



## NPNRD Reminders...

### Next Board Meeting April 12

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. Our next meeting is April 12, 7:00 p.m.

### Invasive Species Workshop April 11

Landowners and contractors are invited to attend the Invasive Species Workshop, April 11, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Harms Advanced Technology Center in Scottsbluff. Registration of \$10 includes workshop materials and lunch. Topics will include removal and control of Russian olive, saltcedar and other invasive species issues. NPNRD's Dennis Beyer, along with Mike Sarchet, and Steve Brill and Slade Franklin of Wyoming will speak about efforts to secure state and federal support and funding for invasive removal. Call (308) 635-6700 to register. See schedule on Page 2.

### Youth Club to meet on April 3

The new Natural Resources Youth Club meets on the first Tuesday of each month. The next meeting will be April 3, 6:30 p.m. at the NPNRD office, 100547 Airport Road, Scottsbluff. This month's theme will be trees. The May meeting will focus on Gardening, Growing and Ground. The club is open to all youth ages 8 to 18. For more information contact Kay Grote at 632-2749.

### Chemigation renewals due June 1

Landowners in the North Platte Natural Resources District are reminded that chemigation permits issued in 2006 need to be renewed by June 1, 2007. Renewal forms were mailed to permit holders in mid-March. Additional information about chemigation permits and a chemigation permit application are also available on the NPNRD website at [www.npnrd.org](http://www.npnrd.org).

### NPNRD Education Days

The NRD will be interacting with school students during tree planting and resource education outings. This year Earth Day will be observed April 22, Arbor Day on April 27, and Soil & Water Stewardship Week April 30-May 7. The NPNRD will also be helping with the annual Water Wonders field day on April 18 and Branch Out activities on May 8-9. For more information, visit our website at <http://www.npnrd.org/education.htm>

## NPNRD continues talks with CNPPID

The North Platte NRD has been meeting with Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District for the past seven months to try to develop a joint drought management plan.

The NPNRD initiated these talks on Sept. 1, 2006 after CNPPID expressed serious concerns about "over-development of groundwater uses" in the district and voiced the option of litigation against western groundwater users or the NPNRD itself.

The opening of dialog came on the heels of a proposal by CNPPID in January 2006 for a basin-wide integrated management plan that included a 50% reduction in streamflow depletions by groundwater users in the upper North Platte River basin. NPNRD representatives felt this proposal was unbalanced and highly threatening to the economic well being of western Nebraska. They countered in February of 2006 with a proposal that included provisions for all Platte River Basin NRDs (South Platte, Twin Platte, Central Platte and Tri-Basin NRDs) to develop a fair and equitable plan to protect both groundwater levels and in stream flows throughout the entire basin.

Concepts of this proposal included maintaining stays on new well drilling and expansion of irrigated acres; developing rules and regulations for groundwater transfers using offsets to prevent further depletions to the river;

See *TALKS*, page 3



*The northeastern edge of Lake McConaughy at Martin Bay just before crossing Kingsley Dam was once a favorite swimming and small watercraft inlet. Due to drought conditions, the lake is now at 37% capacity and encroaching invasive species are beginning to take root. The lake's manager, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, blames western irrigators for the lake's bleak levels.*

## Western drought continues

Western Nebraska residents should brace themselves for two facts: the drought continues here; and the drought is subsiding in eastern Nebraska.

While the latter may be a droplet of hope for some, it could mean another dry spigot for the Panhandle in terms of eastern empathy and funding for water issues.

During the past two years, dry western cries have caught the ear of the rest of the state due in large part to the effects of drought felt in the central and eastern

See *DROUGHT*, page 2

## Flow meter use rules now in effect

The North Platte NRD has written rules for the installation and use of flow meters.

A public hearing to take public comment on these proposed rules was held Feb. 28, 2007. During the March 8 regular board meeting, the NPNRD directors voted to adopt the draft of rules. Order No. NPNRD-12 with the full text of the rules has been published in the Scottsbluff Star Herald newspaper and the rules will become effective April 5, 2007.

Landowners are reminded that flow meters are required to be installed on all regulated wells within the overappropriated areas of the district by May 1, 2008.

