



**F. NEWS CLIPS:**

- ✓ May 11, 2017, Dakota Co. Star article, Papio-Missouri River NRD earns second highest rating possible for refinancing bonds
- ✓ May 15, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, After tumultuous year for homeowners and officials, Douglas County property valuations are approved by state
- ✓ May 17, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Dan Hoins approved as the next Sarpy County Administrator
- ✓ May 17, 2017, Burt Co. Plaindealer article, Tekamah bike trail
- ✓ May 17, 2017, Papillion Times article, Sarpy mayors see cooperation, growth ahead
- ✓ May 17, 2017, Bellevue Leader article, NRD draws a picture of life in Bellevue
- ✓ May 18, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, NRD board chair David Klug will run for Sarpy County Board in 2018
- ✓ May 18, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Storms will hold off tomorrow in the Omaha area, then start again, bringing potential for floods
- ✓ May 18, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Lawmakers reject overriding 2 Ricketts budget vetoes; 'This is absolute political hardball,' one senator says
- ✓ May 19, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Valuation system creates inequality
- ✓ May 23, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Nebraska lawmaker is 'done waiting,' plans petition drive for property tax relief
- ✓ May 25, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Heavy rains close Elkhorn River boating access sites
- ✓ May 25, 2017, Grant Co. News article, Game and Parks Accepting 2017 Trail Grant Applications
- ✓ May 25, 2017, Bloomfield Monitor article, Nebraska Farm Bureau Identifies 10 EPA Regulations to Modify, Repeal
- ✓ May 25, 2017, Dakota County Star article, Detlefsen Construction Builds Terrace
- ✓ May 25, 2017, Dakota County Star article, Danish Alps Ponderosa pine planting
- ✓ May 25, 2017, Dakota County Star article, Trees Planted on Swanson Farm
- ✓ June 1, 2017, Niobrara Tribune article, Tribal members of MRRIC discuss draft EIS
- ✓ June 5, 2017, Washington Co. Pilot-Tribune & Enterprise article, 1.8 gallons of sewage leaks into Blair tributary
- ✓ June 7, 2017, Omaha World Herald article, Public bike-sharing system expands to Sarpy County

## **May 2017 Information/Education Report**

### **May Programming Schedule:**

5/1- Omaha Library Millard Branch- Trees- 45 people  
5/2-5/3- Water Works- Aquatic Animals- 20 presentations- 600 students (5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
5/4- Pine Creek Elementary- Geocaching- 2 programs- 48 students (4<sup>th</sup> grade)  
5/4- Wegner School of Boys Town- Macros- 18 students  
5/5- Elkhorn Middle- Wetlands/Macro's- 15 students  
5/8- Homer Elementary- Owls- 22 students (1<sup>st</sup> grade)  
5/9- Oakdale Elementary- Trees/Reptiles- 51 students (1<sup>st</sup> grade)  
5/10- Elkhorn Middle- Geocaching- 12 students  
5/11- Benson West Elementary- Insects- 2 programs- 64 students (1<sup>st</sup> grade)  
5/12- Millard West- Animals- 5 programs- 89 students  
5/18- Wheeler Elementary Stormwater Panel  
5/22- Westside Middle- Mammals/Birds- 2 programs- 39 students  
5/25- Premier Academy- Owls- 59 students (pre-K)  
Coordinated planting of 200 milkweed plants with homeschool group

Posts/Updates/Monitoring of Papio-Missouri River NRD Facebook/Twitter/Google+/Instagram Sites and Web Pages  
General NRD Animal Care  
Outdoor Classroom Grants  
Press Releases and Press Statements  
NRD Summer Camp Registrations  
Education Intern Advertising  
Metro Area Trail Map updates  
Range Camp Sponsorship  
Emmett's Retirement Luncheon  
Posted Invitation to Bid (Little Papio Creek Channel Stabilization)/Removed Platte River Landing Bid Invitation  
Posted Water System Operator Position  
Posted Subcommittee & Board Podcasts  
Coordinated clipping services, digital ad reports, and commercial airtime  
Post closings/openings of Elkhorn River Sites  
Coordinate mailing address changes on Spectrum/post Spectrum to website

### **Meetings/Trainings:**

DNR-NeRain Website Training Conference Call  
Education Intern Interviews & Training  
Nebraska Safest Companies Luncheon  
FY18 Budget Meeting

Bennington High School  
A Note of Thanks

Natural Resources District,

The Bennington Outdoor Club Officers would like to thank you for your generous donation. Our Fishing Day was a huge success with your help. The students really enjoyed the day and receiving their fishing gear. You helped create a memorable event for these students.

Mike Salsbery

W4 Matthews

Thanks Again,

Harmon  
Cowan  
Grove

Miriam  
C.

