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# Spectrum

Volume 37, NO. 2  
Summer, 2009

Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District

## METRO FLOOD PROTECTION ENHANCED THROUGH BONDING

Needed flood control measures for the Papio Creek watershed, which encompasses much of the metro area, are one step closer to reality. The NE Legislature passed LB 160 this spring, which allows NRDs encompassing a metropolitan class city the ability to issue bonds for flood protection and water quality enhancement purposes.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD will be able to help construct needed flood control projects thanks to a new bill that allows NRD bonding authority. Working with the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership, the metro area can now start to focus on some new structures to prevent flooding and meet water quality standards. The Partnership includes the Papio-Missouri River NRD, Sarpy County, and the cities of Omaha, Papillion, Bellevue, Ralston, Boytown, LaVista and Gretna.

It took years of debate before the NE Legislature passed the NRD bond authority. It's a compromise between all sides, enabling the NRD to dedicate one cent of its levy towards bonds for flood control and water quality programs and projects. This bonding authority does not allow an increase in the NRD's tax limit in order to issue bonds; rather it authorizes the NRD to dedicate a portion of its existing mill levy to finance projects through bonds upon a two-thirds affirmative vote by the Board of Directors. The NRD could dedicate more than one cent of its tax levy toward bond payments if approved by voters at a general election.

Proceeds from the bonds are to be used for design, right-of-way acquisition and construction of multipurpose projects for storm water management and flood control. This includes dams and water quality basins, levees, floodplain buyouts, and low impact development best management measures.

This bonding authority comes just in time as FEMA has released its first major update for the Omaha-area flood maps in decades. The immediate message of these maps shows potential danger. Approximately 900 properties along the West Papillion Creek are now to be at risk of flooding and may be required to purchase flood insurance. The properties include homes, businesses, office buildings and industrial facilities.

**Floodplains are growing and the threat of flood damage has increased due to the rapid urbanization of the watershed.**

The NRD's top priority in the Papio watershed has been flood control, with water quality not far behind. However, the District has found it difficult to keep pace with the rapid development of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. Armed with a new watershed plan and a new source of funding to support it, the NRD is hopeful for the future.

"It's a matter of time before a devastating storm hits the metro area," said **John Winkler, NRD General Manager**. "This funding option could help curb the potential devastation and loss of life that threatens the metro area in the Papio Creek Watershed."



### MORE ABOUT THIS

**FIRST PHASE:** The NRD will issue bonds for current projects only on an as-needed basis. The first two projects outlined by the Papio Watershed Partnership plans include a flood control reservoir in Papillion, and another structure in Northwest Omaha near 168 & Fort Streets. Beyond that, there are five water quality basins in the first three-year-plan of the Partnership.

While the NRD is an active member of the Papio Creek Watershed Partnership, the 8 other agencies involved play pivotal roles in planning the needs for the area, and in collecting fees from development. These fees will pay for approximately one third of the flood control costs. And the Partnership is relying on these governments to put ordinances in place to meet the water quality requirements that are spelled out in the Watershed Management Plan.



Metro Area elected officials discuss flooding and water quality issues.

## MORE ABOUT THIS

- This southeastern stretch of the Platte is one of the most ice jam flood-prone areas in the state. HELP is needed.
- Frequent Platte River flooding in western Sarpy County and in the Clear Creek area in eastern Saunders County has threatened critical communications and transportation corridors, including Interstate 80 and NE Highway 6.
- This project will protect the well fields along the Platte that supply Omaha and Lincoln's water; nearly 50% of Nebraska's population rely on this water source.
- Breakdown of the \$30 million costs: Federal Money: about \$20 million. Non-Federal: \$10 million. This is comprised of NE Resources Development Fund: \$6 million; 3 local NRDs including the Papio NRD are splitting the remaining \$4 million.
- Both Interstate 80 and Highway 6 have been closed in past years due to flooding.

# 9.3 MILLION Federal Stimulus Money Awarded to Major Flood Control Project

"This award of \$9.36 million is really good news. We have been struggling for years, since the project was authorized in 2000, to get Congressional funding for the now \$30 million project," says **John Winkler, Papio NRD General Manager**. "This stimulus money should finish off the final phases of the nearly 20 mile levee rebuilding project along the Lower Platte River."

Awarded this summer, this money will be given to the US Army Corps of Engineers for this project in Western Sarpy County in eastern Saunders to complete the final phases of the Western Sarpy/Clear Creek Flood Reduction Project. Some levees along the Platte have already been improved, and more improvements are coming to control flooding from ice-jams. The elevation or removal of impacted cabins, plus environmental and wildlife enhancements are also included.

