



NPNRD Reminders...

NPNRD Board 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 monthly meetings will be held **July 9, August 13, and September 10, 7:00 p.m.**

Certification is closed, no new certification of uses issued

As of June 11, 2009, **no new applications for the certification of ground water uses will be accepted** by the District. At their regular board meeting in June, the North Platte NRD Board of Directors voted unanimously to make the cut-off date for applications for the certification of ground water uses effective as of June 11, 2009, with the exception of those applications already in process and pending approval. NRD staff has been working with absentee landowners who were not aware of the certification rules and any applications submitted prior to June 11 will be reviewed and processed accordingly by the NRD. However, no more new certifications will be issued.

According to the North Platte NRD rules and regulations for the certification of ground water uses (Chapter 3) any landowner who uses a regulated well whose purpose is to supply groundwater to irrigate crops; any person who uses a regulated well to supply groundwater for public supplies; or any person who uses a regulated well to supply groundwater for other than irrigation of crops or public water supply must obtain certification of each

irrigated tract or use by applying for certification of those uses. Irrigating with or using groundwater that has not been certified through the District is subject to the enforcement of rules, including cease and desist orders, by the NRD.

To date, the breakdown the types of certifications: there are 1,782 for irrigation; 68 for feedlots; 12 for municipalities; 10 for aquaculture; 8 for parks and golf courses; 3 for wildlife and landscaping; 9 for commercial/industrial; 16 for SIDs/Public Water Supply; and 4 for truck fills, dust control, and water cleaner.

NRD, DNR mull IMP Testimony

Testimony was taken by the North Platte NRD and Nebraska Department of Natural Resources at the June 17, 2009 joint public hearings held in Scottsbluff for the proposed basin-wide and local Integrated Management Plans (IMPs).

The proposed IMPs, developed jointly by the NRD and the Department of Natural Resources, encompass the entirety of the overappropriated and fully appropriated land area within the district. The proposed IMP includes goals, objectives, regulatory and non-regulatory surface water and ground water controls/action items for the fully appropriated and

overappropriated portions of the NPNRD.

The proposed IMP's were reviewed by both ground and surface water managers and attorneys. The proposed rules also received the support of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and the district's stakeholders group, which has been working since 2004 to develop the IMP for ground and surface water within the district.

The bulk of the testimony against the proposed IMPs came from Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation of Holdrege, NE, owners and managers of Lake McConaughy.

CNPPID Natural Resources Manager Michael Drain cited upstream water use that might benefit more people and communities if left for delivery to Lake McConaughy and related entities, rather than being consumed by water users upstream from the lake.

Drain stated that CNPPID believes the plans as presented are deficient, as they focus mostly on meeting the obligations of statute rather than addressing the problem of over depletions to the river, the current conflicts between ground and surface water users, and does not show consideration for prior appropriators or resolve or identify specific

management practices.

According to Drain, the IMP improperly focuses on averages in estimating depletions and offsets, failing to take into consideration hydrologic variations from season to season, and year to year. He also noted that timing of water availability is critical along the river, as supplies are highly variable.

One of Central's proposals is that the IMP contain mechanisms designed to reduce well water use during times of shortage, such as reducing by half the allocation or that number of irrigated acres at times when the North Platte River flows drop

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The North Platte NRD wrapped up another successful tree planting season in June. Over 92,000 conservation trees and shrubs were planted throughout the District. Here, Natural Resources Technician Craig Uhrig plants Colorado Blue Spruce trees at a site near the Robideaux Campground along Highway 71 in Gering. Since 1972 the North Platte NRD has planted over 4 million conservation trees in five counties in western Nebraska. Other conservation projects the NRD is currently involved in include the residential Buffalograss seed program, Gering Valley Flood Control project (in cooperation with the Cities of Gering and Scottsbluff), the Panhandle No Till Partnership, and All-Hazard Mitigation Plan. More information about these beneficial programs can be found in this issue or on our website at www.npnrd.org.

Gering Valley Flood Control Project receives stimulus funding

The entire Gering Valley Flood Control project has been in the works since the 1960's, but there hasn't been funding available to construct the final phase. On June 2, USDA awarded \$2.2 million for the design and construction to complete the federal sponsored project. NRD manager Ron Cacek says this project will increase

watershed restoration and reduce the harmful impacts of flooding.

