



P.O. Box 280 | 100547 Airport Road
Scottsbluff, NE 69363-0280

PRSTD MKTG
Postage
PAID
Permit No. 10
Ogallala, NE

CONTACT US

PHONE
308.632.2749

FAX
308.632.4346

EMAIL
npnrd@npnrd.org

WEB
<https://www.npnrd.org>

OFFICE HOURS

Monday – Thursday
7:30 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
Friday 7:30 A.M. – 4 P.M.

VISIT US

In person,
NPNRD.ORG, or at



North Platte
NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

JANUARY
2026

IMPORTANT DATES

BOARD MEETINGS
3:00 p.m.
Second Thursday of each Month

GREENHOUSE TOURS
Call to schedule

OFFICE CLOSED: 1/1/26

OFFICE CLOSED: 1/19/26

DRIED FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS
WORKSHOP:
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
1/31/26
At the North Platte NRD

FARM AND RANCH EXPO:
2/6/26 – 2/7/26

AG SYMPOSIUM:
9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
2/10/26
At the Gering Civic Center

NSWCP DEADLINE: 2/13/26

OFFICE CLOSED: 2/16/26

TREE PRUNING WORKSHOP:
3/10/26
At the North Platte NRD

HOME AND GARDEN SHOW &
URBAN SYMPOSIUM:
4/18/26
At the Weborg Center

OFFICE CLOSED: 5/25/26

YOUR RESOURCE REPORT

Protecting Lives - Protecting Property - Protecting the Future

Turfgrass Taking Root

by Kirstee Moore-Schutte, Horticulture & Education Specialist in Greenhouse



Turfgrass lawns became the norm through a combination of inherited symbolism, technological advancements, and a post-WWII economy that lent itself to suburban development. Over generations of unquestioned traditional practices, we have developed an inattentive blindness to the spread of lawns, barely noticing that we have quietly carpeted America. Though valued for its ability to take foot traffic in recreational areas, turfgrass lawns have the potential to be quite problematic. They often demand high inputs of water and fertilizer while providing relatively little habitat or food for wildlife, reducing biodiversity and contributing to pollution. While these inputs are not inherently bad, applying them at the wrong time or in excess increases water usage and can significantly contribute to nutrient runoff and leaching in surface water and the ground water that supplies municipal systems within our district.

Some actions can be taken to mitigate negative environmental impacts. Fertilizer should be applied when the grass is actively growing, and only as much as is truly needed. Cool-season grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue do most of their healthy growth in spring and fall, while warm-season grasses like buffalograss, blue grama, and bermudagrass grow best in summer. For established lawns, two applications a year are usually enough: one between mid-April and late May, and a second between late August and mid-September. For new lawns, additional light application may be justified. It is best to avoid early spring and late-fall fertilizing when roots aren't taking up nutrients, and the risk of leaching is high. Whatever nutrients roots don't use are allowed to pass, where they embark on a journey to the aquifer.

Incorporating native species is one of the simplest, most impactful ways to support local ecosystems. Native plants coevolved with regional insects and wildlife and adapted to the local climatic and soil conditions where they naturally occur. They supply nectar, pollen, and seeds that feed native butterflies, insects, birds, and other wildlife. Their ornamental

counterparts offer less nourishment, too, and experience a high incidence of pests and disease.

It's worth questioning how well non-native monocultures of turfgrass truly serve us. Are all our practices ecologically sound, or could we do away with some of the outdated ideals that come with traditional management in urban greenspaces? By incorporating native flowers, trees, and shrubs into landscapes, to timely, appropriate application of fertilizers and chemicals, to frugal use of natural resources, we can all do our part as environmental stewards. Doing things the way they've always been done may be easier and more appealing, but as John F. Kennedy said, "There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long-range risks of comfortable inaction."

Meet the Staff

Keelie Williamson

My name is Keelie Williamson, and I am a Natural Resources Technician with the North Platte Natural Resources District. I have been with the NPNRD for four years, and during this time, I have come to really appreciate how important natural resources are. I enjoy my time out in the field, getting to know producers, and doing what I can to help protect our resources that we all depend on. I am always learning new things within my job.

Life outside of work is just as busy and meaningful. I am married, and we have two little girls at home who bring good chaos to life. When I am not trying to keep up with them, I can usually be found on a horse, taking care of cattle, or doing yard work. Agriculture has always been a big part of my life and something that my whole family enjoys.