## Report on Purchases

### Construction Services, Professional Services, Personal Property

May, 2017

[illegible]

Updated: May 15, 2017

## **Current and On-Going Projects P-MRNRD Legal Counsel**

**★ = Top Priority**

F = Future Work – No Assignment

N = New Assignment

O = Others Handling

W = Work in Progress

P = Counsel Portion Completed

B = Next Board Meeting

- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
  - ★ Access licenses for NFM area stabilization project (W)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch:** (Cleveland)
  - ★ Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96<sup>th</sup> St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike:** (Cleveland/Petermann)
  - NRDs/NE-ARNG Interlocal for Camp Ashland Property (F)
- **Floodway Purchase Program:** (Laster/Grint)
  - Arlington Purchase Agreements, Deeds, etc. – Public Hearing (July Board) (W)
- **Trail Projects:** (Williams)
  - ★ Bike/Ped. Counter Interlocal Agreement with Omaha (B)
  - West Papio Trail, Giles to Millard – Potential Tyson Access License Agreement (F)
  - West Papio Trail, Giles to Millard – Qwest LLC License Agreement Potential Termination (P)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project:** (Becic)
  - ★ California Bend Trail Interlocal Agreement with City of Blair (B)

- **USDA PL 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed:** (Schumacher/Cleveland)
  - Papio PL 566 Site W-2 Issues (F)
  - ★ Grove Easement Across Danish Alps SRA (N)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:** (Grint/Laster/Williams)
  - ★ ROW Acquisition Documents for WP6 & WP7 (F)
  - ★ Transfer Deed to City of Omaha for Zorinsky Basin 1 (P)
  - ★ City of Omaha Interlocal Agreement for ZB-2 (W)
  - ★ WP6 & WP7 Interlocal Agreement with Papillion and Sarpy Co. (P)
  - ★ Purchase Agreements and ROW Documents for Z-B2 (W)
  - ★ City of Omaha Interlocal Agreement Amendment No. 2 for DS-15A (P)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater):** (Grint)
- **Southern Sarpy Watershed Partnership (Stormwater):** (Laster)
  - ★ Interlocal with City of Omaha for Construction Inspections (W)
- **Missouri River R-613 and R-616 Levees:** (Cleveland/Woodward)
  - Offutt AFB Culvert O&M Agreement (W)
  - ★ ROW Acquisition Documents (W)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Nelson)
  - ★ WCRW Co. Rd 40 – Township #1 Interlocal Agreement (B)
- **Other:**



# Papio-Missouri River NRD earns second highest rating possible for refinancing bonds

The Papio-Missouri River NRD has been notified that the district received an excellent bond rating that will save tax dollars as the district refinances Flood Protection and Water Quality Enhancement bonds. S&P Global Ratings has assigned the NRD a AA-bond rating, the second highest possible.

"This is great news for our local taxpayers," said John Winkler, NRD General Manager. "The rating reflects the NRD's credit worthiness exemplified by its strong financial position, diverse and growing tax base and positive fiscal management," he said.

The bonded funding is being used to construct flood control projects

and water quality improvements in the district.

At their April 2017 board meeting, the NRD Board of Directors took action to refinance Flood Protection and Water Quality Enhancement Bonds that may ultimately save NRD-area property taxpayers millions of dollars.

The NRD issued \$58,200,000 of Flood Protection and Water Quality Enhancement Bonds over two bond offerings in 2013. Interest rates have declined to a point where refinancing a portion of the outstanding bonds may achieve interest cost savings over the remaining life of the bonds.

"The Nebraska Legislature entrusted the NRD with the opportunity to fund projects using bond-

ing authority and we always seek ways to be good stewards of this authority," said John Winkler, NRD General Manager. "We believe we can save taxpayers one to two million dollars through this refinancing effort."

The Board of Directors approved parameters for the refinancing of the bonds and directed the General Manager to explore the best course of action.

In 2015, the district refinanced bonds issued in 2010 and achieved approximately \$460,000 of interest cost savings.

The district includes all of Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties plus the eastern portion of Burt and Thurston Counties.



# After tumultuous year for homeowners and officials, Douglas County property valuations are approved by state

- By Christopher Burbach / World-Herald staff writer/May 15, 2017

Douglas County property valuations for 2017 have been approved after a tumultuous year for Omaha homeowners and county elected officials.

That means the 2017 valuations on Douglas County Assessor Diane Battiato's website are final. They will affect how much homeowners and others who pay property taxes owe after the various taxing entities in the county, including the Omaha Public Schools and City of Omaha, set their tax rates.

The county will send out valuation notices by mail.