To assist well owners with the selection of flow meter

brands, the district has adopted a policy statement listing accepted flow meter brands. These brands are: **McCrometer, SeaMetrics, Sparling, Geysler, Master Meter and Hydro-Mag.**

Installation of any of these brands according to manufacturers' specifications should allow the user to be in compliance with the district's rules. If you have any questions about installation or compliance, please contact your local meter dealer or the NPNRD office.

The full text of the flow meter rules, and the Policy Statement for meter brands, are available at the district office in Scottsbluff or on the district's website at [www.npnrd.org](http://www.npnrd.org).

## DROUGHT: Eases in the east, lingers in the west

*Continued from page 1*

regions. Falling levels at Lake McConaughy, which are currently at 31.5 percent of capacity, served as a highly visible and graphic indication of the drying of western Nebraska.

Recent reports from state climatologist Al Dutcher now may be quieting drought concerns for the majority of the state, only to leave the Panhandle high and dry with a predicted eighth year of drought.

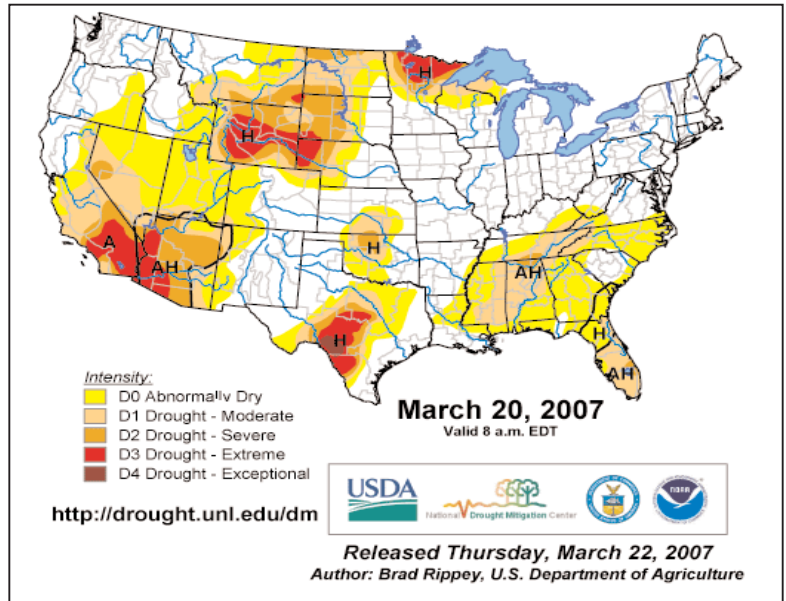
During the governor's Climate Assessment Response Committee meeting held in Lincoln in mid-March, Dutcher said soil moisture for the eastern part of the state is better than during Spring 1999, which pre-dated the onset of the drought. Fall rains and winter snowstorms have helped central and eastern Nebraska return to near normal annual precipitation levels of between 24 and 36 inches. Current precipitation levels in western Nebraska are 1.26 inches compared to a normal of 1.96 inches. Last year the District averaged 9.7 inches of annual precipitation.

This extreme variation was acknowledged by Michael Hayes with the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln when he told the governor's committee that 48 percent of Nebraska is not experiencing any kind of dryness or drought right now, however much of the western United States had less snow with quicker snowmelt due to warmer winter temperatures.

This information was verified by numbers provided by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Mills, Wyo. Area manager John Lawson, in his report at the annual Water Policy Conference held March 13 in Gering, told the audience that the current snowpack levels in the Rocky Mountains was 87 percent compared to 113 percent last year.

Dutcher said even if spring snow storm activity is significant, it is unlikely that substantial improvements over last year's lake elevations on the Platte in Wyoming and Nebraska will occur.

Dutcher said the best bet for western Nebraska is for at least normal moisture to come during the primary growing season, which could in turn stretch expected limited irrigation supplies for this summer.



