

Resources

Winter 2008



Published by the North Platte Natural Resources District

www.npnrd.org

Vol. 15, No. 1

NPNRD Reminders...

NPNRD Meetings

Regular NPNRD board meetings are open to the public and held the second Thursday of each month at the NRD conference room, 100547 Airport Road, Scottsbluff unless otherwise announced. Our next meeting will be **Feb. 14 at 2:00 p.m. in Oshkosh**. For minutes of past meetings and an agenda, see our website at www.npnrd.org.

Filing Deadline for Candidates

The filing deadline for all incumbents (currently holding elective office) for the 2008 Primary Election is **Feb. 15, 2008 at 5:00 p.m.** The filing deadline for all non-incumbent candidates is Monday, **March 3, 2008, 5:00 p.m.** Filings for the North Platte NRD may be completed with the County Clerk or with the Secretary of State in Lincoln. The following Directors are up for election this year: Subdistrict 1 - John Maser; Subdistrict 2 - Arden Wohlers; Subdistrict 3 - Dave Deines; Subdistrict 4 - George Hall.

Chemigation Training Dates

The Nebraska Chemigation Act requires any person who intends to apply chemical through an irrigation system must first obtain a permit. It is illegal to chemigate without the proper permit. Chemigation Application Certification can be obtained by participating in one of the upcoming chemigation training dates. **March 4** -- Panhandle Research and Extension Center, Scottsbluff, 1:30 p.m.; **March 12** -- Prairie Winds Community Center, Bridgeport, 1:30 p.m. For more information, contact Craig Uhrig at the NRD office.

NRD Tree Prices Adjusted

It is never too early to start making your spring tree planting plans. Roy Lyles and Craig Uhrig at the NPNRD office are available to help with windbreak planning, site preparation and cost-share applications. The District has adjusted their prices of trees to reflect additional nursery charges. **Bare-root trees are now 75 cents per tree and potted trees are \$1.50 per tree or \$45/box of 30.** Cost-share minimum is 350 trees and minimum cost-share amount for tree purchases/planting is \$350. Call the District office for more details.

New Transfer Rules Are Now in Effect

The new rules for the Transfer of Ground Water went into effect Jan. 11, 2008. The Transfer rules apply to the entire North Platte NRD with the exception of Pumpkin Creek Basin, which has its own specific ground water management rules. Anyone wanting to transfer either the location of use, point of withdrawal or type of use of ground water is now required to apply for a permit from the NRD. Ground water users are invited to visit directly with NRD staff about any plans for or questions about Transfers.

One concern that developed while writing the rules was the transfer of commingled water, that is, water that is supplied by both ground and surface sources. It is the intent of the NRD to write the rules so that landowners with both surface and ground water available for use would not give up their surface water rights to preserve full transferability of their ground water.

NRD directors and staff agreed that surface water should be protected and used as the "primary source" in cases of commingled water, and explained that the intent is to encourage commingled water users to use their surface water first.

"No one wants to jeopardize our surface water...we can't," said sub-committee member Pete Lapaseotes, Jr. explaining the effects of the region's surface water system on aquifer recharge.

See *TRANSFERS*, page 2

No-Till workshops set for February, March

After several successful No-Till conferences held in November, Panhandle No-Till Educator Mark Watson is continuing efforts to promote and encourage area producers about the advantages of no-tillage farming practices.

Watson just completed his first series of producers workshops held around the panhandle. The next series of workshops will be held Feb. 4-15, beginning in Alliance. (See full schedule on page 4). Watson said he was pleased with the attendance, especially in the Oshkosh and Sidney locations, and hopes the interest continues to grow among traditional tillage farm-

See *NO-TILL*, page 4



Trees and Flow Meters were two popular topics of discussion at the North Platte NRD booth during the Farm & Ranch Expo held January 23 in Oshkosh. Here the NRD's Roy Lyles (center) and Dave Cook with the Oshkosh NRCS office (right) have a good visit with a Garden County landowner. Congratulations to Merlin Zoucha of Oshkosh, winner of the tree drawing, and Tammie Schwartz of Lewellen and Moe Moffat of Oshkosh, winners of the trees on the bid board. Lyles reminds landowners, now is the time to start placing tree orders with the NRD.

Local stakeholder's progress stymied by OA Basin-wide group

The most recent meeting of the North Platte NRD Stakeholder's group brought to light the efforts made by the NRD to implement required controls for the state mandated Integrated Management Plan, although frustrations are mounting about the overall process of writing that plan.

