



## NPNRD Briefs...

### Forms now available on-line

Several forms are now available on the NPNRD website at [www.npnrd.org](http://www.npnrd.org). They include applications for Chemigation Permits, Well Permits, Well Abandonment, Certification of Groundwater Use and our Tree/Shrub purchase form. These can be viewed with Adobe Acrobat Reader 4.0 or above, printed off, filled out and submitted to the office.

### Board elections in 2006

The North Platte NRD board is served by nine directors, elected every four years to represent their interests of property owners and irrigators in their respective sub-districts. They are Ted Cannon, Scottsbluff; Gary Darnall, Harrisburg; Dave Deines, Gering; Jerry Dillman, Mitchell; George Hall, Bridgeport; Pete Lapasotes Jr., Bridgeport; Myron Lembke, Bridgeport; John Maser, Minatare; and Arden Wohlers, Scottsbluff.

This year five seats are up for re-election. The candidates in the November General Election will include: Sub-district 1- Gerald Dillman (I) and Burdette Kister; Sub-district 2 - Ted Cannon (I) and David Ostdiek; Sub-district 3 - Gary Darnall (I) and Leo Hoehn; Sub-district 4 - Myron Lembke (I) and Jim Hass; At Large - Pete Lapasotes Jr. (I).

### NPNRD's new home

Work began in mid-May to remodel the building purchased on Skyport Drive near the airport in Scottsbluff to be the NRD's new district office. The new facility will include expanded office, vehicle and equipment space, tree storage and on-site meeting, conference and education rooms. The staff will be preparing for a move later this summer and will be settled into the new building by late September.

### Check out [www.npnrd.org](http://www.npnrd.org)

The NPNRD website has undergone some re-designing and several additions. Information now includes an up-to-date home page, an events calendar, forms on-line, links to other agencies including DNR, USGS, other NRDs and the State Legislature, a new Education page including links for children and educators, a listing of staff and directors, and lots of snapshots of district activities and programs. We want your input. If you have suggestions or comments that would help improve our website, please contact Kay Grote at 436-7111 or [grote@npnrd.org](mailto:grote@npnrd.org).

## FEIS on Platte River Recovery Program released

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed Platte River Recovery Implementation Program was released May 23 by the Department of the Interior. This is one of the preliminary steps toward the approval of the PRRIP, which would provide for habitat for four targeted threatened or endangered species in Nebraska while attempting to give water users a fair allocation from the river basin.

The FEIS identified the Governance Committee Alternative as the Department's preferred alternative to the plan. Once the Secretary of the Interior decides to implement the preferred alternative, a Secretarial record of decision (ROD) will be released. For the program to be implemented, the Secretary of the Interior and the Governors of Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming must

sign a program implementing agreement. Colorado and Wyoming have already said they are on board with the program. Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman said last week he likely will sign the agreement. The state legislatures and the U.S. Congress would then make decisions on funding the program.

The Cooperative Agreement process began in 1997 when the Governors of Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming and the Secretary of the Interior agreed to jointly pursue a basin-wide effort to improve and maintain habitat for four threatened and endangered species along the Platte River in Nebraska. They are the whooping crane, interior least tern, piping plover and pallid sturgeon.

This cooperative agreement then established a  
*See FEIS, page 4*

## District nixes interbasin transfer ideas

The North Platte Natural Resources District is on record as opposing the transfer of water from the Platte River Basin to any other river basin in the state. During the LR389 Interim Study Hearing held May 16 in Holdrege, NPNRD representatives stated that taking water from one water-shortened basin to help another water-shortened would only serve as a bandage to the state's current water woes.

"We see no sound reasoning to encourage or even allow transferring water from one fully-appropriated basin to satisfy the depletion of the same resource in another fully-appropriated basin," NPNRD board member Myron

Lembke of Bridgeport told members of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee.

Lembke said the district rejects interbasin water transfer proposals, including one by Imperial-based irrigation advocacy group WaterClaim to transfer so-called excess water supplies from areas including the Sandhills, the High Plains Aquifer and the Platte River Basin, to the Republican River Basin to help meet the Nebraska-Kansas compact's 2007 deadline.