*This map, modified from the March 20, 2007 U.S. Drought Monitor, indicates that all of western Nebraska and the upper watershed of the Platte River will continue under extreme drought conditions while most of Nebraska will ease in the abnormally dry to near normal conditions. The U.S. Drought Monitor is a partnership between the National Drought Mitigation Center, United States Department of Agriculture, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Map courtesy of NDMC-UNL.*

## NPNRD joins with Wyoming to fight Invasive Species

Representatives from the North Platte NRD, Nine Mile Creek Watershed Coalition, Wyoming Department of Agriculture and Goshen County (Wyoming) Weed and Pest have joined to address the increasing concerns and issues associated with invasive species, specifically Russian olive and saltcedar, growing along the North Platte River and its tributaries.

NRD Watershed Coordinator Dennis Beyer and Mike Sarchet of Twin Cities Development/NMC Watershed Coalition traveled to Washington, D.C. Feb. 25-March 2 to attend the National Invasive Weed Awareness Week conference. The purpose was to encourage senators and representatives from Nebraska and Wyoming to fund the Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act (P.L. 108-412) at its authorized level of \$15 million for FY 2008.

They met with a Wyoming delegation consisting of Slade Franklin, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, and Steve Brill, Goshen County Weed and Pest Control supervisor. This coalition was formed to show the interest from both states to work together seeking solutions to the burgeoning impact of invasive trees and weeds that have become a major problem.

This coalition met with senators from New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, and North Dakota urging them to fund the Act. They also met with representatives from Nebraska and Wyoming for the same

purpose. The idea of states working together to combat an enormous invasive weed problem was met with favor and encouragement. Another aspect presented to the congressional representatives was the beneficial use for the bio-mass produced when these invasive trees were removed. The video of the Nine Mile Creek Eradication Project was used as a learning tool to heighten the awareness of the economic gain as well as the increased water flow that can be the result of eradicating invasive species within the North Platte River watershed.

The interest shown by the senators and their staff, along with the representatives and their staff, will be of utmost benefit when the plan for eradicating invasive species by the interstate coalition is implemented.

### Nine Mile Creek Restoration Project Video

"*The Hope of Nine Mile Creek*," a 23-minute educational video production describing the efforts that have been made to remove invasive species along Nine Mile Creek, is now available. The professionally produced video by Becky McMillen includes interviews by longtime Nine Mile Creek landowners describing the evolution of the creek due to development, drought and the proliferation of invasive species. The video also outlines the initiative and project steps taken to remove vegetation, protect the creek's water and its fish and wildlife, and future plans. The video is available free of charge from the NPNRD.

### Russian Olive/Saltcedar Control Workshop

April 11, 2007

9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Harms Technology Center, 2620 College Park, Scottsbluff, NE

8:30-9:00 -- Registration

9:00-9:30 -- Nine Mile Creek Video

9:30-10:00 -- Mapping Invasives on the

NP River, Robert Wilson, UN-L

10:15-10:30 -- Slade Franklin, Wyo.

Dept. of Agriculture

10:30-10:45 -- Tandy Wheeler, NRCS

10:45-11:00 -- Steve Brill, Goshen Co.