During the January 24 meeting in Scottsbluff, stakeholders were given an overview of the work the NRD has done since October 2006 to implement practices geared at protecting the district's ground water resource. According to Tina Kurtz of the Department of Natural Resources, the district is already subject to and enforcing most of the required controls for a Fully Appropriated area as well as using many of the control options for managing the Overappropriated area. These include moratoriums on well construction permits, moratoriums on increases in ground water and surface water irrigated acres and surface water appropriations; the certification of ground water uses; rules allowing for the transfer of ground water and uses; and providing for offsets to any new development. The NRD, just in the past year, has

adopted the additional options of allocations, flow meters, limitation or prevention of expansion of irrigated acres, conservation education, and vegetation control. The NRD is also partnering in a study with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to understand the intentional recharge and water storage potential using the region's canals.

"There's no doubt that your district is making strides," Kurtz told the group. "But we need to fit these controls into the plan and know how they will help you get back to 1997 levels."

"We're tired of waiting for the OA group. The governor and the State need to step up with some guidance and money to get this process completed."

Dennis Strauch, Stakeholder

The Integrated Management Plans (IMP), to be jointly written by the NRDs and DNR, have a goal to sustain a balance between water uses and water supplies so that the economic viability, social and environmental health, safety, and welfare of the Platte River Basin can be achieved and maintained for both the near term and the long term.

Although a rough draft exists, the local IMP itself remains to be finalized. Stakeholder's expressed their frustrations during the meeting about a process that has been slowed by the inability of the Overappropriated Basin-

wide stakeholders group to finalize its IMP. The Basin-wide IMP is intended to serve as the umbrella under which the local IMPs are developed, but according to Kurtz, the main issue for that group has been how general or detailed the Basin-wide plan should be. Representatives from Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District and Nebraska Public Power District, who have seats at both the Basin-wide and local stakeholders tables, would like the Basin-wide plan to include specific objectives while the NRDs ask for a more generalized plan with the specifics to be worked out in the local IMPs.

Many of the NPNRD stakeholders want to finalize its IMP draft despite the Basin-wide group's stalemate.

"We're tired of waiting for the OA group," said local stakeholder Dennis Strauch. "The governor and the State need to step up with some guidance and money to get this process completed."

Kurtz suggested that the NRDs and local stakeholders groups need to put more pressure on their legislators to see that gets done.

Another work session for the local stakeholders group was tentatively set for February 21. A subcommittee of stakeholders will be meeting in the interim to fine-tune elements already listed in the IMP draft.

High Plains Weed Association is gearing up for spring projects, seeking members

Western Nebraska is in the ninth year of drought. This period of drought has increased landowners interest in many water conservation practices including the control of Invasive trees and weeds. This concern and heightened awareness initiated seven counties to recently agree to join a cooperative effort and form the "High Plains Weed Management Association."



The first priority of the HPWMA is to educate all landowner's concerning the need for a comprehensive regional invasive control strategy. An agreement was reached with the Panhandle Research Integration for Discovery Education (PRIDE) to share the cost of printing and distribution of an annual landowner news letter that provides updated information on the newest most effective control methods. A property distributed newsletter with a variety of control methods would serve as the most effective first step toward regional invasive species control.

The second priority is collecting an accurate survey of the Riparian wetlands areas impacted by Russian Olive trees and Salt Cedar (Tamarisk) for each county. Many of the counties in the HPWMA (Banner, Cheyenne, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, and Sioux) have limited budgets and only part time employees. Their time and money is necessarily focused on control of only the

most obvious infestations of noxious weeds. A budget enhancement of one thousand dollars per county would compensate for the time and mileage to allow county weed directors to conduct a visual survey of impacted riparian wetlands and create working maps.

The third priority is to initiate control of Russian Olive trees and Salt Cedar in Riparian Wetlands. Each county will use the budgeted two thousand to control the invasives in the areas they have identified from their survey and mapping. Then working with landowners in each county, the riparian wetlands that are most severely impacted by invasive trees can be controlled.

Many of the counties in our newly formed HPWMA haven't even considered accessing riparian wetland areas that might be under siege from invasive trees. This grant money could augment the county budget allowing assessment and phase one of control methods in their county.