"We got our A-OK from the state," Battiato said Friday. "We're printing the valuations. They'll go out on or before June 1."

The Tax Equalization and Review Commission notified the county last week that it had approved the valuations.

That's normal.

But the past year has not been normal.

In 2016, the Tax Equalization and Review Commission found that Battiato's valuations were off base. The commission ordered the county to raise valuations by 7 percent on about 78,000 residential properties in central and west Omaha.

The commission also ordered the county to reduce valuations by 8 percent on about 20,000 residential properties in northeast Omaha.

The Douglas County Board appealed those orders to the Nebraska Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the increase, in a ruling issued April 27. But the high court reversed the decrease. The ruling will not affect 2017 valuations.

Meanwhile, Battiato's preliminary valuations for 2017 raised a ruckus among homeowners and Douglas County Board members. They viewed increases as too large and many valuations as inconsistent and inexplicable.

Battiato contended that her chief field deputy, Jack Baines, and other staff were catching up with a hot real estate market and with properties that had not been reassessed for many years.

Even so, Battiato agreed to lower increases to make the new valuations more palatable. The state requires that counties value properties for tax purposes at between 92 and 100 percent of market value. Battiato said she adjusted 2017 property values so the county would be at 93 percent of market value.

The Tax Equalization and Review Commission found that valuations set by the county meet the law.

In a ruling sent to Douglas County on May 4, the commission said residential property in Douglas County is at 93 percent of market value, and commercial property is at 95 percent of market value.

The tumult of this tax season may not be entirely over, however.

Taxpayers who believe the assessor got it wrong may file a protest in June with the Douglas County Board of Equalization.

P.J. Morgan, who sits on that body as a member of the Douglas County Board, said he's glad the state approved the Assessor's Office valuations. But he said he's still hearing from taxpayers who believe their valuations are too high, who question the land portion of valuations and who see valuations as inconsistent.

"Some of them have said they didn't receive the reductions they thought they would," Morgan said. "They'll have their time to come before us."

Battiato said she didn't know how many protests to expect.

"In light of the reduction to 93 percent, there shouldn't be a lot, but that's all up to the property owner," she said.

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# Dan Hoins approved as the next Sarpy County administrator

- [By Emily Nitcher / World-Herald staff writer](#)/May 17, 2017

Dan Hoins is officially under contract to be the next Sarpy County administrator.

The Sarpy County Board unanimously approved a contract for Hoins at its Tuesday meeting.

Prior to the vote, board Chairman Don Kelly said the contract provided fair compensation for all the expectations the county has for Hoins.

Hoins, 54, has been the Papillion city administrator for 17 years. His new contract with the county starts July 1 and ends on June 30, 2018. It does not renew automatically.

Per the contract, Hoins will be paid a salary of \$138,464. In 2015, Hoins was paid a gross salary of \$142,880 for his duties in Papillion.

Hoins also will be eligible for county benefits like health insurance, a \$100 per month cellphone stipend and a \$200 per month vehicle allowance.

If the contract is terminated early, Hoins will be paid only the money he's earned up to the date of termination.

A majority vote by the County Board can terminate Hoins' contract for several reasons including incompetence, neglect of duty, breach of contract, insubordination, immoral conduct or conviction of a felony.

Current County Administrator Mark Wayne's contract ends June 30. He had a gross salary of \$134,528 in 2016.

Also Tuesday, the Papillion City Council tapped Assistant City Administrator Chris Myers to be Hoins' replacement. The city said they will begin a search to find someone to replace Myers.

Myers has worked for the city for 23 years – first as city clerk but most recently as assistant city administrator. From October 1999 to August 2000, she served as interim city administrator. During that time, she received the Sarpy County Economic Development Corporation's 2000 Partner in Economic Development Award.

Myers said she will work hard to meet the council's expectations, as well as the expectations of Papillion's residents.

"Papillion is truly a great place to live and a great place to work," she said.

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## Tekamah bike trail

Linda Shada, member of the Tekamah Trails Committee, asked the council to approve a change in the Recreational Trails Program project agreement.

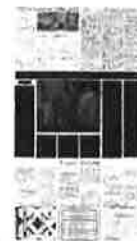
Shada asked that the first segment of the trail be constructed around the pool and south park shelter area. Plans previously called for the Tiger Loop to be constructed first. That section was near the football field and north ballpark complex.

Shada said Tekamah-Herman Schools has not committed to a 20-year agreement for use of the ground required for that segment of the trail.

"I went to Nebraska Game and Parks and everything was positive and they are okay with the change," Shada said. Their portion of the funds has been approved for two miles or less. The new route will be slightly shorter.