Cacek says based on our experiences with other projects there in Gering Valley, damages have been reduced considerably over the years to the point that the general public does not even realize that there might have been damages

without the project.

The effort will slow the water down with the construction of a diversion to hold the water back and let the water out a controlled rate, so the drain can handle the water with minimal flooding problems.

This project will install channel improvements and a diversion to work in con-

junction with already installed structures. The entire system - which includes nine floodwater retarding structures, 10 miles of divisions, and over 60 miles of channel improvements and surface water disposal channels - will work together to control and safely pass flood water from the drainage

area to a natural channel downstream.

This project will protect the city of Gering, Neb., and several area farmsteads from seasonal flood damages. Highly productive irrigated cropland will be protected from erosion and sediment damages due to flooding. An irrigation canal system, vital to crop

production in the area, will also be protected by the completion of this project.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service will direct the technical and financial assistance for the project. The NRCS will need to complete the final engineering design of project, construction will begin spring 2010.

NRD asked to head up Regional Disaster Mitigation Plan

Summer weather often brings with it the threat of severe storms. Intense rainfall events and flooding, hail, high winds and tornados have already been frequent visitors to western Nebraska.

The North Platte NRD has joined forces with several municipalities and counties within the district to develop an All-Hazard Mitigation Plan to assess and address these and other local hazards and risks to lives, properties, and critical facilities. The local sponsors are being assisted in plan development by Consulting/engineering firm JEO. The draft of the plan is being reviewed and a grant application has been

submitted to receive the funding for the development of the plan.

All participating local entities completed project assessments and identified projects which they believe will help reduce risks to constituents and vulnerable properties over the next five years. Those projects include such things as emergency power supplies and generators, warning sirens and critical facility weather alerts, reverse 911 systems, flood control measures, drainage improvements, road and bridge protection projects, safe rooms and flood mapping.

The plan will also provide a component for man-made disaster preparedness when such things as fertilizer or fuel storage and use, or hazardous material transportation pose risks to the population. The value of the plan to local entities, besides securing critical practices up front to protect in the event of these disasters, is that it also assures eligibility for Federal funding should a natural disaster occur in their jurisdiction.

The cost of the plan is being supported by a 75% grant from NEMA.

Forest Service to monitor Pine Beetle located in Banner County

A beetle that has destroyed millions of acres of forest in the American and Canadian west appears to have reached Nebraska.

State foresters are about 95 percent certain that a Scotch pine found in a windbreak in Banner County was killed by the Mountain Pine Beetle. About a dozen trees in the windbreak are infested.

So far, no infested trees have been found in the nearby Wildcat Hills or the Pine Ridge, two areas of western Nebraska with large populations of at-risk trees.

According to Mark Harrell, forest health program leader for the Nebraska Forest Service, The Wildcat Hills and Pine Ridge are mostly populated with Ponderosa pine, a species

that, while not immune, is more resistant to the beetle than the Lodgepole pine that is dying off in the Rockies and Canada.

The diseased trees are located near Harrisburg and the beetles are believed to be from Wyoming. More than 3 million acres of trees have been killed in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and South Dakota. More than 33 million acres have been lost to the beetle in Canada.

Experts say all species of pine are vulnerable to the pest, which is native to North America.

Spraying is most effective to prevent the pine beetle. The optimum time for spraying healthy trees is done by mid-June.

Spraying must be done annually and has been very effective in protecting individual trees. However, spraying is impractical in protecting forests. The only way to slow the spread in a forest is aggressive thinning.

The beetle starves a tree by depriving it of sugar it needs for nourishment.

Harrell said the Nebraska Forest Service plans to survey forests and set out beetle traps to see if the infestation has spread beyond one or two windbreaks in the Panhandle.

Following is information provided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: Symptoms of mountain pine beetle include sawdust in bark crevices and on the ground

next to the tree, popcorn-like masses of resin, called pitch tubes, on the trunk of trees, woodpecker activity and foliage that turns yellowish-green to reddish-brown throughout the canopy.

Mountain pine beetle will attack even healthy pines, but pines that are old, crowded or struggling due to drought, poor growing conditions, disease, fire damage or mechanical damage are most susceptible.

If someone in western Nebraska believes they have mountain pine beetle because of the presence of many pitch tubes on the trunk, they can contact Mark Harrell for additional recommendations at mharrell2@unl.edu (402) 472-6635.



Top view of adult Mountain Pine Beetle (actual size, 1/8 to 1/3 inch).

