 66 percent, or 101 of 153 monitoring wells, showed an increase. The most noticeable increase in groundwater levels between 2002 and 2005 has been in the Lawrence Fork area in western Morrill County.

According to United

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Order now for spring trees

Christmas time is the right time to be thinking about planting trees. Consider tree planting as a great gift to future generations. Plus, windbreaks have been proven to prevent soil erosion, protect livestock from heat and cold, prevent crop damage and slow evaporation, provide habitat for wildlife, and increase property value. Those are some great New Years resolutions.

Orders are now being taken at the NPNRD office for 2006 conservation trees. But hurry, as always, trees are sold on a first-come, first-served basis.

The NPNRD has 28 varieties of two-year-old bare-root conifer and deciduous trees and shrubs and eight varieties of potted trees available. New varieties this year include aspen, Jack pine, and wax currant.

Trees are sold in bundles of 50 at 65 cents each for conservation purposes only. The district does not sell trees for landscaping purposes.

In addition, supplies of potted Eastern red cedar and



Close monitoring of wells is a key part of NPNRD's groundwater management plan. Here water resources technician Carolyn Hudson takes weekly readings at a district pumphouse.

potted Rocky Mountain juniper trees are limited due to the 2004 hails at the Halsey nursery and high demand for these species. NPNRD tree program coordinator Roy Lyles said those interested in ordering potted stock should stop by the NRD office in Gering.

"Potted stock is available, but we'll have to call the nurseries to confirm their quantities and availability," Lyles said.

Lyles said many tree planting services are also available through the NPNRD to help get conservation trees established and improve survival rates. These include tree planting at 65 cents per tree and chemical weed control for 15 cents.

"We can go out, as a service, and take measurements and help with site selections," Lyles said. "We can make recommendations for site selections as far as soil types, conditions and slope. We don't charge extra, that's included."

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State wants to know more about Nine Mile Creek

"Tell us more about this tree removal program you're doing."

That was the word heard by NPNRD delegates during the North Platte River Basin-wide Stakeholders meeting held Nov. 15 in North Platte. It seems the aggressive effort by the NPNRD to remove acres of water-sapping invasive Russian olive and Saltcedar trees along Nine Mile Creek in eastern Scotts Bluff County is beginning to attract some attention.

During the November meeting delegates from five natural resources districts within the basin and representatives from the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) discussed concerns and solutions related to a basin-wide integrated management plan.

NPNRD delegates and supporters of the Nine Mile Creek Invasive Species Control project are beginning to urge other districts and state conservationists to consider

the cost, both monetarily and water wise, of invasive species growing along the state's rivers and tributaries. A mature Russian olive tree can use up to 150 gallons of water per day while a mature Saltcedar (tamarix) can absorb up to 200 gallons of water per day. The lack of control of these invasive species could, literally, suck the state dry.

NPNRD stakeholder group member Bruce Rolls of Scottsbluff provided testimony during the basin-wide meeting that there are approximately 40,000 acres of woody vegetation, most of it Russian olive and Saltcedar, growing along the North Platte River. Rolls and Nine Mile Creek landowner Mike Sarchet urged the basin-wide group to consider the consumptive water use of this biomass as a source of offset water when making decisions about the groundwater management plan.

DNR acting director Ann Bleed said one of the obsta-

cles for tree removal is funding of such programs. The Nine Mile Creek project, which is removing Russian olive and Saltcedar trees along ten miles of the creek east of Minatare, was partially funded through a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Jim Cook of DNR agreed that the data on water use of the invasive species would be good to include in the basin's planning process. Cook is interested in learning more about efforts and advances being made by the Nine Mile Creek project.

NPNRD directors are pleased with the early results shown from the Nine Mile Creek project after the summer 2005 tree removal. These include better access for spraying and noxious weed control along the creek, improved wildlife habitat and a cleaner watershed. Stream flow and groundwater increases will continue to be monitored for accurate results.

NRD tree planting cost-share assistance

Several programs provide cost-share assistance to help landowners establish tree plantings:

Conservation Cost-Share Program: This program reimburses 65 percent of the costs of site preparation, trees (or shrubs) and planting costs, and 50 percent for fencing. The limit is \$3,000 per landowner per year.

Continuous Conservation Reserve Program: For land enrolled in the USDA's Continuous CRP program, the cost-share rate is 50 percent on site preparation, trees, planting, and either fabric mulch or drip irrigation system. In addition, a practice incentive payment of 40 percent of the eligible installation costs and a sign-up incentive payment of \$10 per acre per contract year are

available.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program:

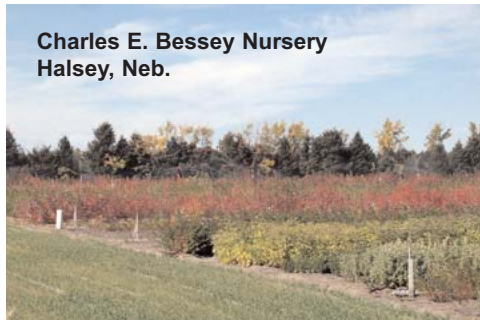
For land enrolled in EQIP, another USDA program, there is a 50 percent cost-share rate for site preparation, trees, planting, fence, fabric mulch and drip irrigation.