Those counties along the North and South Platte River realize the daunting task ahead of them for controlling invasive trees. As we met to form the new Weed Management Area, one of the primary discussions involved the benefit of a coordinated effort to clear the entire watershed in the most cost effective manner.

Membership into the HPWMA is open to any individual, business or organization that sees the worth of a collaborative effort in controlling noxious weeds and invasive species.

For more information about HPWMA membership, contact association president Jeff Schledewitz at (308) 436-6709 or your county weed superintendent.

Deadline for flow meters is May 1

The deadline for installation of flow meters on all regulated wells in the overappropriated area of the District is May 1, 2008. Landowners are urged to apply for cost share assistance for flow meter installation as soon as possible as shortages and back-ordering have been reported by some area dealers.

Cost share for meters is still available. Landowners should apply through their local Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) office and visit with their dealer early to avoid any rush or last minute complications.

Brands allowed for the installation, use or replacement and will be considered conforming flow meters to receive cost-share assistance are: McCrometer, SeaMetrics, Sparling, Geyser, and Master Meter.

The District's rules require that flow meters be installed at the well. Exceptions may be considered and approved to accommodate existing well and pipe configurations. Full information is available on our website.

TRANSFERS: In effect

Continued from page 1

The issue has proven to be challenging. The North Platte NRD Board continues to work with area surface water users to further develop the language for commingled water transfers.

Full details and a copy of the new Transfer rules are available at <http://www.npnrd.org>.

Declines noted in Fall 2007 GW levels summary

The North Platte NRD continues to examine data collected from water wells within the district to identify long-term trends and patterns in ground water levels. Recent analysis includes a comparison of ground water levels measured 5 and 10 years ago to recent ground water levels at the same wells.

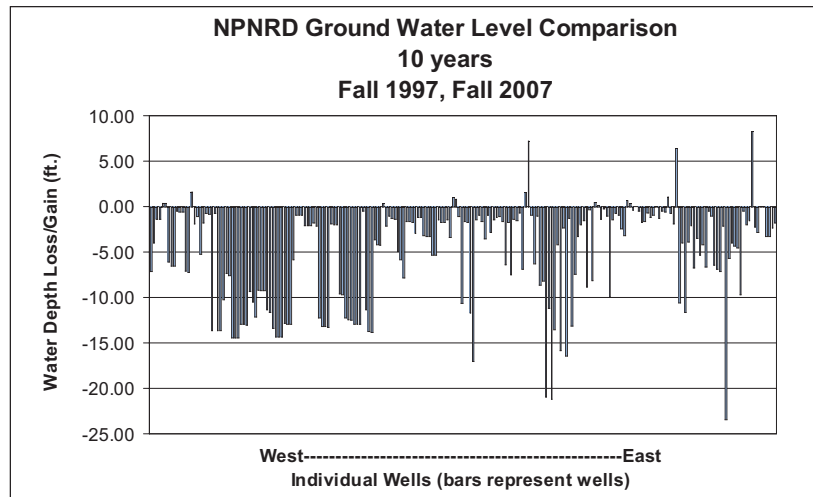
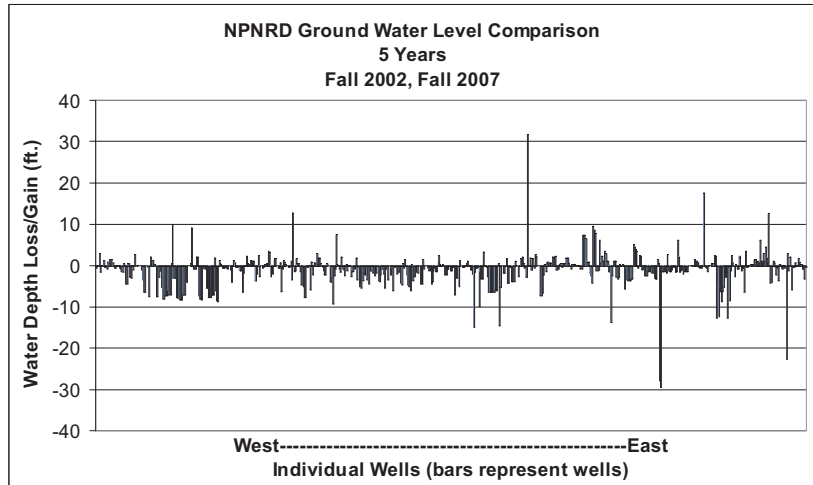
Depth to ground water below the land surface was measured in 216 water wells within the district in the fall of both 1997 and 2007. Comparison of depth changes and examination of aggregate depth change over the 10 year period reveals that about 97% of the aggregate depth change represents declining water levels from 1997 to 2007. The remaining 3% represents a rise in water levels over the same period.