Mountain area infested by MPB, showing three years of mortality. Old, dead trees are gray; newly killed trees are straw yellow or orange. Some trees may also be infested but do not turn color until nine months or so under attack.



NE Environmental Trust continues funding for Aerial Geophysical Survey project

In April 2009 the North Platte NRD received \$350,000 from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for the "Aerial Geophysical Survey of Selected Panhandle Aquifers" project.

This is the second year of the award with grants amount totaling \$800,000. The North Platte NRD will use the funds to pay for aerial collection and subsequent interpretation of data.

The first year of this three-year project has been used for data collection and initial analysis. Data collection using a helicopter-borne electromagnetic sensor was conducted in the summer and fall of 2008 and again this spring. The next two years will be used for detailed mapping and map publication. All final maps will be produced in a format that will allow their use in geographic information systems (GIS) and ground water modeling programs.

What does it mean for the Panhandle?

This project has come at a crucial time. After eight years of sustained drought, aquifers in the panhandle have been strained to supply water to users and base flow to the North Platte River and Lodgepole Creek in the South Platte NRD. Municipalities face challenges in providing adequate supplies of water. In numerous communities, uranium and arsenic concentrations in drinking water exceed federal maximum contaminant levels. Therefore, it is imperative to find a new source of water for these communities in the future.

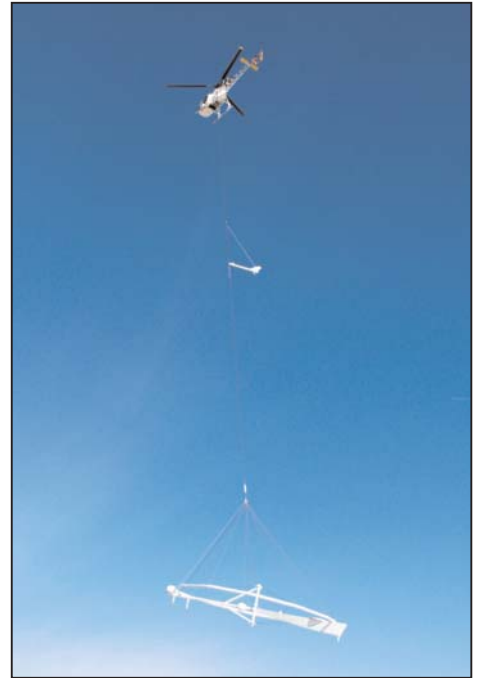
Meanwhile, changes are also in store for water management. Legislative Bill 962 requires that Natural Resources Districts and the Department of Natural Resources develop integrated management plans (IMPs) for the North Platte and South Platte Basins.

For these reasons, it is vital to have accurate, affordable information about the geology affecting water supplies. This information could best be obtained through a program

of geophysical mapping of subsurface geologic characteristics. Traditional methods, including surface geophysics and borehole logging, are needed for this work in order to calibrate the survey results, but they are inefficient to map an area of 252 square miles. An innovative, cost-effective, \$6 per acre, alternative is airborne geophysical mapping, performed by a helicopter carrying a sensor that analyzes geologic formations. The North Platte and South Platte NRDs are proposing to work together, using the expertise of the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Nebraska Conservation & Survey Division, to take advantage of economies of scale and undertake a project to conduct geophysical mapping of priority target area within each basin.

The Nebraska Legislature created the Nebraska Environmental Trust in 1992. Using revenue from the Nebraska Lottery, the Trust has provided over \$142 million in grants to 1, 134 projects across the state.

At about \$6 per acre, airborne geophysical mapping, (shown at right) performed by a helicopter carrying a sensor that analyzes geologic formations is a cost-effective alternative to the traditional test hole drilling method used in the past. These surveys were conducted in June and November of 2008 and May of 2009.



IMP HEARING: *Continued from page 1*

800,000 acre-feet per year.

He also argued that reducing allocations at the onset of a drought would result in providing an adequate supply by the time the drought is over. "I'm not proposing that the NPNRD cease irrigating, just reduce the acres and stretch the water" or go to dryland, he said.

Central maintains that depletions totaling 120,000 acre-feet, or nearly a quarter of the total flow into Lake McConaughy, are being caused by groundwater pumping in the district. Central believes the proposed district IMP is inadequate in reducing the impact to appropriators and

inefficient at addressing current conflicts between ground and surface water users.

