



## 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 **Nov. 12 and Dec. 10, 7:00 p.m.**

### Be thinking about spring tree planting and maintenance

A clean planting bed is essential for spring conservation tree and shrub planting. It is not too early to stop in and visit with Roy or Craig about your upcoming tree planting needs, including site location and preparation, and variety selection. Tree season 2010 begins in January!

### Winter No Till Conference slated for Dec. 1-2 in Gering

The North Platte NRD is working with other agencies as the Panhandle No Till Partnership to bring the **Winter No Till Conference** to Gering. This year's event is slated for **Dec. 1-2, 2009 at the Gering Civic Center**. The conference will include no till expert speakers, demonstrations, and exhibits. This year's session topics will include No Till: More than Just Avoiding Tillage, No Till and Irrigation Water Savings, Forage Cocktails in the Panhandle, Value of Residue, CRP to No Till, No Till and Insurance, the Carbon Cycle, Enhancing Forage-Based Livestock Operation, and No Till with Grazing. A producers' panel discussion, which will allow you to ask actual producers about their experiences with no till farming practices, will also be held. The two-day conference includes lunch, catered breaks, and an evening social with informal discussion.

Booth space and sponsorship are still available. Booths are available at the \$250 or \$500 level, which both include free advertising and one free pass for the exhibitor to the two-day conference. Advertising is also available in the conference's brochure that will be given to all conference participants. More information about booth space, sponsorship, schedule, speakers and registration is available at

## Fall flow meter readings taken

The North Platte NRD is currently conducting fall ground water meter readings. This is the first full water year to take readings since the NRD implemented its metering requirements in 2008.

Initial readings were taken in April and May of this year to establish the baseline of use. The fall readings will be plugged into a formula based on the type of meter used.

According to NRD staff, the fall meter readings have been going well despite some set backs caused by weather. "We started taking fall readings on Oct. 1 and have to date read 1,325 of 1,584 meters in the overappropriated area," said GIS specialist Jeff Sprock.

Flow meters are required to be installed and used on all regulated wells within the overappropriated area of the district. See a map of this area on our website [www.npnrd.org/flowmeters.html](http://www.npnrd.org/flowmeters.html).

Sprock explained that these fall readings will be used as the ending reading for water-year '09 and the beginning reading for water-year '10. Irrigators can continue using their wells through the winter months on irrigated wheat and other crops, but all water use will be counted toward next year's water use.

Water users are also reminded that if any damages to or replacement of their meters has occurred or if the meter has been removed for any reason, the NRD must be notified.

"We've had some instances where meters have either failed, they've been changed, removed, or damaged and we are just now finding those," Sprock said. "The owners need to notify us so we can help them with repairs and keep their reading data up to date."

Sprock also points out that removable flow meters are against the NRDs rules.

"We have found about 10 removable meters so far. Those landowners will be contacted about correcting the situation," he said.

A full text of the district's flow meter rules (Chapter 4) are available either from the NRD office in Scottsbluff or on our website.

The base-line allocation of ground water for Water Year 2009 was set at 18 inches per acre. Once all meter data has been collected, the NRD will provide a 2009 Ground Water Use Report to landowners showing their water use on each of their certifications. This report will also show what, if any, penalties will be imposed for any over use of groundwater.

*The North Platte NRD continued its tradition of assisting with tree, groundwater, and soil/geology education events. Over 600 area students have been introduced to outdoor and natural resources education just this fall. Education efforts will continue throughout the year with classroom visits and demonstrations, our Adopt-a-School partner Roosevelt Elementary in Scottsbluff, and the spring Water Wonders event. Here, "tree guy" Roy Lyles shows Mitchell Elementary students the proper way to plant a tree during the annual Branch Out event held at the Wildcat Hill Nature Center in September.*



# Setting the record straight on water, land use

*The following was a letter submitted to the editorial staff at the Omaha World Herald responding to its editorial "Strains Build on Big Mac" published Sept. 20, 2009.*

The North Platte Natural Resources District and western Nebraska water users have been withstanding an adverse publicity campaign by the well-oiled Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) public relations machine for months. This has included several spins and even deceptive statements, obviously designed to incite the rest of the State against this NRD, and place the blame for Lake McConaughy's lower levels on ground water use in western Nebraska. The Omaha World-Herald Sept. 20, 2009 editorial entitled "Strains Build on Big Mac" was prime example.