As the network of monitored wells continued to expand, depth to ground water below the land surface was measured in 672 wells within the district in the fall of both 2002 and 2007. The aggregate depth to water from these measurements shows that about 64% of the change in depth represents a decline in water levels from 2002 to 2007, and about 36% of the depth change represents a rise in water levels. Two wells of the 672 measured had no change in depth to water and seven were dry in the five-year comparison.

Figures 1 and 2 (see right) are bar graph depictions of the data from the 5 and 10 year ground water level comparisons discussed above. The bars on the graphs represent individual water wells where depth to water was measured. The wells are depicted in geographical order from west to east moving across the graph from left to right. The water wells in both the 5 and 10 year comparisons predominately show declines in ground water levels. Declines are represented on the bar graphs as negative depth changes.

The NPNRD has been focusing on ground water levels in the Dutch Flats area of southern Sioux and northern Scotts Bluff Counties, and the Pumpkin Creek Basin. Of the 672 wells measured and compared between 2002 and

The aggregate decline in ground water level in the Dutch Flats wells for the 5 year comparison represents about 37% of the aggregate decline throughout the district.



The above bar graphs represent 216 monitoring wells within the District where ground water levels were recorded in 2002 (five year data), 1997 (10 year data), and 2007. The bars on the graphs represent individual water wells where depth to water was measured. The wells are depicted in geographical order from west (near the Dutch Flats/Morrill/Mitchell area) to east (the Garden County line) moving across the graph from left to right. The water wells in both the 5 and 10 year comparisons predominately show declines in ground water levels. Declines are represented on the bar graphs as negative depth changes.

2007, about 27% of these wells are in Dutch Flats. The aggregate decline in ground water level in the Dutch Flats wells for the 5 year comparison represents about 37% of the aggregate decline throughout the district. About 20% of the 672 wells measured and compared over the 5 year period are located in the Pumpkin Creek Basin. The aggregate decline in ground water levels in the Pumpkin

Creek wells for the 5 year comparison represents about 24% of the aggregate decline district-wide.

The NPNRD continues to monitor water levels and expects the resulting data to be useful in understanding stresses on aquifers, how aquifers respond to recharge, and hydraulic connection of surface water and ground water.

Resources

Published quarterly by the North Platte Natural Resources District, 10547 Airport Road, Scottsbluff. Mailing: P.O. Box 280, Scottsbluff, NE 69363-0280.

Phone: 308-632-2749

Fax: 308-632-4346

E-mail: cacek@npnrd.org

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

Board of Directors: John Maser, Chairman,

Gary Darnall, Dave Deines, Jerry Dillman,

George Hall, Jim Hass, Pete Lapasotes Jr.,

David Ostdiek, and Arden Wohlers

District Manager: Ron Cacek

Newsletter Editor: Kay Grote

For More Information, visit our website, www.npnrd.org

NO TILL: Workshops

Continued from page 1

ers. Like he says, "It's all about getting the right information and a willingness to learn and try new things."

Watson, with the help of the North Platte, South Platte, Upper Niobrara-White NRDs and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, has also been informing the public about no-till related events and innovative no till practices through a series of columns entitled "No-Till Notes" running in regional newspapers. Be sure to look for those weekly.

The entire series of "No Till Notes," along with links to upcoming regional no-till events and the full schedule of Watson's winter no-till workshops are now posted and available for reading on the North Platte NRDs website, <http://www.npnrd.org/notill.htm>. Watson is also available for direct consultation about any no-till questions you might have. Give him a call at (308) 760-5259.

Winter No Till Meetings

All meetings run from 9:00 a.m. to Noon

2nd meeting- Feb. 4-15, 2008

Feb. 4 - Alliance

Box Butte Co. extension office, 415 Black Hills Ave.

Feb. 7- Sidney

South Platte Natural Resource District office, 551 Parkland Drive

Feb. 8- Oshkosh

UNL Extension Office-Garden County, 611 Main Street Annex building

Feb. 11- Rushville

Security First Center meeting room, 110 East 2nd Street

Feb. 15- Scottsbluff

North Platte Natural Resource District office, 100547 Airport Road

3rd meeting- NEBRASKA NO TILL CONFERENCE

Feb. 20-21, 2008 (tentatively) Holdrege, Nebraska

4th meeting- March 10-14, 2008

March 10- Rushville

Security First Center meeting room, 110 East 2nd Street

March 11- Alliance

Box Butte Co. extension office, 415 Black Hills Ave.