Shada said the committee would still like to complete the bridge from the park to the football field for future use on the trails and immediate needs of the ball association. She said the trails committee would also hopes to assist the ball association fund a new \$70,000 concession stand and restrooms in the north baseball/softball complex.

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# Sarpy mayors see cooperation, growth ahead

By Eugene Curtin

*Times Associate Editor*

A growing collegiality is replacing the conflict and suspicion that in previous decades colored the relationship between Sarpy County's five cities, Papillion Mayor David Black said May 9 during a luncheon held in Bellevue.

"There's a lot more cooperation starting to go on than I think people are used to seeing," he said. "Historically, Sarpy has had a little bit of a reputation of maybe some dysfunction — cities fighting among themselves, city-county fights, territorialism."

Although a sense of competition between the cities remains strong, Black said, and although he would always fight to promote Papillion's interests first, nevertheless, he said, an awareness that Sarpy County residents are in the same boat is growing. That is a necessary awareness, he said, given that Sarpy County, although the fastest growing county in the state, is also geographically the smallest.

"We are a big family that lives in a really small house," he said. "Most of the time we love each other, but once in a while we fight pretty hard."

Black spoke at a luncheon hosted by the Greater Bellevue Area Chamber of Commerce, sponsored by Papillion Sanitation and held at the Bellevue Public Schools' Lied Activity Center. In addition to Black,

Bellevue Mayor Rita Sanders, La Vista Mayor Doug Kindig and Paul Lambert, mayor of Plattsmouth, a neighboring city in Cass County, all gave accounts of progress being made in their cities.

Kindig said his city of 17,000 people has successfully used partnerships to provide major services and has taken care to secure the support of voters before embarking on large projects.

The \$200 million civic center project along 84th Street north of Giles Road, along with the \$125 million Nebraska Multipoint Complex at 120th Street and Giles Road, are examples of public-private partnership, he said, made possible in part by a voter-approved half-cent increase in La Vista's sales tax.

The La Vista Public Library, a cooperative venture with Metropolitan Community College, and joint fire service with Papillion, are examples of money-saving interlocal agreements, he said.

Kindig welcomed Bellevue's decision to rejoin United Cities of Sarpy County, an interest group that lobbies state government. He said Bellevue's involvement will greatly enhance the organization's efforts to shape state legislation.

Sanders pointed to the opening in 2016 of the Beardmore Event Center of Bellevue and the adjoining Courtyard by Marriot Hotel, a complex which is a joint project of the City of Bellevue and Kineth

Hospitality of Iowa.

She said 5,000 acres south of Offutt Air Force Base are being actively promoted for economic development while the city has experienced steady business growth through such arrivals as Corwin Toyota, Great Southern Bank, the expansion of the Blue Buffalo warehouse and the completion of the Richmond Village retirement living complex.

She also stressed the quality of life in Bellevue, a city of 55,000 people.

She said a new recycling program is reducing the amount of trash Bellevue residents send to the landfill and that a citywide tree-planting program is enhancing the "green" nature of the county's largest city.

A new public library is a high priority, Sanders said, as is maintaining a high level of public safety.

The Bellevue mayor said the city, in cooperation with state government, the City of Omaha, Sarpy County and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, had successfully raised almost \$30 million to strengthen the levees that protect Offutt Air Force Base from the Missouri River, and that the U.S. Department of Defense has agreed to fund construction of a new runway at the base.

Sanders also praised the Bellevue Community Foundation for raising approximately \$150,000 for various civic causes and cited Bellevue's role as

home to Nebraska's annual Veterans Day Parade.

Black pointed to such major recent developments in Papillion as the million-square-foot Facebook data center, plans for a new community center complex, a housing boom and ongoing plans to preserve the historic and small-town feel of his city's downtown.

Broadly, however, Black said his city of 19,500 people continues to pursue a three-prong policy that seeks to make Papillion a place where people may "work, live and play" in a city that projections suggest could grow to as many as 90,000 people by 2050.

Black said the "live" and "play" aspects are well in hand and the city is now turning its attention to attracting more employers.

Lambert, whose City of Plattsmouth is not in Sarpy County but who nonetheless described Black, Kindig and Sanders as his "brothers and sister," said the reconstruction by the state of Highway 75 has infused new life into his city of 6,500 people.

A Hy-Vee grocery store, a hardware superstore, a new Casey's convenience store, a DJ's Dugout sports bar and a bevy of smaller businesses have already arrived in the wake of the new Highway 75, Lambert said, a development he said he expects will continue.

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Photo by Eugene Curtin

Four area mayors pose for a photo May 9 at the conclusion of a conference in Bellevue. From left, Doug Kindig, mayor of La Vista; Rita Sanders, mayor of Bellevue; David Black, mayor of Papillion; and Paul Lambert, mayor of Plattsmouth.