On top of all of this, I am working toward my associate's degree in Agribusiness. While this adds to the chaos, I am excited to keep growing and learning new things I am enthusiastic about.

Meet the Staff

Paula Kihlthau

Hi, my name is Paula Kihlthau. I have been part of the North Platte Natural Resource District staff in Scottsbluff since December 2015, first as the Bookkeeper and then, in 2023, moved to the Data Management Department. I grew up on a family farm in Minatare, Nebraska, where my father raised beans, corn, alfalfa, sugar beets, and had a large cattle operation. After college, I married Brad Kihlthau, and we farmed for a few years in the Lake Alice community, then in banking, secretarial, and as a Farm Service Agency Technician. I have helped my husband in his current pastoral ministry position for the past 24 years. We have two adult children: Phillip, his wife Blessing, and their two sons, in Texas, and Nichole, her husband Jared, and their two daughters, in Scottsbluff. My husband and I live on a small acreage in Minatare and enjoy working outdoors in our garden spaces, growing trees, and, of course, enjoying as much time as we can with our grandkids.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Roger Eirich—Chairman
Sub-District 4 since 2013
Kent Andreas—Vice Chairman
Sub-District 4 since 2013
Pete Lapaseotes—Secretary
At-Large since 2005
Ryan Reuter—Treasurer
Sub-District 1 since 2018
Lane Darnall—Director
Sub-District 3 since 2023
Dave Deines—Director
Sub-District 3 since 2005
Chuck Henkel—Director
Sub-District 2 since 2013
Dan Weinreis—Director
Sub-District 1 since 2009
Mark Westphal—Director
Sub-District 2 since 2019

NPNRD STAFF

General
Scott Schaneman – General Manager
Travis Preston – Assistant Manager
Paul Safford – Source Water Protection Specialist
Water Department
Craig Uhrig – Water Resources Coordinator
Seth Popp – Water Project Specialist
Jody Fiscus – Water Resources Technician
Lynn Okicki – Water Quality Specialist
Keelie Williamson – Water Quality Specialist
Ethan Woehrl – Water Resources Technician
Terry Yeager – Water Operator & Resources Technician
Resource Conservation Department
Todd Filipi – Resource Conservation Coordinator
Ken Ridgeway – Resource Conservation Technician
Kaden Vowers – Western Assistant Community Forester
Geographic Info. Systems Department
Lydia Hendrickson – GIS Data Coordinator
Administration Department
Danielle Madden – Office Manager

Renay Smith – Secretary/Accounts Payable Clerk
D'Nesha Douglass—Office Assistant & A/R Clerk
Greenhouse & Special Projects
Kirstee Moore-Schutte – Horticulture & Education Specialist in GH
Data Management and Outreach Dept.
Kyle Ann Hopkins – Data & Outreach Coordinator
Paula Kihlthau – Data Specialist
Macy Elliott – Communications & Data Specialist
NPNRD & NRCS Clerks
Geri Alworth – NRCS Clerk, Oshkosh
Becky Schaneman – NRCS Clerk, Scottsbluff

Unless specifically noted or credited, articles printed in this newsletter are not copyrighted and may be reproduced without permission if the proper credit is given to the North Platte Natural Resources District as the source of the article. The NPNRD can be reached by phone at (308) 632-2749; by email at melliott@npnrd.org.



What is an Aquafer?

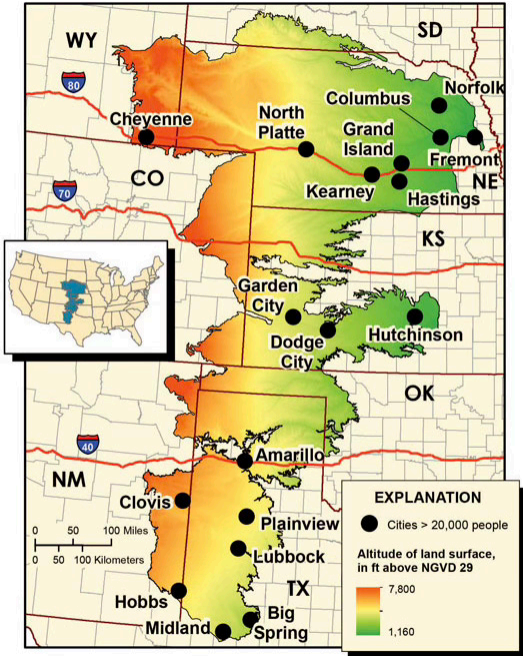
An aquifer is a natural underground formation made of permeable materials such as sand, gravel, or porous rock that can store and transmit water. Rain and snowmelt seep down through the soil, filling the tiny spaces between these particles much like water filling the gaps in a sponge.