While the article recognizes that nature plays the primary role in dictating water levels in both Lake McConaughy and storage reservoirs in Wyoming, which ultimately feed the Platte River Basin, CNPPID seeks to eliminate the risk that nature places upon all of us for the purpose of keeping Lake McConaughy full. While most everyone would like to see the lake full, it should not and cannot be done at the sole expense of Panhandle water users with resulting disastrous consequences for the social and economic welfare of the population of five western Nebraska counties.

The editorial also correctly notes that man-made problems can in fact be "grappled with." That was the purpose of LB962, enacted by our legislature in 2004. The joint Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-NPNRD Integrated Management Plan (IMP), which became effective on September 14, 2009, was developed using a consultation and collaboration process with stakeholders from this NRD and downstream Platte River Basin water users. In addition, a Basin-wide Plan has been adopted by the DNR and the five overappropriated Platte River Basin NRDs to address integrated water management on a basin-wide scale and includes a process to identify and address disputes from water users within the basin. This Basin-wide Plan was also developed using the consultation and collaboration process with stakeholders from each of the NRDs and Platte River Basin water users.

Among other things, the IMP contains a commitment to limit all ground water irrigation use in the overappropriated portion of the NPNRD to a 56 acre-inch, four year allocation, which translates into a 14 acre-inch annual allocation starting with the 2010 irrigation season, except the Pumpkin Creek Basin which already has a 12 acre-inch annual allocation. The Legislature, in §46-715 and related statutes, contemplated that restoring the overappropriated basin to a fully appropriated status will take time, and thus the reason for inclusion of provisions for an incremental approach, first setting goals to offset stream depletions caused by uses initiated after July 1, 1997.

Thereafter, if necessary, after further scientific study and

analysis, NRDs in the Platte River Basin will strive to return to an equilibrium designated as fully appropriated status.

The study specifically commissioned by CNPPID (which estimated a 123,000 acre-feet annual depletion) has not been peer-reviewed or critically analyzed. Under LB962, the Integrated Management Plan and Basin-wide Plan processes require ongoing review and study to arrive at scientifically sound conclusions before the need for appropriate regulatory actions is considered.

The OW-H editorial equates the CNPPID depletion estimate to "the equivalent of five feet of water depth." While we presume they are trying to relate this to the depth of water in the lake, it is unclear what they are referring to.

The editorial then states "if Big Mac had had that water the past five years, Central suggested, the NRD would have been able to deliver full quotient to its irrigators, rather than about 50 percent less." That is obviously a mistake, inasmuch as the NRD does not deliver water to its irrigators rather it regulates ground water usage. Significantly, no ground water irrigator, within the boundaries of CNPPID has any limitation on the amount of ground water that can be withdrawn, unlike those in the NPNRD.

In addition, the NPNRD put a moratorium on the drilling of new irrigation wells in place in 2002, prior to the moratorium implemented in 2004 by LB962. CNPPID's customers were able to drill new irrigation wells long after 2002.

Assuming the editorial is referring to CNPPID's ability to deliver "full quotient" of surface water to its irrigators, that is also deceptive. Commencing next year, CNPPID will be delivering approximately 15 inches to its

customers. We must keep in mind that the average annual rainfall in CNPPID's service area is approximately 23.5 inches, while the average annual rainfall in the NPNRD is approximately 16.5 inches. The same amount of moisture is required to grow corn and other crops in both NRDs. Additionally, approximately 60% of the customers served by CNPPID have supplemental ground water wells, which again are not limited by how much ground water they can withdraw.

Between their annual precipitation, available surface water supply, unlimited ground water supply, and the ability of CNPPID's customers during reduced deliveries to acquire additional surface water from other CNPPID customers willing to transfer their surface water for a year, CNPPID's irrigators have not been shorted and have been successful in producing and achieving excellent yields even during drought years.

Accordingly, the statement that the irrigators in the NPNRD "still receive far more than downstream Central customers" is simply not true. Use of CNPPID's rhetoric, including such an outlandish claim, without verification of the facts is grossly misleading to all Nebraska residents.

Due to our lower levels of annual precipitation and our already highly regulated wells in the Panhandle compared to the rest of the State, we are evermore at the mercy of nature. We recognize that there is very little, if anything, we can do about it except plan, conserve, and make the best use of our limited resources.

The North Platte NRD has been and will continue to plan, conserve and manage our resources while protecting the economic and social well being of our District residents. This will be done under the legislative requirements for all NRDs.



Ron Cacek  
General Manager

## Yensen Drain project: *Continued from page 3*

heavy rains have equally caused disturbance to area pasture ground. Flood control is among the 10 priorities given to NRDs by state statute. The Yensen Drain project hits on at least five of these priorities.