# NRD draws a picture of life in Bellevue

By Eugene Curtin  
Leader Associate Editor

A hazard mitigation plan drawn up by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and approved by the Bellevue City Council on May 8 draws a detailed picture of Bellevue, its people, its climate and the natural disasters Bellevue residents are most likely to face.

The plan, which provides the basis for a coordinated response to various emergencies, shows Bellevue is generally a safe place to live even though it is occasionally subject to

flooding and high winds.

According to the adopted plan:

- The normal high temperature in the month of July in Bellevue is 85.8 degrees compared to 88 degrees statewide.
- Annual rainfall is 32.83 inches compared to 30.3 inches statewide.
- Annual snowfall is 26.5 inches compared to 31.2 inches statewide.
- Population fell during the 1970s, declining from 21,953 to 21,813 during the decade, but soared thereafter, climbing from 21,813 to 30,982 in the 1980s, from 30,982 to 44,310

during the 1990s, and reached 50,137 by 2010.

- The median age of a Bellevue resident is 35.1 compared to 36.2 statewide.
- Bellevue's median household income is \$59,164, almost \$11,000 less than the Sarpy County median of \$69,965 but \$7,500 higher than the statewide median of \$51,672.
- The median per capita income in Bellevue is \$26,480 compared to \$30,189 countywide and \$26,899 statewide.
- The median home value in Bellevue is \$133,500, compared to \$162,400 countywide and \$128,000 statewide.

The plan found that Bellevue experiences high winds generated from severe thunderstorms every year and those winds have been known to cause power outages and tree damage.

The National Climatic Data Center, the plan said, reports that five severe windstorms since 1996 caused a total of \$160,000 in damages.

The greatest threat to Bellevue, however, is considered to be flooding, especially flash floods that have repeatedly caused the closing of the 36th Street bridges over the Papillion Creek.

# **NRD board chair David Klug will run for Sarpy County Board in 2018**

- By Emily Nitcher / World-Herald staff writer/May 18, 2017

The 2018 election is still months away but already a candidate has said he is running for a spot on the Sarpy County Board.

David Klug said he will run for the District 2 seat, representing the north-central part of the county.

Klug is the chairman of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District Board and has been on that board since 2006.

Jim Thompson now holds the District 2 seat. He said Wednesday that he hasn't decided if he'll run for a third term.

# Storms will hold off tomorrow in the Omaha area, then start again, bringing potential for floods

- By Mara Klecker and Andrew J. Nelson / World-Herald staff writers/May 18, 2017

If the forecast holds, eastern Nebraska and western Iowa will get a reprieve from storms today before heavy, potentially flooding rains return.

The rain, forecast to start in earnest around midnight, will continue off and on, possibly into Saturday, according to forecasts.

“If you want to get something done this week, you should plan on doing it (today),” said Becky Kern, meteorologist with the National Weather Service. “It might be one of your only chances this week.”

Flood watches already have been issued in parts of the Midlands due to heavy rains that have fallen. Across much of the region, about 1.5 to 2.5 inches of rain fell, with locally higher amounts possible. Whether additional flooding occurs depends on a couple of factors, Kern said.

“The concern is how saturated the soil will already be by Friday,” Kern said. “It will depend on how much rain we get and how the rivers respond. Luckily, we had some room in our waterways.”

On Tuesday night, 75 to 80 mph winds felled trees and caused significant power outages in and around Omaha and Council Bluffs. Areas west and northwest of Omaha saw heavy tree damage, particularly in Valley and Bennington. Fremont saw golf-ball-sized hail, Kern said.

On Wednesday, storms were more isolated.

A tornado touched down on farmland about 5 miles west of Wisner, Nebraska. The tornado, which was reported at about 3:50 p.m., caused heavy damage to a farm, said Dave Fobert, also a meteorologist with the weather service.

Communities worked Wednesday to clear branches off the streets and out of the parks. The Cities of Papillion and Valley made special arrangements to help residents with tree debris.

Ken Grimm, the public works director with the City of Valley, said he hasn’t seen a storm knock down so many branches since 2008.

“We are just trying to keep up,” he said. In addition to his six-man crew, a few volunteers have helped to clean up debris in the park.



“The biggest loss there was an old cottonwood that was maybe 4 feet in diameter,” Grimm said. Another fallen tree damaged fencing around the park’s batting cages, Grimm said.

“We have a lot more work to do — those winds really hit us hard,” Grimm said.

Residents of Valley can bring branches of less than 10 inches in diameter to the Joe Roberts Arboretum today.

The City of Papillion will host a tree debris drop-off from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at the Papillion Public Works complex at 99th Circle and Portal Road. Residents should bring water bills or driver’s licenses to prove residency.

