

Resources

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NPNRD Reminders...

Board elections in 2006

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

This year five seats are up for re-election. Incumbents Cannon, Darnall, Dillman, Lapaseotes and Lembke have all re-filed. Pumpkin Creek area landowner Leo Hoehn has filed to run in District 3.

For a listing of candidate filings go to <http://www.sos.state.ne.us/elec/candidates/nrds.htm> To learn more about the NPNRD directors, go to our website at <http://www.npnrd.org/staff.htm>.

Ag scholarships available

The Scottsbluff/Gering United Chamber of Commerce Agribusiness Committee is offering three \$750 scholarships to college students pursuing an ag-related field. The scholarships are available to students entering college, and current college students from the surrounding areas.

Applications are due in the Chamber office by 5 p.m., March 29. They are available at the Chamber office in the Bluffs Business Center at 1517 Broadway, Suite 104, Scottsbluff, NE 69361 or by calling (308) 632-2133.

We're here for the Kids

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 28, and Soil & Water Stewardship Week April 30-May 7. The NPNRD will also be helping with the annual Water Wonders field day on April 20 and Branch Out activities on May 3.

Area students also have the opportunity to participate in the NPNRD's Conservation Poster Contest (deadline is April 28). More information is on our website or at area elementary schools.

We'd like to be part of your spring resource education activities, from trees planting to talking about soil and water. Give us a call at 436-7111.

Favor given for Cooperative Agreement

The Platte River Cooperative Agreement Governance Committee has developed a Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP), also known as the Cooperative Agreement that must be signed by the governors of Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska and the Secretary of Interior before it can go into effect.

In a nutshell, the PRRIP protects and provides for habitat for four targeted "threatened or endangered" species, the pallid sturgeon, least tern, piping plover, and whooping crane, while attempting to give water users a fair allocation from the river basin.

Colorado and Wyoming are on board. For Nebraska,

however, it may boil down to choosing the lesser of two evils, complying with the Endangered Species Act by adopting the PRRIP or forgoing the program and dealing with federal regulations as they are sanctioned. Gov. Dave Heineman is undecided about signing off on the program.

"There is no walk away option on this. We either do it through the program or through regulatory action."

PID Manager Dennis Strauch on the Cooperative Agreement

Strauch, Jim Cook with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, and other area water managers favor adopting the program

See AGREEMENT, page 4

Flow meters could safeguard district

The accurate measurement of water use could become a strong defense in many water disputes, whether between states, districts, or neighbors.

The use of flow meters, though not warmly embraced, is becoming more acknowledged and accepted. Landowners who have been required to use the monitoring gauges on their pivots and pumps are beginning to laud their merits.

"I think they've really made an improvement in our management of water," said irrigator and NPNRD director Pete Lapaseotes.

Lapaseotes was among the hundreds of landowners in

the Pumpkin Creek basin who were required by the NRD in 2003 to install flow meters for better groundwater management in that sub-area. Flow meters are also required in the Lisco-Oshkosh-Lewellen groundwater management sub-area. Throughout other areas of the district, they are not.

Due to the accountability of groundwater use required by LB962, water users and managers are beginning to recognize flow meters as valuable tools for measuring and managing water use. Flow meters could also go a long way toward protecting the district's water supplies in the future.

See FLOW METER, page 2

FFA & NRD in action

NPNRD Soil Resources Coordinator Roy Lyles, right, helps Bayard FFA members Shaylee Jobman, Samantha Jobman and Madi Coon understand the tree ordering and wind-break planning process in preparation for their Ag Sales & Service presentation during the District FFA Contests held in Scottsbluff in January. The girls, along with team mate Candice Ross, placed second at Districts, which qualified them for the State Competition in March. With their polished salesmanship skills and understanding of natural resources, these FFA members could be future NRD staffers. We salute the FFA.



FLOW METERS : Use could benefit district

Continued from page 1

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

One proposal put forth by Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District targets the alleged overuse of groundwater in the North Platte NRD. NRD manager Ron Cacek and some NRD board directors believe the use of flow meters could better establish the *actual* use instead of *estimated* use of water, protecting the district from such claims.

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

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

According to a published article on the Progressive Farmer website, researchers at the University of Georgia found farmers pump far less water during drought than regulatory officials had assumed.

Like Nebraska, Georgia is currently in dispute with neighboring states Florida and Alabama over water rights. Metering should show the courts that farmers are serious about managing water. Knowing an accurate amount of water used is a key step in this process.

To read the findings of the report and to learn more about flow meter use, go to http://www.progressive-farmer.com/farmer/farming_business/article/0,24672,1113222,00.html

Industry professionals tout meters

Admittedly, sales of flow meters are not driven by the wants of consumers--they're driven by needs.