Weed & Pest

11:00-11:15 -- Curtis Cloud, NRCS

11:15-11:30 -- Doug Haller, BASF

11:30-11:45 -- Mike Sarchet, TCD

11:45-1:00 -- Lunch

1:00-2:30 -- Equipment and chemical

demonstrations

Call 635-6700 to Register by April 9

# TALKS: NPNRD wants drought management for Platte basin

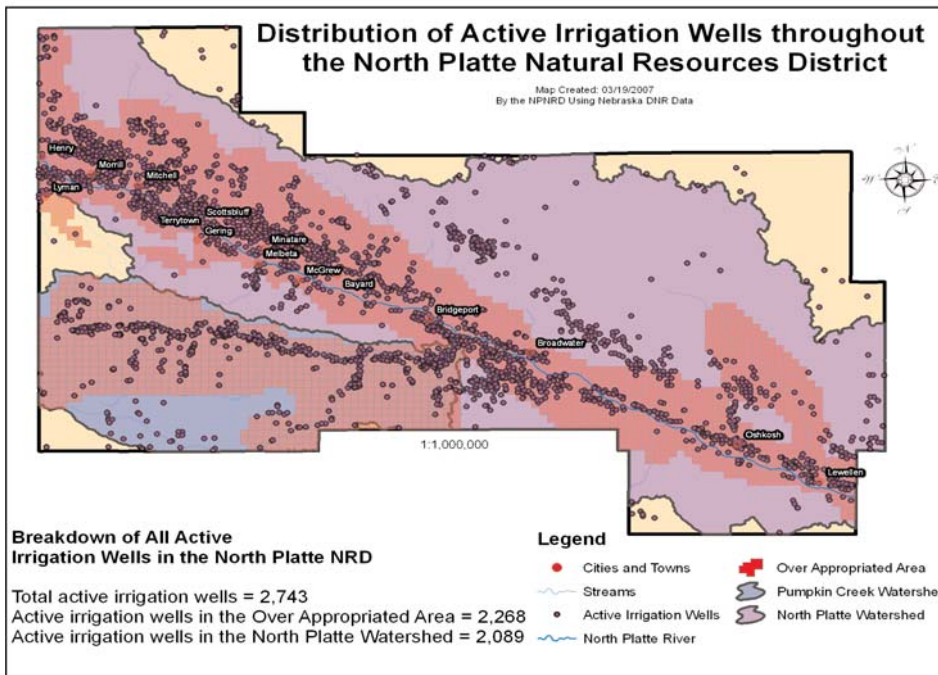
Continued from page 1

using triggers along the North Platte River to determine appropriate protective regulatory action; and eradicating and managing invasive species along the river and its tributaries. Both of those proposals laid on the tables of the local and basin-wide stakeholders groups for six months.

After expressing their willingness to work with CNPPID and other NRDs on water shortage issues and initiating open dialog in September, members of the NRD's water resources subcommittee and staff worked with area irrigation district managers and officials with the Department of Natural Resources to review information related to and options for drought management that would benefit both surface and groundwater users. This information has been used in the subsequent meetings with CNPPID.

During the October joint meeting, NPNRD and CNPPID officials agreed that there needed to be a quantification of groundwater use in the upper basin. Currently, only irrigators in the Pumpkin Creek and Lisco-Oshkosh-Lewellen sub areas are required to use flow meters. In November the NPNRD board voted to require meters in all Overappropriated areas of the district. Prior to this, the district passed rules for certification of all groundwater uses in August and began that process in October. Certification is scheduled to be completed by January 2008 and metering should be fully implemented by May 2008. Both certification and flow meters have been necessitated by the shortage of water exacerbated by six years of drought.

In answer to a call for stricter regulations, NPNRD officials acknowledged the option of implementing allocations in the future, but indicated they are not prepared to go to allocations until a pumping baseline is established. CNPPID representatives, led by their legal council Mike Kline, suggested that the scientific data and regulations used in Pumpkin Creek could serve as an indicator to the district's need for



There are a total of 2,743 active irrigation wells in the North Platte NRD. Of those, 2,266 are located in the over-appropriated area of the district, shown in pink. A moratorium on well drilling, one of the first in the state, was imposed on the district in 2002. No new wells or additional groundwater irrigated acres can be developed. A major area of concern now is further reducing the number of those wells and removing additional irrigated acres from production, retiring them into range, wildlife habitat or dryland cropping acres.

stronger and quicker allocations.

CNPPID officials acknowledged a "certain degree" of progress through the talks and on Dec. 4, 2006, their board voted to postpone the decision of litigation against western groundwater irrigators, specifically in Pumpkin Creek, until April 2, 2007. CNPPID general manager Don Kraus said delaying litigation would allow "the negotiating process to continue without the distraction of litigation."

CNPPID and NPNRD representatives agreed that the next step in the joint effort would be to invite neighboring Twin Platte NRD to the table and continue developing concepts for a drought management plan. Due to a scheduling conflict, Twin Platte NRD could not participate in the February 2007 meeting, leaving discussion limited.