LR389, introduced in March by Elm Creek Senator and chairman of the Natural Resources  
*See INTERBASIN, page 3*

*The North Platte NRD received a \$260,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust in April to assist with the habitat restoration along Nine Mile Creek northeast of Scottsbluff. The Trust is funded by proceeds of the Nebraska Lottery and private donations and has awarded more than \$89 million to conservation projects in Nebraska since 1994. Accepting the award from NET Executive Director Mary A. Harding (left) are NRD Watershed Coordinator Dennis Beyer, NRD director Arden Wohlers and Nine Mile Creek Watershed Council chairman Mike Sarchet. See the full story on page 2*



## NPNRD awarded \$260K NET grant

The Nebraska Environmental Trust has provided over a quarter million dollars to help the North Platte NRD continue habitat restoration efforts along Nine Mile Creek northeast of Scottsbluff.

On April 25 the North Platte NRD was among the recipients of a portion of over \$11 million in environmental grants that has been awarded in the Nebraska Panhandle. The NRDs portion, \$260,000, will be used for riparian buffer strips and habitat restoration along Nine Mile Creek.

Watershed Coordinator Dennis Beyer said the invasive species eradication project is beginning to show positive benefits as native vegetation is returning along the creek banks that were once choked with Russian olive trees. Access for fishing and land management practices including spraying of other noxious weeds has been great-



An aerial photo of Nine Mile Creek taken in June 2005 shows the prevalence of Russian olive trees, which have choked out native vegetation. The RO trees are now gone, allowing the watershed to heal itself.

ly improved. The riparian buffer strip establishment effort is just a portion of a 10-year restoration plan.

A major portion of the proceeds for the Nebraska Environmental Trust grants have come through funds generated by the Nebraska Lottery.

NET executive director Mary A. Harding said the western Nebraska Panhandle region is second only to Lancaster County and southeast Nebraska in receiving environmental trust funds for a myriad of projects.

## Public Hearing on Certification to be held

The NPNRD board at the May 11 regular board meeting approved a final draft of rules and regulations for the certification of groundwater use in the North Platte NRD. The draft has been reviewed by the district's Water Resources Sub-committee consisting of Gary Darnall, Jerry Dillman, Myron Lembke, and Dave Deines, by the Department of Natural Resources and by the district's attorney. The draft is now on track to be presented at a formal public hearing in late June to accept public comment.

Watch for the public notices to run in the Star-Herald.

The draft, "Section E: Certification of Groundwater Uses," outlines requirements that will be needed to certify not only irrigated acres within the district, but also public water supplies and other uses including golf courses and water sources for recreation areas. Certification will allow the NRD to know more accurately how much groundwater is being used in the district. Information that will be needed for the certification process will include aerial photos or maps of

irrigated tracts of land, registration numbers of wells historically used to irrigate each tract, source of irrigation water other than groundwater, USDA-FSA records and/or county assessor records.

Most NRDs in the state now require certification as part of their groundwater management plans. Certification is also required to complete the integrated management plan for the entire fully-appropriated area. Once approved, certification will go into affect in 2007.

## Voluntary metering urged, needed in district

As the district and basin-wide integrated management plan process progresses, more attention is being focused on ways to get the fully-appropriated Platte River basin and its over appropriated areas, including our North Platte Valley, Pumpkin Creek and Lisco-Oshkosh-Lewellen sub-areas, back to 1997 levels of water supply and water use. One effective way is the use of flow meters to monitor and quantify water use.

NPNRD director Jerry Dillman of Mitchell said he supports the idea of flow meters "so landowners know exactly the amount of water being used and to defend the district against allegations of overuse."

"We need to know how much (water) is being used in order to know how much we need to cut back," Dillman said.

With the exception of the Pumpkin Creek Basin, flow meters are currently not required by irrigators in the district. The NPNRD board of directors during their April regular agreed not to mandate the use of flow meters in the entire district at this time.

However, the directors, as well as the Stakeholders group, believe that it will take a voluntary effort by the public, notably irrigators, to help quantify water uses within the district. The board of directors strongly encourage irrigators to the voluntarily use flow meters as a management and water saving tool. Cost share through the NRD is available to install flow meters.