Scottsbluff attorney Steven Smith, hearing examiner for both hearings, asked Drain if Central had run an analysis on the economic impact of the district if groundwater allocations were dropped to a level they suggest. Drain said they had not run such an analysis.

Burdette Kister, Scottsbluff area farmer, pointed out the prolonged effects of drought upon area irrigators and cited the fact that the reservoirs in the upper North Platte Basin have not been filled which has a direct effect on the levels in Lake

McConaughy. Kister took issue with the proposed four-year total allocation of 56 inches, stating that amount would not be enough to sustain irrigation production in the district.

Gerrod Toepfer of Lewellen pointed out the unregulated pumping of wells east of the district and called for equity among all well users; the greater amount of precipitation in central and eastern Nebraska; the economic devastation of the area due to decreased allocations; and the danger of having water policy influenced by larger companies.

Nebraska Public Power District cited concerns with the plan correctly assessing

offset credits for permanent irrigated acre retirement and suggested that the plan include a detailed methodology for how such credits will be determined and implemented in the field.

The hearing was held to comply with regulations in LB 962, the basis of Nebraska's water law, which calls for collaboration by the North Platte River Basin NRDs as they bring water use back to 1997 levels.

The NPNRD and the NDNR have 60 days in which to study the submittals and decide whether or not to accept the basin-wide and local plans

A basin-wide plan, including local IMPs, must be adopted by Sept. 15.

Resources

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Irrigators advised not to chemigate over or near open irrigation canals

With summer irrigation season comes the possibility that area farmers applying pesticides through an on-farm irrigation distribution system (chemigation) might be applying chemicals over or near open irrigation canals. Irrigators should understand the potential environmental and regulatory consequences of allowing this practice to occur.

Nebraska state laws administered by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality prohibit the use of any pesticide that is either inconsistent with the label for the product or impairs the beneficial use of any water resource of the state. Only certain aquatic pesticides are allowed for direct or indirect application to open water. In fact, virtually all agricultural pesticides labeled for chemigation prohibit the direct application or runoff into surface water. The NDEQ and the local Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) are the agencies who regulate chemigation and water resource protection in Nebraska. These agencies are charged with the implementation of the Clean Water Act, as well as numerous surface water rules related to the quantity and quality of irrigation canal water, especially as it applies to the water as it returns to outflow water resources.

With this mind, NDA and NDEQ advises all ag producers that any direct application or indirect runoff of chemically treated water from agricultural use is a violation of state law and could result in enforcement action against the applicator of the chemical, as well as any irrigation authority that allows it to happen. We encourage you to take protection of our water resources and the aquatic ecosystem of our state seriously. If you have any questions please contact Craig Uhrig at the NRD office, 632-2749.

Nebraska ranks #1 in irrigated acres

In a recent report, Nebraska ranked number 1 in the nation for number of irrigated acres. Nebraska accounts for one-sixth of all the irrigated farmland in the nation. By the end of 2007, Nebraska had 8.5 million acres under irrigation, three-quarters of it under center pivots. According to Bruce Johnson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln agricultural economist, the state has essentially reached its maxi-

mum development limits.

The North Platte NRD issued a moratorium on the drilling of any new water wells first in the Pumpkin Creek Basin in 2001. A year later, the moratorium went District-wide. Since then, all regulations within the District have been geared toward the sustainability of the water resource. Unregulated pumping can not continue for Nebraska's future.

Third annual Science Camp "Buggin' Out on the Prairie" makes connection between entomology and range ecology



The third annual High Plains Science Camp was held June 22-26. The North Platte NRD sponsored scholarships for four students and assisted with curriculum and activity planning.

This year's theme, "Buggin' Out on the Prairie," incorporated lessons on entomology and range ecology/botany. Area junior high students received hands-on training on recognizing local bug and plant species and their ecological relationships. The students traveled to various sites, including the Wildcat Hills and Scotts Bluff National Monument where they participated in a prairie restoration project along the pathway on the east side the Monument. Students identified invasive weeds and removed them before planting native buffalograss seed.

This is the third year the camp has been held. Camp sponsors are the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, National Park Service, Children and Nature In Our Parks, Educational Service Unit #13, North Platte NRD and the University of Nebraska Extension.

Camper Natasha Teal of Gering (right) gets up close and personal with a prairie beetle she found while working on the trail.