Partners in the Project include the Papio NRD, the Lower Platte South NRD, the Lower Platte North NRD, the State of Nebraska and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

"This is a good thing. We are delighted to see this project come to completion after ten years of work by numerous agencies." —John Winkler, NRD General Manager

# GOOD NEWS ON THE PLATTE

## GOLF OUTING



**2009 WATER QUALITY OPEN**

**SEPT. 3RD, 2009 QUARRY  
OAKS COUNTRY CLUB  
16600 QUARRY OAKS  
DRIVE \* ASHLAND, NE**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
CONTACT MEGHAN SITTLER,  
COORDINATOR,  
MSITTLER@LPSNRD.ORG**

# WATER POLICY

## PLATTE RIVER WATER USE

The Director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources announced this spring that the Lower Platte River Basin is not fully appropriated, reversing the preliminary determination. The Lower Platte River Basin covers the Platte River from the confluence with the Missouri River to Columbus, Nebraska and also includes the Loup and Elkhorn River Basins. The Lower Platte River Basin includes land in 14 of the state's 23 NRDs.

There is currently not a ban on well construction and surface water allocations. However, the water used in this basin is monitored constantly. The NE Legislature passed Legislative Bill 483 this spring which places safeguards on the expansion of irrigated acres under a change in status from fully appropriated. Limitations on water use in the basin are required to ensure a sustainable supply into the future. The NRD's affected by this change in status are now working with the DNR to limit groundwater and surface water uses over a four year planning period.

## Lower Platte River Is Not Declared Fully Appropriated

As part of that process, the Papio NRD has placed a stay on the construction of new irrigation wells and the expansion of irrigated acres in the hydrologically connected area. In July, 2009, the NRD adopted rules and regulations and a variance process to the stay that will allow for limited expansion of irrigated acres.

The Papio NRD will also complete a process of certifying historically irrigated acres within the Lower Platte River Basin. Historically irrigated acres will be those acres that have been irrigated at least two of the previous ten years. Landowners requesting certification of irrigated acres must submit documentation to the NRD by December 1, 2009. According to **Brian Henkel, Papio NRD's Groundwater Management Engineer**, this local process is beneficial as residents have local access to their District's management and Board of Directors in determining local policies. "It's a natural process for local boards to work on local issues. This is a good system," he said.

The Papio NRD has approximately 15,000 irrigated acres in the hydrologically connected portion of the Lower Platte River Basin.

## MORE ABOUT THIS

- Nebraska is now the #1 state in the nation for irrigated acres.
- The Papio NRD has approximately 15,000 irrigated acres in the hydrologically connected portion of the Lower Platte River Basin.
- What fully appropriated means: The current uses of hydrologically connected surface water and groundwater will cause the surface water supply to be insufficient to support the current beneficial uses.
- According to US Geological Survey figures, 93% of water use in Nebraska is utilized in irrigation. Just 3.5% is used by municipal utilities; with the remaining uses including livestock, domestic wells and industrial water wells. Omaha, Lincoln & other cities rely on the Platte for a significant amount of their water supplies.



NEWS  
THE  
RIVER

# OUTDOOR NATURE PLAY WORKSHOPS FOR FAMILIES

The NRD is sponsoring Outdoor Play workshops for parents and children focusing on unguided nature play with kids while spending quality time outdoors. These fun and creative workshops are being held:

October 3rd at Fontenelle Forest

October 10th at Hitchcock Nature Center.

Contact **Christine Jacobsen, NRD Education Specialist** at 315-1713 or [Cjacobsen@papionrd.org](mailto:Cjacobsen@papionrd.org) for more info.



## NEW PLAY BOOK AVAILABLE

Visit local parks and play destinations around the metro area, and qualify for prizes! Through the **GO! Play Adventure** playbook, sponsored by the The Junior League of Omaha and MORE Nature, kids and families are encouraged to go outdoors, and have unstructured play.

**GO! Play Adventure** features fun, family-friendly destinations across the metro and surrounding area in a scavenger hunt format. Families can obtain registration forms at [www.juniorleagueomaha.org](http://www.juniorleagueomaha.org) or any Omaha Public library to receive their free GO! Play Adventure playbook.



The **GO! Play Adventure** playbook features various activities ideas at 35 local destination featuring local parks, playground, sports venues, nature centers, and more. The idea is for families to visit and collect rubbings from all the play destinations in a one year period. Rubbings will be validated and completed survey turned in at the Omaha Children's Museum desk by May 31, 2010. Families will then be entered into the Adventure Seekers drawings. Prize drawings will be posted on [www.juniorleagueomaha.org](http://www.juniorleagueomaha.org).

## Outside Play: It's Important

In today's society, video games and computers have taken the place of playing outside for many children. Lack of physical activity can lead to obesity and a number of other health issues.