"Generally, the only times we're seeing them installed is when people are forced to and when they get government funding," said Chad Schneider, owner of Irrigation Specialties in Gering. "But really, once they have them on, they don't disagree with them. I think they find them pretty useful. It's just the idea of regulatory control they don't like."

Schneider said there are several benefits to using flow meters.

"What's nice, in my opinion, is on some pivots you can actually hook them up so they go into the pivot panel. They sense how much water is being used and then regis-

ters that into the panel, which can be linked to a home computer so you can keep track of your water use from the house," he said.

Schneider said flow meters are a better way of tracking water flow rather than trying to compute water use at the weir. "It's simpler for the irrigators, the ditch riders and other managers," he said.

Schneider said he understands the resistance that many water users have about using flow meters, but also recognizes their worth. Flow meters monitor the amount of water used and rate it is applied, helps avoid over or under watering, and can indicate problems with a pivot, pump or well operating system.

"It would be nice if everybody kind of got on board and started using them voluntarily, but I understand people don't like regulations," he said.

Schneider said voluntary use of flow meters could also help the industry in the long run.

"I've gone to national meetings

and states where they are now mandated. Everybody has got to have them installed and that has caused a heavy burden on the industry," he said.

Pros

Accurate water application and rate of use
Indicating changes or problems with a pump, pivot, or well
Increase irrigation efficiency
Varieties include mechanical, electrical and solar

Cons

Cost: between \$700 and \$1,300 per flow meter (NRD cost-share is available)
Maintenance and repair to keep in running condition

NPNRD board submits bid for property

The NPNRD has submitted, and the City of Scottsbluff has accepted, a bid to purchase a building and 3.63 acres located in the airport industrial park east of Scottsbluff. The property is known locally as the former CBIT building.

The NPNRD hopes to relocate its office, shop and tree storage facilities to the location by fall 2006.

The NPNRD and City are awaiting the finalization of the deal, which includes a 30-day waiting period for public comment.

The NPNRD board approved the submission of the \$277,500 bid at their January regular board meeting and the Scottsbluff City Council accepted the bid at their regular meeting Feb. 21.

As staff and the need for additional equipment grows, so has the need for more space at the current office in Gering. Estimated cost to build a new office and shop to meet current needs was \$1.3 million.

More information about the NPNRD's plans will be forthcoming this spring.

Cost share available for flow meter installation

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

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

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

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

Funding available through NE Buffer Strip Program

Funding is still available to install buffer strips through the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program.

Buffer strips help filter waste and chemicals from field runoff before it returns to a nearby stream, ditch, tributary or other watershed.

Cropland adjacent to seasonal and perennial streams, wetlands or ponds are eligible for the Buffer Strip Program. Two kinds of buffer strips are eligible - filter strips, which are narrow strips of grass; and riparian forest buffer strips containing trees and grass.

The program was designed to be used in conjunction with the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), however it can be used by itself, as well. Rental rates are calculated as follows:

-- For irrigated cropland, rental rates are \$150 per acre minus payments from other programs.

-- For non-irrigated cropland without CRP, the rental rate per acre is equal to 120% of the average CRP soil rental rate plus \$5 per acre, up to a maximum of \$150 per acre.

-- Non-irrigated cropland enrolled in CRP is no longer eligible.

-- There is no sign-up period. Landowners may sign up at any time, but this funding is available to eligible landowners on a first come first serve basis.

Interested landowners should contact their local Natural Resources District or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office to begin the application process.

Dealing with fully appropriated and over appropriated

Pumpkin Creek retirement incentives are no buyout

Twenty-seven applications accounting for 2,794 acres in the Pumpkin Creek basin have applied for incentive funds to permanently retire up to 2,500 irrigated acres. The two-week application period ended Feb. 24. NRCS and NRD staff are now reviewing the applications to make final rankings and approvals.

Interest in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Special Initiative for Pumpkin Creek

Basin indicates that landowners are willing to take irrigated ground out of production for the overall benefit of the entire Platte River Basin.

Statewide public perception, however, has been tainted by the mistaken notion that incentive programs are a buyout for producers. In Pumpkin Creek, landowners can receive up to \$450 per acre for converting irrigated ground to native grass, tame pasture or hay, dryland crops or the wildlife habitat. The program was funded through joint efforts between the North Platte NRD, NRCS, and Department of Natural Resources.

The incentive program's purpose is to decrease the number of irrigated acres in the over appropriated area and to help groundwater recharge and increase stream flow into the North Platte River. The ultimate goal is to reduce the consumptive use of groundwater in cooperation with the North Platte NRD and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and help satisfy the requirement under the state's new depletions plan and LB962.

Incentive programs for permanent retirement of irrigated acres are one of the methods used in developing the Platte River Basin's integrated management plan.