In Bennington, Tuesday’s fierce winds sent a set of heavy bleachers tumbling through the backstop at the softball field at the Junior-Senior High School.

School officials didn’t have a cost estimate for the damage, but Superintendent Terry Haack said the district will replace the damaged backstop with a better one.

“The backstop is not as high as some other facilities, so now we’ll make it higher, put some netting up there to prevent more foul balls from hurting spectators,” he said. “I don’t know how much we can salvage the bleachers, but we can certainly try.”

**World-Herald staff writers Jay Withrow and Hailey Konnath contributed to this report.**

# **Lawmakers reject overriding 2 Ricketts budget vetoes; 'This is absolute political hardball,' one senator says**

By Martha Stoddard / World-Herald Bureau/May 18, 2017

LINCOLN — Gov. Pete Ricketts' successful backing of legislative candidates appeared to have paid off on Wednesday.

His allies in the Nebraska Legislature held the line against all efforts to override his line-item budget vetoes.

In a statement, Ricketts commended lawmakers for sustaining his \$56.5 million worth of vetoes in the two-year budget ending June 30, 2019.

"The senators made the right decision to prudently manage the budget and protect the taxpayers," he said.

But State Sen. Bob Krist of Omaha said the votes produced "probably one of the darkest days I've had here."

The defeated motions included one that would have restored \$32.5 million for the care of low-income Nebraskans and people with developmental disabilities or mental health problems.

A second motion would have restored just the \$23.6 million vetoed out of funding for care of people with developmental disabilities.

A third would have restored \$1.2 million for child welfare services, while a fourth would have restored \$300,000 for probation services.

None of the motions got more than 27 votes in support. It takes 30 votes for an override to succeed.

Among the 21 senators who voted against each motion were 16 who got campaign funds from the governor.

Ricketts' involvement in last year's elections has been credited for ousting more moderate senators and moving the Legislature further right.

During the debate, State Sen. John McCollister of Omaha alluded to the pressure being brought on senators to support the governor.

He said he was willing to risk defeat in his re-election bid next year "because I know I didn't buckle under."

"This is absolute political hardball," McCollister said.

Opponents of the override motions said little during the day's debate, leaving the floor largely to supporters.

But one, Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Omaha, said her decision to back the budget vetoes was painful but necessary. She expressed fears that Nebraska's economic situation will get worse.

"We aren't broke, but we shouldn't allow ourselves to get quite so close," she said, noting that the budget passed by lawmakers would have reduced the state's budget cushion.

With the governor's vetoes, the cushion will remain at 3 percent of state tax revenues.

Linehan and Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte suggested looking at state aid to schools for future cuts.

Ricketts and the Appropriations Committee both named school funding a priority. State school aid will increase 2.3 percent under the new budget.

Another opponent, Sen. John Kuehn of Heartwell, said in an interview that he did not speak this time because he had made his position clear in earlier budget debates.

He said the debate Wednesday involved “an attempt to shame senators into voting one way or another.”

Override supporters argued that the funding vetoes would hurt some of the most vulnerable Nebraskans.

“It is our job in the Legislature to take care of the weakest and poorest among us,” said Sen. Carol Blood of Bellevue.

Sen. Sue Crawford, also of Bellevue, pointed to deaths and serious injuries of children in recent years as evidence of the need for child welfare services.

“Surely the safety of our children who have been subject to abuse and neglect is a core government function,” she said.

Omaha Sen. Robert Hilkemann raised concerns about the effect of the cuts on nursing homes, mental health services and other providers.

People served by Mosaic, which cares for people with developmental disabilities, watched from the balcony and the Capitol Rotunda during much of the day’s debate.

Krist, who has a daughter with developmental disabilities, urged his colleagues to look at the people their votes would affect.

“Look in their faces and tell them, ‘I’m sorry,’ ” he said.

Meanwhile, administration officials sought to spread the word that the Department of Health and Human Services is looking at ways to absorb the funding cuts without harming critical services.

According to Courtney Phillips, the HHS chief executive officer, the state expects to save \$1 million a year with a new statewide contract for drug testing of parents involved with the child welfare system. That savings more than takes care of the \$640,000 annual cut in child welfare services.

As for Medicaid, she said HHS plans to start paying Medicaid rates for the care of people eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. The agency has been paying the higher Medicare rates for those people. The change is expected to save \$11.3 million a year.

Phillips said the agency will work with interested parties to find another \$500,000 a year in Medicaid savings that steer clear of critical services.

In behavioral health, she said, state and regional officials are looking for ways to cut costs without affecting the rates paid to care providers.