CNPPID shifted its focus to Pumpkin Creek issues, citing what they considered to be an ineffective allocation of 14 inches. According to a March 3 report in the Kearney Hub, Klein, his partners and CNPPID's in-house attorneys are looking at the best way to set a legal claim against Pumpkin Creek water users or the NPNRD.

Despite the setback, NPNRD agreed to meet with CNPPID one more time on March 20 in an attempt to get

back on track with talks aimed at developing a joint drought management plan for the upper Platte River Basin. NPNRD went into the March 20th meeting with several concepts for a working plan that included the use of triggers based on percentage differences between river inflows at Guernsey, Wyo. and outflows at Lewellen; intentional groundwater recharge projects using existing NRD dams located near Lake McConaughy; the eradication and management of invasive species along the river and its tributaries; and considering the overall economic impact of the upper Platte River basin when additional regulations and management practices are implemented.

CNPPID officials said they would still like to see a "significant commitment to water use reductions" in western Nebraska, but expressed support for the concepts that were brought to the table during the March 20 meeting.

"It's a nice meshing of where we initially came from," said CNPPID's natural resources manager Mike Drain.

NPNRD general manager Ron Cacek said he is "cautiously optimistic" about negotiations with Central, citing that their main objective remains to increase water levels at Lake McConaughy.

## Resources

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## Funding, authority, invasives species top Legislative issues

Since mid-March, new options have been put forth for the funding of Nebraska's water issues, primarily for the Republican River issues.

**Why should we watch the Republican?** The Republican River issues serve as an indicator to Panhandle water users about similar potential issues that are being spurred by drought and continued water use here. Some of the policies and options made now for the Republican could be precursors for the Platte.

According to the Nebraska Association of Resources District (NARD) weekly Legislative update for March 23, the Republican River NRDs have been meeting with state agencies and Irrigation Districts in the basin to discuss surface water leasing and potential long-term purchase of surface water to assist with compact compliance. Leasing or purchasing surface water would fill short-term needs of the basin and also act as a "shock-absorber" in future water-short years for compact compliance.

One of the problems related to this solution in the Republican Basin is financing. Thus, NARD has been working with bond counsel to come up with some statutory language to allow the local NRDs in the basin to assist with financing through bonds and/or revenue notes. This would allow for repayment of the bonds over time rather than coming up with all of the tax funds needed in the first year. In the next week, a draft will be offered to senators for consideration as part of the solution on the water issues.

Elements of the draft include allowing local NRDs, irri-

## Deadlines approach for GW Certification

The deadlines for Certification of all groundwater uses in Morrill, Banner and Scotts Bluff Counties are approaching. May 1, 2007 is the deadline for Morrill and Banner Counties and January 1, 2008 is the Scotts Bluff County deadline. Certification of ground water uses is required for all irrigation, public water supplies, industrial and other uses including golf courses and ground water sources for recreation areas. Domestic and range livestock wells are exempt from certification.

**Groundwater Use Certification Deadlines**  
**May 1, 2007 -- Morrill & Banner Counties**  
**Jan. 1, 2008 -- Scotts Bluff County**

The NPNRD staff is now taking appointments to help property owners complete their certification. Property owners are reminded that in order to certify irrigated acres, the ground in question must have a history of groundwater irrigated use. A helpful guide listing the required documentation is provided at <http://www.npnrd.org/certification.htm>.

The certification of ground water uses is required to satisfy the Integrated Management Planning process outlined by Nebraska's 2004 water law LB962. Rules for the Certification of Ground Water Uses in the North Platte NRD went into effect Oct. 12, 2007.

gation districts and other local entities to be directly involved in the negotiations and finding solutions; approved funding for projects such as acquisition, ownership and management of water rights and storage rights, purchase or lease of canals, reservoirs or other holding structures, vegetation management, augmentation of river flows through groundwater; allowing NRDs the authority to issue bonds or other revenue-raising options such as an occupation tax or property tax levy authority of up to 10-cents.

Bear in mind, these are only options, and are being proposed as a way to provide funding for water issues in the Republican Basin. Could some of these options work in the future for the Panhandle?