Once stored, this groundwater can be accessed through wells or released naturally through springs. Some aquifers recharge quickly with modern rainfall, while others, like the Ogallala, contain ancient water deposited thousands of years ago and refill only very slowly. These “fossil aquifers” are invaluable because they hold enormous volumes of water but are extremely difficult to replenish.

Stretching beneath eight states and covering portions of the Great Plains from South Dakota to Texas, the Ogallala Aquifer is one of the most important and least visible water resources in the United States. This vast underground reservoir provides nearly 30% of the nation’s irrigation water, sustaining one of the world’s most productive agricultural regions.

The Ogallala is the largest component of the High Plains Aquifer system, a broader network of connected groundwater formations that underlie the central United States. While the High Plains Aquifer refers to the entire system, the Ogallala makes up its most extensive and most heavily used

section. Together, they form the primary water supply for the High Plains region, supporting agriculture, communities, and ecosystems across millions of acres.



Location map showing the boundary of the High Plains aquifer, major cities and roads, and altitude of land surface from the USGS.

Urban Symposium

Join us at the KNEB Home and Garden Show for guest speakers talking about horticultural impacts on the environment, effects of nitrates on human health, and nitrates in the District. There will be a morning and an afternoon session during the show. More information to come.

IRA Zoo Grant Award

The North Platte Natural Resources District, on behalf of the Riverside Discovery Center, was recently awarded a \$105,901 Community Forestry Infrastructure grant from Plant Nebraska, formerly the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA). The grant is part of the \$10 million awarded to NSA in 2024 by the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry program.

The grant program supports Nebraska’s community forestry by assisting with tree removal, care, and planting; improving watershed access through stronger community forest management; and expanding workforce development in the tree care industry.

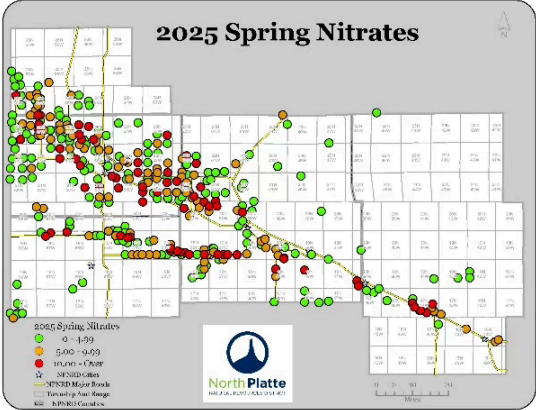
The North Platte Natural Resources District will use the funds to help the Riverside Discovery Center remove hazardous trees, rebuild canopy with diverse plantings, complete needed pruning, and train zoo staff for ongoing tree care over the next three years.



IMPORTANT Nitrates in the area

We are currently addressing a nitrate issue identified in our area. As part of our management efforts, we are asking all landowners with more than 5 acres who irrigate with surface or groundwater to complete soil and water testing for nitrate levels. These tests will help us better understand local conditions and guide next steps as we move forward in this initial phase.

2025 Spring Nitrate results from the North Platte NRD monitoring well system.



Spring Tree Sales

North Platte NRD employees doing a tree planting after mulching a windbreak.

You’ve probably heard the saying, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now.” That message rings especially true as the North Platte NRD opens its tree order program for 2026.

The NRD is now accepting orders for tree seedlings on a first-come, first-served basis. Trees are sold in bundles of ten, making it easy for landowners, acreage owners, and conservation-minded residents to plan windbreaks, shelterbelts, or habitat plantings.

A wide variety of species is available, including evergreens, broadleaf trees, and shrubs. Seedlings come in two forms:

- Bare-root: \$1.20 per tree
- Plugs: \$2.20 per tree

A complete species list can be found on the NRD website at npnrd.org.

Whether you’re planning to reduce wind erosion, create wildlife habitat, or simply add beauty to your property, now is the perfect time to start planning.