North Platte NRD submits plan for over appropriated basin

The North Platte NRD has come to the Basin-wide Stakeholders group table with a seven-point proposal that could be included in the overall plan to replenish flows to the Platte River Basin while protecting the economic interests of western Nebraska water users.

NPNRD general manager Ron Cacek said the proposal includes provisions that could be implemented by all Platte River Basin districts as fair and equitable way of protecting groundwater levels and instream flows throughout the entire basin.

The following is proposed as an outline for a basin-wide plan for the Upper Platte Basin in Nebraska. This, along with other proposals, will be considered as the stakeholders groups continue the IMP process. The next basin wide stakeholders group will meet March 22 in North Platte.

1. All NRDs maintain the stay on drilling of new wells and the stay on the expansion of irrigated acres in the over appropriated areas. Stays at a minimum would have to be maintained until the over appropriated area falls below the fully appropriated designation.

2. The provisions of the new depletions plan be implemented by all NRDs in the basin as soon as possible and not later than _____ (date). (Most likely we will have to do this anyway if the Cooperative Agreement program is adopted.)

3. Each NRD develop a plan to get down to the 1997 level of use within ten years at a maximum. Sooner if possible.

Could include such items as retirement of irrigated acres, regulatory controls or a combination of both. (May depend upon available funding.)

4. Each NRD develop rules and regulations for the transfer of ground water within the NRD and from the NRD to outside locations providing for offsets to prevent depletions to the river. Computation of required offsets should be the same in each NRD.

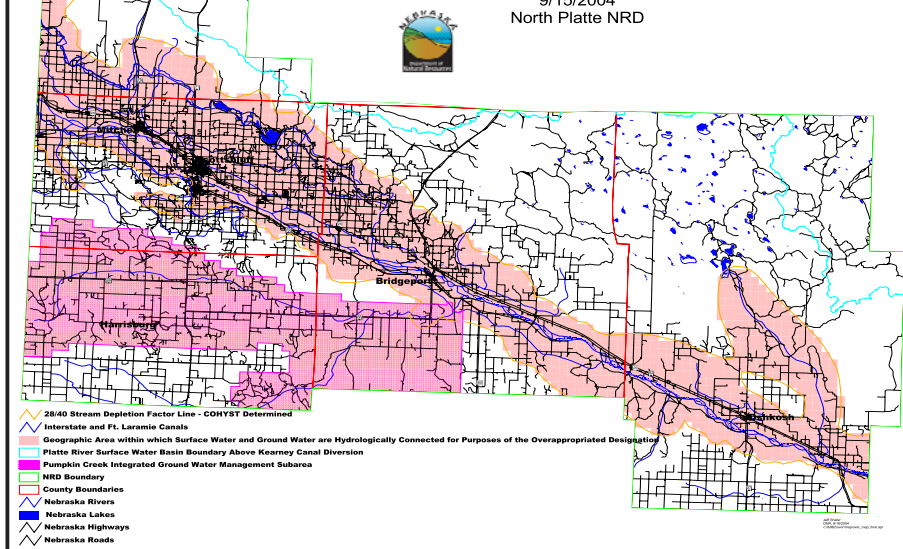
5. Develop a basin-wide drought management program that would be implemented upon a trigger such as the notification of the Project Manager of the Bureau of Reclamation at Mills, WY to the Director of the Nebraska

Department of Natural Resources and the Wyoming State Engineer of an allocation year. This is the notification required in the NE vs. WY settlement agreement. (Discussion needed on the details)

6. Nothing in this plan would limit surface water deliveries except as an individual irrigation district might decide to do because of local circumstances such as drought requiring conservation measures be implemented.

7. A basin-wide program be developed to address the increasing number of invasive plant species (Russian olive and Saltcedar) growing in the vicinity of the river channels.

Designation of the Geographic Area within which Surface Water and Ground Water are Hydrologically Connected for Purposes of the Overappropriated Designation
Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
9/15/2004
North Platte NRD



FULLY APPROPRIATED: In 2004 The Platte River Basin was determined by the DNR to be fully appropriated, that is, water use meets the current water supply.

OVER APPROPRIATED: A large part of the basin was further determined to be over appropriated, that is, water use exceeds water supply. These areas are indicated by the pink areas in the above map.

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More monitoring wells being drilled

The North Platte NRD is currently drilling new monitoring wells at several sites around the district. According to NPNRD hydrogeologist Chris Jutting, wells are now being drilled north east of Scottsbluff in several new subdivision areas. Some of these wells have been drilled as deep as 600 feet into the Chadron formation. Previously, monitoring wells were only tapping the Alluvial and Brule aquifers.

Monitoring wells are dedicated well sites that are carefully designed and constructed and used only to collect data about groundwater.

Monitoring wells are a more reliable source of data than existing wells that were drilled for other uses. If a well is used for human consumption, irrigation, or watering livestock, these uses might affect the water in the well.