Another item of interest in the Legislature is LB 458, introduced by Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege to assist local NRDs with vegetation management in rivers and tributaries. The Natural Resources Committee amended the bill to provide \$2 million annually in state funding for vegetation management. The committee amendment creates a 13-member Riparian

Vegetation Task Force consisting of the Governor, state agencies, NRDs and a riparian landowner from each of the state's congressional districts. The task force would sunset on June 30, 2009. The task force is to consult with appropriate federal agencies and develop and prioritize vegetation management goals and plans to accomplish them.

The primary focus of the task force shall be in river basins that are fully appropriated or overappropriated. That includes the North Platte NRD. Intent language is included to appropriate \$2 million dollars annually to the Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Species Assistance Fund for the management of vegetation within the banks of a natural stream or within one hundred feet of the banks of the channel of any natural stream.

These funds are to be used only for activities and equipment as part of a vegetation program to improve streamflow.

## 2007 Tree Season begins at the NRD

The first shipment of nursery stock was unloaded March 28 at the North Platte NRD office. This will be the first year of use for the district's new tree cooler, with a capacity of 250,000 trees.

Orders are still being taken for conservation trees and shrubs. The NRD reminds property owners that their nursery stock is available only for conservation purposes and must be purchased in bundles of 50.

During the tree planting workshop hosted by the NPNRD and NRCS on March 15, landowners were urged to continue planting efforts despite dry conditions. District Forester Doak Nickerson reminds us, "we successfully planted trees in the 1930s. It's time to do it again." Here are some tips to help plant, establish and grow your young trees in western Nebraska:

**Site Preparation** -- Leave residue--retain moisture! Try to avoid working the planting site to a fine, clean bed. Leave cornstalk and grass residue to provide nutrients, hold the soil against wind, and preserve soil moisture. With light, sandy soil, less disturbance is better. Nickerson prefers no-till.

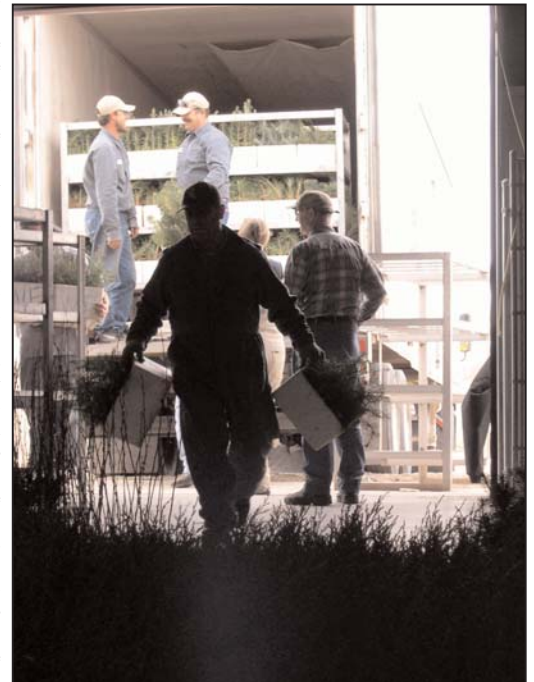
**Seedling Handling** -- Avoid exposing the roots to warm temperatures and high winds. These dry roots and kill seedlings quick. Keep moist and covered until moments before planting. The NRD will hold your seedlings until you are absolutely ready to plant.

Three **TREE KEEPERS**: keep storage time short, keep them moist, keep them cool.

**Best Planting Conditions** -- Temperatures between 35 and 60 degrees, cloudy and overcast, less than 10 mph winds and possibly misting or raining. The best time would be night time if you can do it!

**Protecting** -- Fence out your tree rows if possible and invest in gopher, rabbit and deer deterrents. Rodents are hard on seedlings.

The NPNRD has other tree planting and care resources. A complete tree order form is also available at the district office or log onto our website at <http://www.npnrd.org/trees.htm>.



NRD soil conservation technician Craig Uhrig unloads crates of Red Cedar trees from the first shipment of nursery stock at the NRD shop March 28. Early tree orders can now be picked up for self planting. Orders for small potted and bare root trees and shrubs are still being taken. Call the NRD office at 632-2749.