Board members believe now is the time to adopt the practice before the state or Mother Nature forces the issue.

Many municipal water managers, including Pat Heath of the City of Gering, strongly favor water metering.

During the Stakeholders April 4 meeting in Scottsbluff, Department of Natural Resources acting director Ann Bleed asked the group to identify the reasons why they would want metering. Under LB962, the installation of flow meters is not required in a fully appropriated area. Several members of the group cited the reason of quantifying groundwater uses as support. Others, including NPNRD board chairman John Maser, said they would still like to give water users the opportunity to voluntarily install meters rather than forcing their installation.

*It will take a voluntary effort by the public, notably irrigators, to help quantify water uses within the district.*

### Cost share available for flow meter installation

Currently, the NPNRD has \$60,000 in cost-share money available to help landowners voluntarily install flow meters on their irrigation systems. The NPNRD will reimburse landowners 50% of the cost of buying and installing flow meters. The money is available on a first-come, first-served basis and some limits apply.

To apply for the cost-share funds, contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices in Harrisburg, Bridgeport Oshkosh or Scottsbluff.

After application has been made, NRD board approval is necessary before the meter can be installed. Reimbursement is made after the installation is verified.

According to NPNRD general manager Ron Cacek, sign-ups are open now and there are no cut off dates for application.

# Spring '06 water levels show increase

There has been an increase in spring groundwater levels throughout the district. While that may bring optimism to irrigators, area water managers caution that those increases are likely related directly to the increase in canal flows this spring. Overall, the levels are still following a downward trend.

Groundwater levels data was taken from the monitoring wells throughout the district in mid-March. NPNRD hydro-geologist Chris Jutting then compiled that data and released the annual report at the regular board meeting in May.

Jutting explained that of the 359 wells monitored, 249 wells (69%), showed an increase in water level. One hundred and six wells (30%) showed a decrease in their levels. Four wells registered no change. Overall increase for the year was .40 feet.

These numbers show a more encouraging picture than the five year average, which indicated an overall levels decline of 1.94 feet between spring 2001 and spring 2006. During that time only 51 of 340 monitoring wells (15%) showed an increase in levels. A decline was registered in 289 (85%) of the wells.

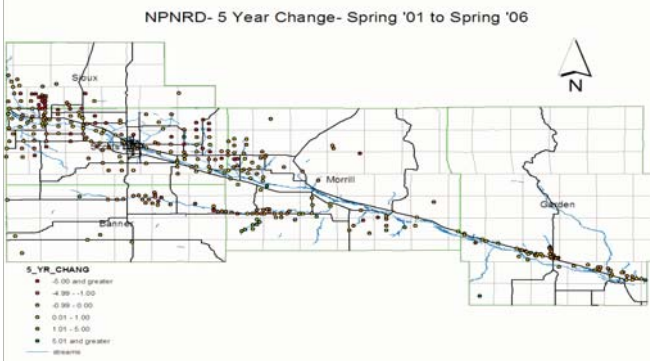
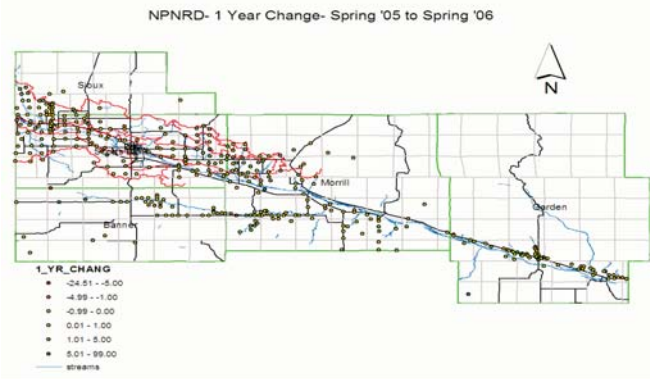
Jutting said the shorter canal runs during the past five years may be the strongest influence on the groundwater levels.

Historically, groundwater levels increase with canal flows. Canals are a major component in the recharge of the district's underlying aquifer. Where the canals have been running approximately 60% of their capacity for the past five years, a decline in groundwater levels can be expected.