Monitoring wells are tightly sealed against the elements and potential contaminants that might enter the well.

A typical well site might actually contain a "nest" of several wells. Each well consists of a 2 1/2-inch-diameter PVC pipe that is screened along a portion of its length so water can be pumped from certain depths.

The materials used in constructing these wells are rel-

In addition to the nearly 600 monitoring wells located throughout the district, the NPNRD also uses U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) monitoring sites to collect data for groundwater levels. Of the 21 USGS monitoring well sites in the state, 15 are located within our district. Landowners can access real-time or 30-day average groundwater level readings and precipitation data from a nearby USGS site. Check out the NPNRD homepage at www.npnrd.org for a link to the USGS website.

atively inert and do not contaminate water samples.

A nest of three wells might be screened so that one well collects water from the top of the aquifer (near the water table); one from the middle depths; and one from the bottom of the aquifer.

So a network of wells set up in a grid pattern and screened to sample water from varying depths gives scientists a 3-D view of an aquifer, according to Jutting. Water can be tracked along horizontal and vertical movement.

The fourth dimension is time. Changes in water quality or water levels can be measured at scheduled time intervals to learn groundwater trends. Sometimes, wells are fitted with electronic data loggers, equipment that will continually monitor water levels over a period of time.

Left: The NPNRD, along with Rider Drilling, have been drilling monitoring wells in a housing subdivision north of Scottsbluff. These monitoring wells help the NRD keep data on water and nitrate levels. This week they will drill monitoring wells into the Chadron Formation south of Gering near County Road W.



New staff at NPNRD

The North Platte NRD welcomes new water conservation technician **Michelle Long** to the staff. Michelle, a graduate of Bayard High School and Chadron State College with a degree in geo-science, grew up near the Nine Mile Creek area north of Minatare. Michelle's duties include assisting water conservation coordinator Carl Roland and water conservation technician Carolyn Hudson with taking weekly water level measurements and testing for nitrates and uranium levels.

Rachelle Eversole is the new clerk at the NRD office in Bridgeport. She is available to help Morrill County residents with their applications and NRD business.

USGS, NPNRD gain through partnership

A cooperative relationship between the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the North Platte NRD continues to provide benefits. The coupling of a federal agency using data from local resources has led to better water management and decision making.

A published report, "*Working with the U.S. Geological Survey: Ground-Water Information and Partnership Opportunities*" by W.F. Horak and G.V. Steele details this working relationship and the benefits that have been derived through years of cooperative partnership between the USGS and NPNRD. The report explains how the NPNRD and the USGS Nebraska Water Science Center have worked collectively since 1990 on many data-collection efforts and interpretive studies. This data has assisted the NPNRD with managing water resources associated with about 3 million acres of the North Platte River Basin and its tributaries.

This partnership has resulted in an impressive array of USGS products (data and interpretive reports) and the North Platte NRD has been an active participant in collecting ground-water quantity and quality data that are technically sound and defensible. All of this information is available to the public.

The report is published in its entirety at two sites, on the USGS website and on page 10 of River Network's publication, "River Voices."

The USGS site, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/article/rivervoices/2005/vol15.html>, contains a good reference for the

material and contains live links to other websites. The "River Voices" newsletter, at <http://www.rivernetwork.org/emplibary/rv2005v15n3-4.pdf>, also contains many useful and informative articles related to water resources and river protection. Both of these articles are also quick linked on our website, www.npnrd.org.

AGREEMENT: Program provides for certainties

Continued from page 1

despite its implications.

The PRRIP's primary purposes include: securing defined benefits for the target species and their associated habitats, serve as the reasonable and prudent alternative to offset the effects of existing and new water related activities; help prevent the need to list more basin-associated species pursuant to the ESA; and mitigate new water related activities in each state in a manner that will not increase the mitigation responsibilities of other signatory states, with the intent that mitigation will be implemented in the state where the activity occurs.

Strauch explained that by adopting the program, water users would have a clear understanding of what is required by law for land and water shares, research, terms, and participation. In addition, Nebraska would receive part of the 50/50 cost share between the federal government and the three states and cooperative guidance to enforce the pro-

gram. The first increment of \$317 million would be for 13 years; states would receive \$130 million credit for water and land shares and the state of Nebraska and water users would bare none of the cash cost, which would fall mostly to the federal government.

Strauch said without the program, there would likely be higher habitat requirements, unknown federal dollar assistance and likely no credit for water use.

"We'd be getting 13 years of regulatory certainty at little or no cost," Strauch explained. "The alternative is unknown regulatory requirements and the possibility of litigation."

The Governance Committee is completing its final impact statement for the plan, which will be available for public review on March 21. For complete information about the Cooperative Agreement, go to www.plateriver.org.