WILD Nebraska:

For land enrolled in this program, jointly sponsored by the NRD and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 80 percent cost-share is available for site preparation, trees and shrubs, and planting. Cost-share for fabric mulch and fence is 50 percent.

Participation in the

above programs is subject to eligibility and availability of funds. To inquire or apply, visit the local USDA Service Center in your county.



Charles E. Bessey Nursery
Halsey, Neb.

TREES: Order now

Continued from pg 1

ed in our planting fee."

Tree planting in the district has increased from 184,860 trees in 1990 to 274,870 in 2005.

Trees ordered through the NRD are shipped from the nursery and stored at the district's tree coolers until planting time, which begins April 1. Customers can either pick up the trees themselves and plant them, or have the NRD deliver and plant them.

Tree order forms are available at the NPNRD office in Gering or can be viewed and printed from our website at <http://www.npnrd.org/trees.htm> and mailed in.

For a chance to win 50 free conservation trees and visit about your tree planting needs, stop by the NPNRD booth at the Farm and Ranch Day in Oshkosh Jan. 25, 2006.

Tree and Shrub Varieties

Caragana	Cotoneaster	Chokecherry
Lilac	Plum, native	Sumac
Sand cherry	Nanking cherry	Woods rose
Buffaloberry	Golden currant	Serviceberry
Privet	Wax currant	Austrian pine
Red cedar	Ponderosa pine	Colo. blue spruce
Green ash	Jack pine	Rocky Mtn. juniper
Siberian elm	Hackberry	Cottonwood (hybrid)
Honeylocust	Bur oak	Black walnut

To learn more about the varieties of trees and shrubs that are best to plant in conservation windbreaks, visit our website at www.npnrd.org or the Conservation Trees for Nebraska website at <http://www.nrdnet.org/trees/>

LOL season-end crop reports due

The deadline is quickly approaching for the Lisco-Oshkosh-Lewellen groundwater management sub-area season end crop reports. The reports are due **January 10, 2006**.

Reports must include results of soil and irrigation water tests for residual nitrates; 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.

Producers do not need to fill out forms if they have not fertilized in the past year or are not currently fertilizing.

According to Oshkosh NRCS clerk Marilyn Howerter, only a few producers have contacted the office to ask questions or get started on their reports.

"Most of them put it off until after Christmas," Howerter said.

However, producers do need to start contacting the office to avoid the last-minute rush. Howerter expects approximately 60 producers will need to submit forms.

For more information or to set up an appointment with NPNRD Resources Coordinator Greg Jackson, contact Marilyn at the Oshkosh office at (308) 772-3953, Ext. 3, or Jackson at the Gering NRD office at (308) 436-7111.

Howerter said interest has also been brisk for tree orders in Garden County. Landowners wanting to get their orders in for 2006 conservation trees should contact Howerter at the Oshkosh office or Roy Lyles at the Gering NRD office.

LEVELS: Pumpkin Creek, other areas show first increases since 2002

Continued from page 1

precipitation in the Pumpkin Creek Basin has shown a marked increase. Between Nov. 1 2004 and Nov. 1, 2005, 21 inches of rain had fallen in the Hull Church area in the upper western end of the basin south of Stegall; 20.1 inches were recorded at Castle Rock in eastern Banner County and 13.71 inches at Harrisburg. Last year, the highest precipitation measurement was 15.5 inches at Castle Rock.

Better management of groundwater by area producers has also played a major role. NPNRD Water Resource Coordinator Greg Jackson reported that fall readings from flow meters indicated the average usage of water for irrigation was 7.9 acre inches in the Pumpkin Creek Basin. This year the NPNRD board of directors set Pumpkin Creek allocations at 14 inches.

Cacek and NPNRD staff have been working internally to improve the policy concerning groundwater use in the Pumpkin Creek Basin. Amendments have been proposed to the Rules and Regulations for Pumpkin Creek Basin Groundwater Management Sub-area to better address water use and allotment. The board of directors agreed at their Nov. 10 meeting in Gering to present the proposed changes at a public hearing scheduled for Dec. 14 in Harrisburg. The public was allowed to review the draft and make comment on the proposed changes during that hearing.