Regionally, the area showing the largest increase in levels was the Lawrence Fork area of Pumpkin Creek Basin in western Morrill County. Increases are shown in green in both maps to the right. The Lawrence Fork area also showed a marked increase in levels during the Fall '05 reading. This area is a naturally occurring catch basin for precipitation run-off.

Several areas showed water level declines (shown in orange or red in the maps) from this spring's readings. They include the Dutch Flats area north of Mitchell and Morrill and areas in far eastern Garden County. Jutting said these declines could be due in part to the switch from surface water irrigation to groundwater irrigation. More pumping and less surface water seepage which attributes to recharge may be causes of the declines in these areas.

*The map on the top right show the one year change from Spring '05 to Spring '06 in groundwater levels district-wide. The bottom map shows levels changes from Spring '01 to Spring '06. Increases are shown by the green dots. Red and orange dots indicate level declines.*



## INTERBASIN TRANSFERS: District rejects proposals

Continued from page 1

Committee Ed Schrock, is an interim study to examine the possibility of interbasin transfers during water-short years to assist the state in complying with any interstate com-

pact, decree, or agreement.

The WaterClaim proposal in part would have the state paying for water that is consumptively used by irrigators, that is water used by crops before seepage, to be transferred to the Republican River basin to settle its legal problems. The group proposes that the Platte-to-Republican transfer could be made using Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's canals and then divert water through Spring Creek in western Phelps and Harlan Counties and into the Republican. The full proposal and can be read on group's website: <http://www.waterclaim.org/welcome.htm>

NPNRD officials maintain that transferring any water from the Platte River Basin is a dangerous plan and one that could put western Nebraska uncomfortably close to the same situation as that of the Republican region.

"Any transfer of water from the Platte River Basin to any other part of the state would be 100-percent depletion with no return to our district," said NPNRD General Manager Ron Cacek.

Cacek cited the obligations the district is already under to comply with LB962 to get over-appropriated regions within the basin, including Pumpkin Creek and

areas in Morrill and Garden Counties to fully-appropriated designation and develop an integrated management plan to return the entire basin back to 1997 water use levels. The district would also be required to comply with the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program when approved, which calls for a 13-year requirement to provide between 130,000 and 150,000 AF annually for the benefit of Endangered Species within the Platte River Basin.

Cacek said the NRD also has responsibilities to its landowners and residents to protect groundwater supplies to sustain the agriculture and manufacturing economies and quality of life to its communities

Nineteen individuals or groups testified at the May 16 Legislative hearing. Of those, eight were strongly opposed to proposals of interbasin transfers including the North Platte and Twin Platte NRDs, the City of Lincoln, City of Grand Island, and the Nebraska Game and Parks. The Lower Republican and Upper Republican NRDs, American Rivers, and WaterClaim voiced support for interbasin transfers. The Department of Natural Resources and Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District remained neutral.

### Resources

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## Poster Winners

This year we had 95 entries in our Conservation Poster Contest. Entries were from Westmoor Elementary in Scottsbluff, Geil Elementary in Gering, Mitchell and Morrill Elementary schools. Students were asked to design a poster showing ways to be "Water Wise."

First place winners received \$20, second place earned \$10 and third place got \$5. We also have one entry, Tyler Mickey of Westmoor, that will be entered in the state NARD Poster Contest later this year. Visit our website, [www.npnrd.org/postercontest](http://www.npnrd.org/postercontest) to view some of the winning artwork. We will have another contest next year.



5th Grade poster winners are from left, Tyler Mickey, 1st; Mekayla Abts and Sarah Hall, honorable mentions, and Allison Stricker, 3rd. Not pictured is Morgan Baker, 2nd and Jaimin Mesa, honorable mention.



4th Grade winners are (group) from front left, Jayme Chapman, 2nd; Ashley Derr, 1st; Tory Bauer, 3rd; back row, Logan Soto, Holly Grote and Draven Thompson, honorable mentions and (right) Emily Yanke, honorable mention.