The NRDs cooperatively work with other local, state, and federal agencies to achieve these priorities.

These priorities, in order, are:

1. Development, management, use and conservation of groundwater, surface water, and water supply for any beneficial use.
2. Soil conservation, erosion prevention and control.
3. Flood prevention and control (structural mitigation:

dams, levees, channels, and storm sewers).

4. Pollution control (water and land quality).
5. Prevention of damages from flood water and sediment (non-structural, such as greenbelts and zoning.)
6. Development and management of recreational and park facilities.
7. Forestry and range management.
8. Development and management of fish and wildlife habitat.
9. Drainage improvement.
10. Solid waste disposal (landfills or incineration) and sanitary drainage.

## NPNRD lowers levy by cent and a half

The North Platte Natural Resources District board of directors was commended Thursday night for making a significant reduction in its Fiscal Year 2010 tax request. Despite budget increases planned for litigation, the district managed to lower its levy to 4.0 cents. This is down a cent and a half from the FY-2009 mill levy of 5.7 cents. The NRD's total property tax request this year is \$1,353,300, down from \$1,725,611.12 in 2009.

"This goes contrary to what our colleagues did," said Mitchell area landowner Robert Busch during the annual budget hearing Thursday. "It is a blessing to come to a taxing authority and see a decrease."

Despite the NRD's lowered request for property taxes, the Board and staff are braced for increased spending on litigation and legal processes necessitated by an ongoing battle with downstream water users.

"We have budgeted about \$100,000 more just for legal fees," general manager Ron Cacek said. "We would rather be spending our taxpayers' money on solutions than fighting a legal battle, but this is the reality."

"This goes contrary to what our colleagues did. It is a blessing to come to a taxing authority and see a decrease."  
Robert Busch, landown-

The NRD's total FY-10 budget is \$4,868,641, up from the previous budget of \$4,727,849. This year's large expenditures are anticipated to be \$2.2 million for special projects, which include three separate partially grant-funded ground water analysis studies conducted with the United States Geological Survey, ongoing maintenance and development of monitoring well and flow meter data, incentives to permanently retire irrigated crop acres, and maintaining and developing an established ground water modeling system.

### Resources

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## NPNRD Board gives support to Yensen Drain flood control project

Recently, Yensen Drain, a flood control project designed to divert heavy rain run-off from nearby bluffs and protect the Gering Valley from flooding, has been subject of media attention.

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.

North Platte 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 at 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 conjunction with already installed structures. The entire system - which includes nine flood-water 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 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 (NRCS) is directing the technical and financial assistance for the project. Cacek says the NRCS will need to complete the final engineering design of project, so construction will likely begin fall 2010.

Gering Valley landowners, including Cleo Gering, were notified by letter of the Yensen Drain public hearings providing information to all landowners affected by the project. These public hearings were held in 2006. No one representing the Cleo Gering family attended. Ownership of this land transferred to Mary Jo Betz in September after the death of Cleo Gering.

New landowner Mary Jo Betz and daughter Lisa Betz attended the monthly NRD meeting Oct. 13 to request that the board consider doing the project without their property involved (total area affected of 14.6 acres), have another public hearing in which they could participate and voice their concerns publically, and requested historical, statistical data showing the damage of flooding in the area. The NRD board was notified by state conservationist Steve Chick that the Board needed to make a decision by Wednesday Oct. 14 of whether they are going to continue to support the project or not, so the federal funding can be reserved for the completion of the project or given to another project. The NRD board was faced with three options: continue with the project and complete the final phase (Yensen) as planned; not support the project and forfeit the federal funding, thus making all the previous years of funding and drain development in vain; or leave out the portion of the Betz's land, having to redesign the drainage and put added pressure on the Gering-Ft. Laramie canal, which cannot handle

The Board sees that the benefits to the community, as a whole, and other landowners, residents and taxpayers are great enough to warrant this project. This project provides protection to roads, bridges, fields, homes, property, the Gering-Ft. Laramie canal, and the community located below the Betz property.

any extra flooding.

NRD board member Dave Ostdiek pointed out that all the public hearings have been held, all notification was properly given to landowners, and the NRD has followed all legal procedures. Ostdiek made the motion to send a letter to Steve Chick that the NRD will stand behind the project with the removal of the Betz's land and continue with the rest of project as planned. Motion died for lack of a second.