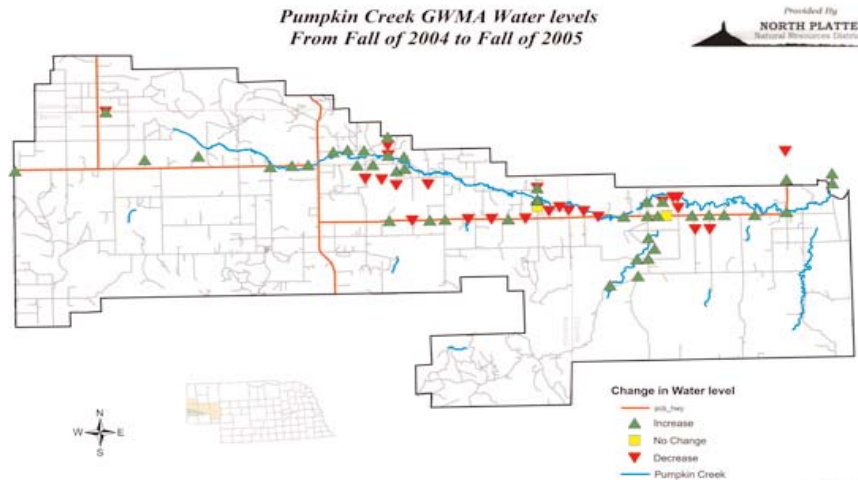
Other areas in the district have also shown improvements in fall levels for the first time in several years. Fall levels at Dutch Flats, Mitchell Valley, east of Scottsbluff and southeast of Oshkosh in Garden County, are the highest they have been since October of 2002.

Cacek cautions, however, that it is overall trends, not yearly averages, that indicate accurate groundwater level fluctuations and ultimately, the bottom line.

2005 PC precipitation levels

Nov. 1, 2004 -- Nov. 1, 2005
21" at Hull; 20.1" at Castle Rock; 18.51" at Murray Lake; 13.71" at Harrisburg.
Highest 2004 measurement: 15.5" at Castle Rock.

USGS recorded wells, information available on USGS website.



This map compiled Nov. 4, 2005 by NPNRD GIS Coordinator Mike Donley shows comparisons of the fall groundwater readings from 2004 to 2005 in the Pumpkin Creek Basin sub-area. Of the 68 wells tested, 42 showed an increase (green), 24 showed a decrease (red), and two showed no change. The largest noted increases were in the Castle Rock and Lawrence Fork areas.

USGS real time recorders now in use

Groundwater levels within the district are constantly fluctuating. Influences include relationship to surface water, seasonal trends and increased use. In addition to the 800 NRD monitoring wells located throughout the district, the North Platte NRD also uses information from U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) monitoring sites to determine current groundwater levels.

Of the 21 USGS monitoring well sites located in the state of Nebraska, 15 are located within the NPNRD. From these monitoring wells, the NPNRD can access information about water levels and precipitation, compiled in real-time, weekly, monthly, or annually.

District landowners can directly access this information based on a USGS monitoring well located nearest to their property. Sites in our district include Albin, Wyo., Harrisburg, Broadwater, Buske Ranch, Castle Rock, Hull Church, Chimney Rock, Murray Lake, Angora, Scottsbluff, Morrill, University Farm, South Alliance, Dutch Flats and Sheep Creek.

To view this information, visit the USGS website at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ne/nwis/current/> to access the individual wells. Data is presented in hydrographs showing water level trends. Full information about USGS services can be found at <http://water.usgs.gov/>.

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Published by the North Platte Natural Resources District, 1054 Rundell Road, Gering. Mailing Address: P.O. Box 36, Gering, NE 69341. Phone: 308-436-7111. Fax: 308-436-2452.

E-mail: cacek@npnrd.org

World Wide Web: <http://www.npnrd.org>

Chairman of Board of Directors:

John Maser

District Manager:

Ron Cacek

Newsletter Editor:

Kay Grote



New Technology

NPNRD soils technician Craig Uhrig, left, and water coordinator Carl Roland, right, get tips from Burl Goree of the U.S. Geological Survey on how to enter data for well location, water levels and other field readings. Goree came up from Louisiana to present a two-day training to NPNRD staff about using the latest GPS technology which enables quicker data entry and retrieval in the field.



NRD seeking 2006 Master Conservationist nominees

The North Platte Natural Resources District is looking for nominees for the 2006 Master Conservationist Awards. These awards, recognizing excellence in soil and water conservation, are presented annually at the Nebraska Association of Resources District state convention in September. Deadline for local nominations is March 1, 2006.

Awards are available in the areas of production agriculture, residential, community, and youth. Five production agriculture awards are given, one each from five Master Conservationist District areas. District A, the western Nebraska district, consists of the Upper Niobrara-White, North Platte, and South Platte NRDs. In 2004, the state District A winner was the Alton Lerwick family farms of Stegall, recognized for their efforts in planting shelterbelts and developing cropping rotations for dryland and limited irrigation.