March 12- Oshkosh

UNL Extension Office-Garden County, 611 Main Street Annex building

March 13- Sidney

South Platte Natural Resource District office, 551 Parkland Drive

March 14- Scottsbluff

North Platte Natural Resource District office, 100547 Airport Road

<http://www.npnrd.org/notill.htm>

NPNRD introduces two new programs

"Seeding for Savings" & "Plant a Classroom" for homes, schools

In December, the North Platte NRD Board of Directors approved two new programs geared specifically at homeowners and schools within the District. Our new Buffalograss seed rebate program is called "Seeding for Savings" and our new Outdoor Classroom cost rebate program is called "Plant a Classroom." We believe both of these programs will help promote water savings, good land stewardship and help increase natural resources education in Western Nebraska.

"Seeding for Savings"

The North Platte NRD's cost share program for planting Buffalograss is here! The "Seeding for Savings" program provides residential homeowners in the North Platte Natural Resources District reimbursement of costs for converting their existing irrigated lawns to Buffalograss—saving precious water, lawn maintenance time and costs on their yards.

Water Savings! Buffalograss is a drought-hardy, native grass species that thrives on only 1/2 inch of water per week. Most other turf grasses use between 1 to 1 1/2 inches per week.

Labor and Time Savings! Buffalograss does well on hot, dry sites where bluegrass or ornamental landscaping dies out. Buffalograss grows slowly to a maximum height of three to six inches, reducing the need for mowing to once every two to three weeks.

Money Savings! Buffalograss, once established, requires less water, less mowing and less fertilizer than blue grass lawns. Buffalograss can be maintained with no mowing if weeds are controlled.

Participants can receive \$10 per pound for up to 15 pounds of **Bowie or Cody brands** of buffalograss seed purchased to convert existing irrigated bluegrass lawns to buffalograss. Maximum reimbursement is \$150 per person per year. This program is open to any existing homeowners in Scotts Bluff, Morrill, Garden, Banner or southern Sioux Counties who want to convert their present irrigated turf grass to buffalograss. **Applications are now available and due May 1, 2008.** For more information and brochures, see our website or call program coordinator Roy Lyles at (308) 632-2749.

"Plant a Classroom"

The North Platte NRD just started a brand new program to assist schools with establishing a new or improving an existing Outdoor Classroom.

Outdoor Classrooms are outdoor areas landscaped with native trees, plants and grasses, rocks, ponds, bird and butterfly houses, to create habitats for the purpose of outdoor education lessons. Students enjoy learning hands-on lessons in biology, science, history, reading, writing, math and art in an outdoor environment. The benefits from outdoor classrooms are numerous. Traditional classroom subjects are fresh and new when illustrated outdoors, and students learn to take pride and ownership in their community as they often care for the classrooms during the school year.

Our new "Plant a Classroom" program will reimburse

costs up to \$500 per school per fiscal year related to establishing a new or improving an existing Outdoor Classroom. Funds are non-competitive in nature and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. For complete complete information on the "Plant a Classroom" program, visit our website or call Information and Education Coordinator Kay Grote at (308) 632-2749.



The "Plant a Classroom" program is now available to help area schools establish outdoor classroom areas similar to what was done at the Cedar Canyon school several years ago.

Meet the Staff

Jeff Sprock is the North Platte NRD's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Coordinator.

Jeff started his duties with the NRD in December 2006. Prior to that, he served as a private lands biologist with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. He now specializes in creating maps for the NRD. His knowledge and creativity has produced many useful maps including topographical maps and location maps for monitoring well and flow meter locations, an atlas for the Pumpkin Creek Basin showing flow meter locations, working with staff to make water level maps, and nitrate levels maps. His mapping and GIS experience has been invaluable in the NRD's certification process and helping other NRD's better utilize their GIS information.

Jeff's services are also available to the public. If anyone needs help getting a specialized map of their property, or utilize data to make maps of their certified acres he can help make you one. Jeff is also available to help Boy Scouts, 4-H or other youth groups to learn GIS.



Jeff Sprock
GIS Coordinator