Windbreak Renovation Grant

The North Platte Natural Resources District would like to remind folks about an opportunity currently available to help renovate and rejuvenate existing tree windbreaks. The NRD was awarded a Nebraska Environmental Trust Grant last year to help implement a new Windbreak Renovation Strategy over the course of three years. Historically, when windbreaks decline and become ineffective, they are bulldozed, piled, and burned. The North Platte NRD secured funding to implement a less destructive and more ecologically friendly approach to renovate and rejuvenate the old and dying windbreaks within the district.

The grant money was awarded to be used toward leasing a Forestry Drum Mulcher and a tracked compact loader to create planting paths through existing degraded or non-functional windbreaks. Fallen debris, widow makers, and such are mulched to create a new planting path immediately next to the old stumps and standing trees which are left to provide protection and to catch and hold moisture for the new seedlings. This method provides protection and holds moisture better for the new seedlings while maintaining some continued functionality of the existing windbreak during the establishment period of the seedlings.

The work is completed by District staff after a site visit and charged to the landowner on a per-hour basis, with the requirement that

seedlings be planted within 12 months of completion. All current NRD and NSWCP cost-share programs will be available for the planting portion of these projects.



North Platte NRD Windbreak Renovation project in progress.

Winter 2026 WORKSHOPS

Dried Floral Arrangements

Join us for a hands-on workshop. Participants will learn how to make simple dried floral arrangements using locally sourced flora. Dried arrangements last for months (even years), making them a perfect eco-friendly decor option for your home. Participants are encouraged to bring any of their own dried items or embellishments, but materials will be provided. Dried Floral Arrangements Workshop January 31st, from 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM \$10 a person. It will be hosted at the North Platte NRD. Please email kmoore@npnrd.org or call 308-631-7226 to sign up.

Terrariums

Bring a little green indoors this winter! Learn how to build and care for this tiny ecosystem in a jar. Participants are welcome to bring their own jar up to 1 gallon in size, but a plastic 1-gallon jar will be provided \$10 a person. More information to come about the date. Please email kmoore@npnrd.org or call 308-631-7226 to sign up.

Tree Pruning

The North Platte Natural Resources District and Nebraska Forest Service are partnering to host a tree pruning workshop about the proper pruning methods and tools, general tree care, and programs updates.

It is important to start pruning trees within the first 10 years of their life and keep up with a regular routine. If the pruning is done while they are young, it will be easier and less harmful to the tree.

The workshop will be held at the North Platte NRD office, located at 100547 Airport Road in Scottsbluff, scheduled for Tuesday, March 10th, 2026.

The workshop is free of charge, open to the public, and lunch will be provided. It will be conducted both inside and outside, so participants are reminded to dress accordingly. It is important to start pruning trees within the first 10 years of their life and keep up with a regular routine. If the pruning is done while they are young, it will be easier and less harmful to the tree.

Short Conservation Sayings and Lessons Learned Over my First 25 Years in the Conservation Field

by Todd Filipi, Resource Conservation Coordinator, NNRND

- Show me a weed-free yard, and I will show you sick trees.
- What tree/shrub said prune my lower limbs off and make me look like a lollipop, and I will be healthy and happy? – None of them!
- With regards to range and pasture plants: You have bacon and donuts in your pasture. Just because the bacon was eaten first doesn’t mean donuts aren’t delicious. When you look across the fence at the solid stand of black licorice your neighbor has, don’t be fooled, black licorice is still gross.
- So, you think your neighbor is stupid, yet here you are giving him all of your topsoil at the expense of all of your soil moisture, 3 weeks’ worth of fuel, time, and wear and tear on your machinery, just to be able to plant your crop 4 days before him?
- Any serious conversation about water quality must include a conversation about the health of Mother Nature’s filter.
- Definition of a weed according to Merriam-Webster: a plant that is not valued where it is growing and is usually of vigorous growth, especially one that tends to overgrow or choke out more desirable plants. With that generic definition, what part of the Weed and Grass Killer label on Roundup made you think you could spray it on plants you wanted to keep happy and healthy?
- Wildlife in the hand is cool, but you can’t have wildlife without habitat.
- Wildlife thinks golf is stupid. Do you want your planting to look like a golf course, or do you really want the diverse chaos that wildlife needs?
- Plants have their own timeline.
- Everything happens for a reason, and sometimes that reason is you’re stupid and make bad choices.

Thanks, Grandma!