She said the targets include underused budget areas, training and administrative budgets, and looking for operating efficiencies.

Phillips said officials in developmental disability services are working on how to handle the budget veto. She said they are confident that changes can be made without cutting the rates paid to providers.

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## MIDLANDS VOICES

# Valuation system creates inequality

BY DON KELLY

*The writer is chairman of the Sarpy County Board.*

Recently, the Nebraska Supreme Court affirmed the Nebraska Tax Equalization and Review Commission's controversial ruling on the 7 percent increase for valuations in central and west Omaha in 2016.

What the Supreme Court's ruling validated was there are distinct differences in valuation methodology used by county assessors, allowable by statute, and those differences make tax equalization for Nebraskans an illusory goal.

This is especially problematic for Sarpy County residents paying into common tax levies. When taxes are not "equalized" across county lines, some ultimately pay a disproportionately larger share of taxes into the common levies and more property taxes in general.

Many Douglas County homes showed little or no appreciation in valuation from 2013 through 2015. While thousands were raised in 2016, many others weren't changed. In 2017, valuations on many residential properties were raised and then lowered somewhat after homeowners objected. Meanwhile, home values in Sarpy County increased steadily over the same five-year period.

The World-Herald reported in February 2016: "As for home values, RealtyTrac shows that the median existing home sale price in the Omaha metro rose 7.5 percent in the past year, and is up 16 percent over a decade ago." It also reported that "Online real estate database Zillow recently named Omaha on its

As a result, Sarpy County residents who live in the Omaha, Millard or Gretna school districts will continue to pay more than those north of Harrison Street who send children to the same schools.

first-ever Top 10 list of 'hottest' housing markets, noting that shining stars of 2016 aren't limited to coastal or tech towns."

However, a random sampling of Douglas County properties shows they are consistently below Zillow's estimated valuation of a home's resale value. In most cases, residents in Sarpy County would be very happy to sell their homes at their assessed values because they approximate Zillow's valuation, but not so in Douglas County.

These differences in valuation methodology, however, represent only one aspect of the problem concerning tax equalization.

There are 18 common levies in portions of Douglas County and Sarpy County. Taxing entities such as the Learning Community, Metropolitan Community College, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and Educational Service Unit 3 extend into parts or all of both counties.

It was reported that tax val-

uations would be set at 93 percent on residential property in Douglas County in 2017. Sarpy County has consistently used 96 percent as the target median valuation because it represents the middle of the statutorily allowed range of 92 percent to 100 percent and makes tax changes predictable and modest. Valuations, together with tax rates set by local governments, determine property tax levels.

Sarpy County residents who share a common levy with their Douglas County neighbors will pay an additional 3 percent more in 2017 for the same services.

As a result, Sarpy County residents who live in the Omaha, Millard or Gretna school districts will continue to pay more than those north of Harrison Street who send children to the same schools. That is not tax equalization, and that is not fair.

Some news stories have focused on the thousands of Douglas County taxpayers upset about their property valuations. Although their anger is understandable, it is just one aspect of the larger and more important story about how Nebraska can have a system of tax equalization that is not "equal."

It is also important to understand that Sarpy County residents' constitutional rights under the Uniformity Clause — which requires the taxation of property to be uniform both as to tax rate and property valuation — are being ignored at best and trampled on at worst.

There are a number of steps lawmakers in Lincoln can take to rectify this situation, and the citizens of Sarpy County certainly hope they take action soon.

# Nebraska lawmaker is 'done waiting,' plans petition drive for property tax relief

- By Martha Stoddard / World-Herald Bureau / May 23, 2017

LINCOLN — A freshman state senator hopes that voters will act to relieve property taxes where the 2017 Nebraska Legislature did not.

State Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard said Monday that he plans to launch an initiative petition drive with the goal of putting a proposal on the 2018 ballot.

Erdman said he's undertaking the effort because Nebraskans have been demanding lower property taxes for decades and he's "done waiting" for the Legislature to do something meaningful on the issue.

He said he does not have the petition completely worked out or an organization put together.

But Erdman has a press conference set for today in the State Capitol Rotunda to get the process going. The event will come after the adjournment of the 2017 legislative session.

"We'll make an announcement tomorrow and see who steps up," he said Monday, noting that he had invited about a dozen like-minded senators to join him.

Some potential allies said they wanted to talk with Erdman before joining his effort.

Reform for Nebraska's Future, a coalition of agriculture, business and homeowner interests, lamented the Legislature's failure to pass any property tax measures this year and hinted at other options.

"If the Legislature and the governor can't get it done, it might now be time that Nebraskans look at alternative ways to get this done," said Mark Fahleson, the group's chairman.