Arden Wohlers made the motion to approve the Yensen Drain project as proposed, with the understanding that preliminary land evaluations still need to be completed. The motion was seconded by Jerry Dillman and passed 5-1 (Gary Darnall voted no)

The Board sees that the benefits to the community, as a whole, and other landowners, residents and taxpayers are great enough to warrant this project. True, due to the recent climate cycles, we have not experienced many large rain events, but that does not mean we don't plan for them and strive for a level of preparedness for when they do occur. This project provides protection to roads, bridges, fields, homes, property, the Gering-Ft. Laramie canal, and the community located below the Betz property and the Natural Resources District is charged by law to provide for flood control. The NRD cannot neglect these duties, and sometimes that means making a sacrifice, and in this case it is the "native vegetation" of pasture located next to an aesthetically pleasing landmark. Historically, fire, wind erosion, hail,

## Students compete at NRD-hosted range, land contests

Among the duties of the Natural Resources Districts are holding annual range and land judging contests for area high school students. This year the regional range judging contest was hosted by the South Platte NRD of Sidney and the regional land judging contest was hosted by the North Platte NRD of Scottsbluff, both in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Over 130 western Nebraska FFA members participated in these two contests with top teams qualifying for the state contests, also hosted by NRD's.

### Range Contest

About 52 percent of Nebraska's land is in grasslands (comprising either range or pasture), more than any other land category. The range judging contest allows students to test their knowledge of plants, resources management and other skills in the field.

The regional range contest was held Sept. 15 in Chappell. Creek Valley High School of Chappell took overall top team honors. The Scottsbluff FFA team of Teyvn Baldwin, Chris Hartsuiker, Hayley Clark and Ashley Pike (pictured below) took top honors in the Junior division. Baldwin and Clark were also the top two individuals in the Junior division. The North Platte NRD was pleased to provide Baldwin and Clark with full scholarships to attend the 2009 Youth Range Camp held in Halsey in June where they sharpened their range judging skills.

Local ribbon winners were: Sr. Team - Blue , Scottsbluff (Alex Groskopf, Kyra Baldwin, Alex Morris and Hallie Anderson). Jr. Team - Purple , Scottsbluff (Tevyn Baldwin, Hayley Clark, Chris Hartsuiker and Ashley Pike); Red Ribbon, Scottsbluff (Austin Groskopf, Ginger Klemm, Kyle Meinger and Bryant Gilbert). Sr. Individual - Blue ribbon, Alex Groskopf, Scottsbluff; Green ribbon, Kyra Baldwin, Scottsbluff. Jr. Individual - Purple, Teyvn Bladwin, Scottsbluff; Blue, Hayley Clark, Scottsbluff; White, Austin Groskopf, Scottsbluff; Green, Chris Hartsuiker, Ashley Pike, Ginger Klemm, Scottsbluff.



Regional Land Judging was held southwest of Gering on Oct. 7. Here students analyze soil type and texture in one of four soil pits dug for the contest.

### Land Judging

Land judging challenges students to gain a better understanding of soil structure and land evaluation. Land judging enables each participant to learn how to recognize the physical features of the soil, determine land capability for crop production, and evaluate management practices needed for proper stewardship.

The regional land contest was held Oct. 7 at Scottsbluff. The Scottsbluff team of Alex Groskopf, Austin Groskopf, Brett Houston, and Alex Morris took top team honors with the Bayard I team of Nate Applegate, Amanda Dechant, Linz Douglas, and Ryan Parriott placing 2nd and the Bayard II team of Shelbie Rose, Katherine Meyer, James Houck and James Smith took 3rd.

Individually, Alex Groskopf and Austin Groskopf of Scottsbluff and Linz Douglas of Bayard took top honors respectively. Rounding out the top ten individuals were Login Modlin, Kim; Brandon Stuart, Bay; Dillion DeFoe, Bay; Alex Morris, SB; Ryan Parriott, Bay; Kyra Baldwin, SB; and James Houck, Bay. The Scottsbluff and first high Bayard team will represent the Western Region at the State Contest to be held Nov. 3 near Wolbach, NE.



Top land judging team was Scottsbluff (l-r) Austin Groskopf (high individual), Alex Groskopf, Brett Houston, and Alex Morris, coached by Shane Talkington



Bayard FFA team of Nate Applegate, Amanda Dechant, Linz Douglas, and Ryan Parriott, coached by Justin Rafferty placed 2nd.



Bayard FFA team of James Houck, Shelbie Rose, Katherine Meyer, and James Smith, coached by Justin Rafferty placed 3rd