We'd like to bring the award back to the North Platte NRD in 2006. We also encourage landowners, residents, community officials and youth groups to begin developing

practices, programs and projects now that could become Master Conservationist award winners in the future.

In the production agriculture division, nominees must be Nebraska farmers or ranchers who have demonstrated excellent conservation practices for at least a five-year period on Nebraska farms or ranches.

In the residential, community and youth divisions, nominees must have carried out the conservation program a minimum of two years at the site. Residential entries can include a typical home yard or small acreage. Community and youth entries can include groups or an individual. The statewide awards are sponsored by the Omaha World-Herald and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The awards adhere to the guidelines for nominations, which are available for viewing on the NPNRD website at www.npnrd.org.

For more information about the awards, to nominate someone, or to get ideas about starting a conservation program, contact Kay Grote at the NPNRD office, (308) 436-7111.



North Platte NRD Watershed Coordinator Dennis Beyer was honored in November by the Panhandle Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) for his dedication and contributions in bringing the Nine Mile Creek Coalition together to combat invasive species. Beyer has been a catalyst for the assistance being provided to landowners in the watershed to eradicate and control harmful Russian olive and Saltcedar trees. The NPNRD and Panhandle RC&D are co-sponsors of the Nine Mile Watershed project.

Board sets 2006-2008 PC allocations

The board of directors at the North Platte Natural Resources District has set the groundwater allocations for the Pumpkin Creek Basin sub-area at 14 inches for the next three years. The decision was made on a 5-3 vote at the board's regular meeting Dec. 8 in Gering.

Directors favoring the move included Ted Cannon, Gary Darnall, Dave Deines, George Hall, and Pete Lapaseotes. Those opposed were Myron Lembke, Arden Wohlers, and John Maser. Director Gerald Dillman was absent from the meeting.

The Pumpkin Creek annual allocations were first discussed at the board's Water Resources sub-committee meeting held Dec. 5 with sub-committee members Darnall, Deines, Dillman, and Lembke. Darnall urged the need for producers in the basin to know the 2007 allocations in order to make decisions about their rotations for the next two years. Fellow sub-committee members, however, felt the decision should be made after the spring water level measurements are taken and reviewed by the board. The subcommittee could not come to a consensus and referred the matter to the full board.

Director Pete Lapaseotes of Bridgeport said during the Dec. 8 regular board meeting that the current allocation of 14 inches, which has been enforced for the past two irrigation seasons, seems to be a level everyone in the basin is willing and able to work with. He said he felt confident in setting the allocation for the next three years, 2006, 2007, and 2008.

"I feel the 14 inches is working. Everyone seems to be making adjustments in their operations knowing that this is the allotment we have to work with," Lapaseotes said. "The management practices of the landowners in the

Pumpkin Creek area, I feel, have been exceptional. I think we should continue with what is working."

Lapaseotes cited efforts to retire irrigation acres, decommission wells, implement no-till farming practices that help conserve soil moisture, and an average groundwater use of 7.8 acre inches by the basin's irrigators in 2005 as factors that are helping the Pumpkin Creek conditions.

Pumpkin Creek Basin average groundwater use 2003-2005

Of all certified acres

2003 -- 8.9 acre inches applied
Water carried forward, 215,147.4 acre-inches
2004 -- 9.7 acre inches applied
Water carried forward, 252,277.25 acre-inches
2005 -- 7.9 acre inches applied
Water carried forward, 275,171.50 acre-inches

Director Gary Darnall of Harrisburg agreed that having the allocations set for the next three years would allow producers to better plan their crop rotations and make other in-advance management decisions.

Board chairman John Maser expressed caution, however, that setting the annual allocations too far in advance may cause a public perception that the board is overly confident in conservation efforts and increased groundwa-

ter levels.

Director Arden Wohlers said he felt uncomfortable setting allocations too early without the spring readings, which historically have provided more accurate levels data.

Annual allocations for the Pumpkin Creek Basin, which has been on restrictions since 2001 due to decreases in stream flow and groundwater levels, have normally been set after April following the NRD's spring groundwater levels readings. Some directors said setting allocations in the spring did not allow enough time for pre-season planting and irrigation planning. Last year the 2006 allocations were set in June following the review of the Spring 2005 levels.

Harrisburg-area landowner Rex Nielsen expressed his concern about the board being overconfident with the 2005 rainfalls, which in some areas was four inches more than the previous year.

"If we have another year without the rains and a loss of precipitation, we'll be right back where we started," Nielsen said.

Director Dave Deines said that judging from the past levels readings, the basin is beginning to rebound. "My opinion would probably not change after the spring readings," he said.

Lapaseotes said the three-year, 14-inch allocation would allow both producers and the board a baseline to work from.

"The guys (producers) know what they have to work with and the board doesn't have to keep discussing allocations each year," he said. "But if things start to look like we really need to change, then we can at that time."