Recent research has found that children who play outside for an average of 90 minutes per day have less risk of heart trouble later in life. Playing outside not only makes children healthier, there are a number of other benefits to a child's growth and development provided by outdoor play.

Through physical play, young children discover the things their bodies can do. As they increase their skills of running, climbing, or throwing, children gain confidence in themselves and become more motivated to try new things. Playing outside is one of the best ways to boost self-esteem in children.

Playing outside also allows children to understand and appreciate the natural world around them.

Outside play has always been an important influence in a child's development. Children learn to play together as they develop a number of other skills. In today's technological age it is more important than ever to encourage children to play outdoors, not only for their social and physical development, but for their health.

What's more is this finding: kids who play outside tend to stay active throughout their lives.

**MORE Nature** is a collaborative initiative to bring more outdoor, nature-based play to the children of the Greater Omaha area. The project is being undertaken by a consortium of interested organizations: the Papio-NRD, The Nature Conservancy, Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood, Hitchcock Nature Center, Lauritzen Gardens, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Omaha by Design, Audubon Society of Omaha, Sierra Club, Fontenelle Nature Association, Henry Doorly Zoo, Schram Aquarium(NGPC), National Arbor Day Foundation, National Park Service, Omaha Children's Museum and the Junior League of Omaha.





# Projects Update

## Being GREEN: District Tree Planting

**Lance Olerich, Water Supply Technician**, for Dakota County Rural Water and the Papio-Missouri NRD plants shrubs and tree seedlings this spring on a farm southwest of Hubbard while **Denny Piper, NRD Field Representative** in Walthill, operates the tractor.

The trees and planting were cost-shared through the Conservation Assistance Programs (CAP) which is administered by the NRD and the Dakota-Thurston County Pheasants Forever Chapter.

Each spring the District tree planting crews plant thousands of seedlings for wild-life habitat, windbreaks, shelter-belts, landscape purposes etc. on acreages, farmsteads and other properties.

The district also assists individuals with the purchase of trees which can be ordered in the late winter for delivery in the spring. The cost of seedlings is modest—less than \$20 for a bundle of 25 seedlings. A large number of species of trees and shrubs are available.



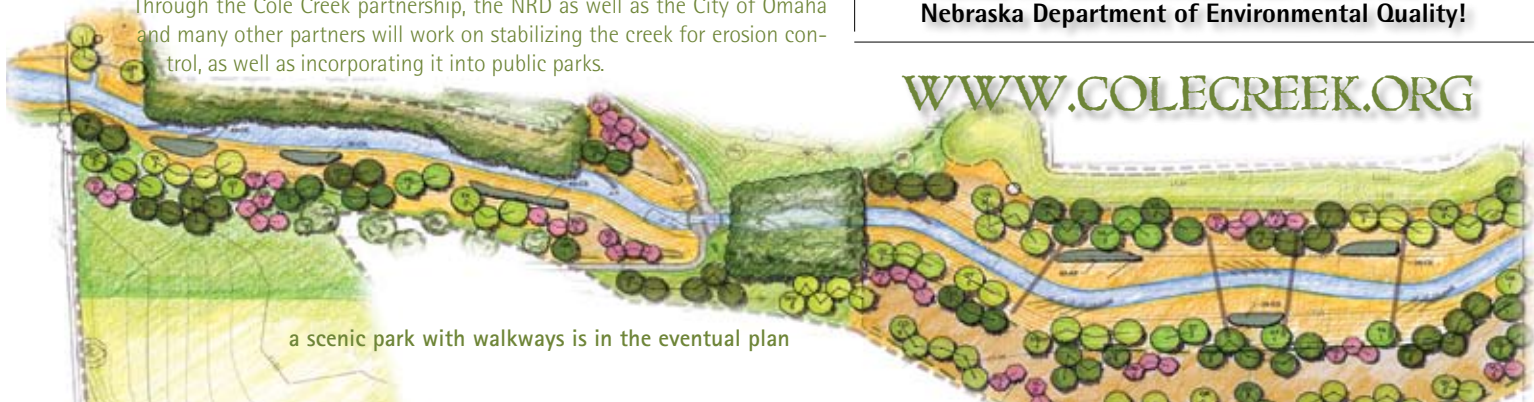
## Omaha's Cole Creek Restoration

The Papio NRD is proud to be a sponsor of the first stormwater demonstration project following the City of Omaha's Urban Design Element that calls for transforming the waterways into a citywide public park and recreation system. Omaha by Design has been instrumental in this process.