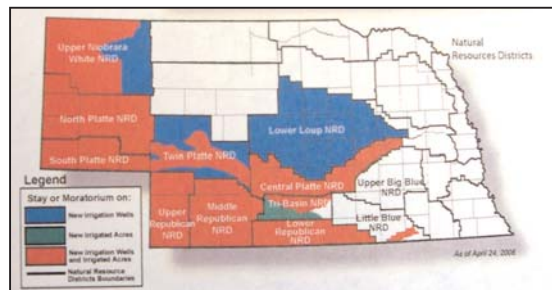
## Reminder: No new wells, no new acres

All landowners, existing and new, are reminded that the entire North Platte NRD continues to be under a moratorium on new irrigation wells and new irrigated acres. This district-wide moratorium went into effect in 2002. The state, in 2004, imposed stays on new wells and the expansion of irrigated acres in the fully-appropriated Platte River Basin.

No new permits for wells with a pumping capacity of more than 50 gallons per minute will be issued through the NRD. New wells for the purpose of additional irrigation will not be allowed. Any such well drilled since 2002 is considered illegal. The NRD will enforce this rule through cease and desist orders. Livestock and domestic wells are exempt from this rule.

The breakout of land in any part of the district for the purpose of new irrigation development is also prohibited unless an equal amount of irrigated acres are permanently retired elsewhere by the landowner. These retired irrigated acres can be converted to dryland cropping, wildlife habitat, rangeland or left idle, but no longer irrigated.

Some cost share is available through various programs to assist landowners with the cost of such conversions.



Several areas in the state, including the entire North Platte NRD, now have moratoriums on both new groundwater wells and irrigated acres. These areas are shown in red. The blue areas have moratoriums on just new irrigation wells and the green areas show moratoriums on just new irrigated acres. (DNR map as of April 24, 2006)

Landowners are also reminded that well registrations need to be kept up to date. Check for accuracy of well location, pumping capacity, date drilled, well ownership and mailing address of the landowner. This can be done by contacting the NPNRD office or checking well registration information on the Department of Natural Resources website. A link is on our website homepage.

## FEIS RELEASED: River impacts reviewed

Continued from pg 1

Governance Committee with representatives from the three states, water users, environmental groups and Federal agencies. The Committee's charge was to draw up a detailed proposal to improve and maintain habitat and to provide compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for certain existing and future water uses in each state.

The FEIS, prepared jointly by the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, analyzes the Governance Committee's proposal and three other alternatives for the first 13-year increment of the program. They include:

- Increasing the target flows for the species by roughly 130,000-150,000 acre-feet (AF) on an average annual basis, primarily by increasing river flows in the spring, summer, and early fall.

- Leasing or acquiring land habitat in the Central Platte Habitat Area from willing sellers and restoring habitat (primarily wet meadow areas and areas of wide unvegetated river channel).

The FEIS focuses on potential impacts of the proposed program on habitat for the four species. It also analyzes the affects on river flows, reservoir storage, water deliveries, water quality, land use, the target species and their habitat, other species, hydropower, recreation, agricultural and regional economics, social and cultural resources.

The FEIS in its entirety is posted for public review on the Platte River website at [www.platteriver.org](http://www.platteriver.org).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is also preparing a biological opinion on the preferred alternative to determine if it provides for the long-term conservation of the target species as required under the ESA. This biological opinion is expected to be released in early June 2006.

### The District's word on PRRP

Although most western Nebraska water users are not warm to the idea of complying with rules for the purpose of the Endangered Species Act, area water managers say adopting the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program is the lesser of two evils. NPNRD General Manager Ron Cacek, Pathfinder Irrigation District manager Dennis Strauch and Jim Cook with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources agree that by not adopting the PRRP, the state's water users would be at the mercy of complying with possibly stricter federal regulations without the benefits of federal funding and guidance.

By adopting the program, water users would have a clear understanding of what is required by law for land and water shares, research, terms, and participation. Nebraska would also receive part of a 50/50 cost share between the federal government and the three states and cooperative guidance to enforce the program. If adopted, the program would provide for \$317 million for 13 years and states would receive \$130 million credit for water and land shares. Nebraska would bare none of the cash cost, which would fall mostly to the federal government.

Complying with the ESA without the program would mean higher habitat requirements, unknown federal dollar assistance and likely no credit for water use.