Cole Creek, surrounded by dense population in northwest Omaha, is a challenged waterway. A number of issues currently contribute to its potential for flooding: \* An unstable and eroding stream bed \* Eroded banks \* Exposed utilities

Through the Cole Creek partnership, the NRD as well as the City of Omaha and many other partners will work on stabilizing the creek for erosion control, as well as incorporating it into public parks.

a scenic park with walkways is in the eventual plan



## Stimulus Money in Washington County

A Washington County dam structure is scheduled for improvement with stimulus funding (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) from part of the the Obama Administration's plan to modernize the nation's infrastructure and create jobs. Nationally, \$45 million will go towards rehabilitating aging flood control structures.

The dam, south of Blair, will be raised in height, the principal spillway replaced with concrete pipe and the auxiliary spillway enlarged to upgrade the dam to high hazard dam classification standards (100 year flood pool storage capacity), which will protect homes, two county roads, and parts of US Highway 30, a major commuter route in Washington County.

The \$1.6 million costs of upgrading this dam will come mainly from the federal government as the stimulus is providing 1.17 million, with the remaining funds provided by the Papio NRD. Construction will start in late summer and the work should extend the life of the dam for about an additional 90 years.

## Grants Awarded For Helping Bellevue's Whitted Creek

The Papio NRD has been awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for restoration work on Whitted Creek near Bellevue. In addition it has been awarded a \$300,000 Section 319 grant from Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality. The project construction cost is estimated at \$1.5 million dollars.

This urban stream flows into the Papio Creek, and has suffered bank erosion and degraded aquatic habitat, which in turn affects the Papio Creek's environment. The streambank was straightened in the 1900s and considerable erosion has occurred.

To restore this streambed and the surrounding habitat, an innovative, hybrid approach will be used with modifying the creek cross sections and banks. This includes using biodegradable fabric on the banks, native plants including shrubs, trees and grasses, constructing 13 step-pool transitions on the tributary to slow the flow of water, and channel cross section adjustments. The project plans have been designed by the engineering firm **CH2MHILL**. Bids have been obtained for the project construction and it is anticipated that construction will commence in August 2009.



**Thanks, Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund & Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality!**

[WWW.COLECREEK.ORG](http://WWW.COLECREEK.ORG)



The NRD CONGRATULATES Bellevue East High School for its third place finish in the 2009 Nebraska Envirothon State Championship held in May at Ponca State Park. Bellevue was one of five teams from the metro area which qualified to compete in this state-wide competition of 12 teams. The other metro teams included Concordia teams A & B, Bellevue East B & Bellevue West B.

The Canon Envirothon is a national program for 9th - 12th grade students who study long and hard to become proficient in a wide array of subjects relating to natural resources and the environment. The weather was perfect for 12 high school Envirothon teams, including both regional and wildcard winners, which gathered at Ponca State Park Education Center on the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska to compete in the natural resources state competition.

Five-member teams compete in seven areas of environmental studies: Soils, aquatics, forestry, wildlife, range, policy and a current environmental issue titled Biodiversity in a Changing World. Tests questions are not only written; many of the questions require hands-on observations, measurements and calculations. To advance to the state competition, student teams first compete in regional contests around the state.

"The Envirothon gives high school students nationwide a chance to experience many different disciplines in the natural resources field," said Jed Wagner, Programs Director for the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts. "The Envirothon also serves to interest students in potential careers in natural resources management. It is important to fill the pipeline with excited and educated young people who will one day become the stewards of our environment," Wagner added.

**Jim Thompson, Chairman**

**John Winkler, General Manager**

**Emmett Egr, Information/Education Coordinator**

**NRD HEADQUARTERS:**

Chalco Hills Recreation Area  
8901 S. 154 Street  
Omaha, NE 68138

**For Correspondence:**

PHONE: (402) 444-6222

FAX: (402)895-6543

E-MAIL: PapADMIN@papionrd.org

**www.papionrd.org**

**FIELD OFFICE LOCATIONS:**

**Washington County:** 1245 Lincoln St.;

Blair, NE 68008; (402)426-4782

**Burt County:** 539 S. 13th,

Tekamah, NE 68061; (402) 374-1920

**Thurston County:** 106 S. Costello,

Walthill, NE 68067; (402)846-5655

**Dakota County:** for correspondence:

PO Box 480; Dakota City, NE, 68731;

For location: 1505 Broadway,

Dakota City, (402)494-4949

**Sarpy/Douglas Counties:** 8901 S. 154 St.;

Omaha, NE 68138 (402)896-0121

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

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The NRD Board holds its monthly public meeting the second Thursday of the month at Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 7 PM. The NRD is an equal opportunity provider.

Spectrum writer/designer: Jennifer Knight, Little House Publications



Summer, 2009

8901 S. 154th St.  
Omaha, NE 68138-3621

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