Trent Fellers, executive director of the group, said the group has not decided its next step but options could include a petition drive or a lawsuit.

Craig Head, vice president of issue management for the Nebraska Farm Bureau, said that group will wait to see what Erdman is proposing.

But Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte, a veteran of a previous petition drive, said he supports Erdman's effort.

"We've got to put pressure on all sides," he said.

Sen. Jim Smith of Papillion, the Revenue Committee chairman, expressed concern that a petition limiting property taxes would lead to a tax shift or tax increase.

He said the way to control property taxes is at the local level, where spending is determined.

Smith, who introduced a bill this year on behalf of the governor to cut income taxes, said good tax policy should encourage economic growth and job creation.

Gov. Pete Ricketts said he could not comment on the petition proposal until he knows more about it.

Erdman said he has been considering a property tax petition drive for some time.

Two years ago, he said, he thought about a petition drive to eliminate property taxes.

He said the idea was born of frustration at rising tax bills on agricultural land and his inability, as a county commissioner, to control them.

That frustration remains even though a decade of double-digit valuation increases on ag land appears to have ended.

This year, ag land valuations statewide dropped 0.15 percent. But farmers and ranchers are still dealing with the 250 percent increase in valuation that built up over the past decade.

Erdman also said past state attempts to ease property taxes have not done enough. Nebraska will provide \$224 million worth of property tax credits this year, of which \$20 million is reserved for ag land owners.

“We have to have significant property tax relief, not \$20 million,” he said. “Whatever relief we’re going to get from the property tax credit won’t be much.”

Erdman said that now could be a good time to pursue a petition because residential and commercial property valuations have started heating up.

State lawmakers rejected two property tax proposals this year. Opponents said neither would provide significant relief.

One, introduced by Groene, would have redistributed the existing Property Tax Credit Fund to the benefit largely of rural property owners.

The other, introduced by Sen. Lydia Brasch of Bancroft on behalf of the governor, would have changed how farm- and ranchland is valued for property tax purposes, which could have helped some landowners.

Depending on whether he pursues a constitutional amendment or a state law, Erdman would have a daunting task ahead of him.

He would have to collect thousands of signatures from across the state — more than 118,000 for a proposed constitutional amendment, more than 83,000 for a proposed law.

Then there’s the checkered history of Nebraska petition drives that attempt to control property taxes.

More than 50 years ago, in 1966, voters narrowly approved an initiative that ended the use of property taxes to support state government. In 1990, they voted to keep the new state school aid law, which was aimed in part at easing property taxes.

But voters soundly rejected measures that sought to relieve property taxes through various limits and lids.

In 1990, 1996 and 1998, they shot down constitutional amendments that would have capped the growth of state and local budgets, limited the growth of tax revenues or put a lid on property tax levies.

Voters also turned thumbs down on a 1978 proposal that would have capped budget increases by law.

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## Heavy rains close Elkhorn River boating access sites

By JAY WITHROW  
 WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Douglas County's three Elkhorn River boating access sites are closed due to high water — and might remain closed over the Memorial Day weekend.

The Elkhorn River has been running high due to heavy rains, and considerable work along the river needs to be done before the access sites can open, said Christine Jacobsen, a Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District official.

The river was at 6.75 feet Wednesday, down from its crest of 9.24 feet on Saturday. It needs to drop to 5 feet before NRD policy allows for the ramps to open, Jacobsen said.

"I'm not sure that the river will fall enough for the sites to be open for the holiday weekend," Jacobsen said.

In addition to floating debris, fast currents above 5

feet are an issue, she said.

The National Weather Service office in Valley forecast a slight chance of rain Friday night and Saturday. Some parts of the Elkhorn River watershed received almost a month's worth of rain in four days last week, according to the weather service.

The shuttered access sites are Graske Crossing off West Dodge Road, West Maple Road near Waterloo and Elkhorn Crossing near North 252nd Street and Bennington Road.

The Elkhorn Crossing campground, with its recreational vehicle pads, playground, water and restrooms, is open, Jacobsen said. Only access to the river is closed.

Platte River Landing, a Douglas County access site to the Platte River, is open near Nebraska Highway 64 west of Valley.

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## **Game and Parks Accepting 2017 Trail Grant Applications**

LINCOLN, Neb. – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is accepting Recreational Trail Program grant applications for fiscal

year 2017 funding.

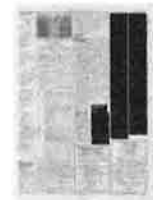
The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a grant program through the Federal Highway Administration that reimburses political subdivisions, such as communities, counties and natural resources districts, up to 80 percent of project costs for trail acquisition, development, renovation and support facilities. Applicants must have the financial means to undertake and maintain the project and all funding should be on hand.

The RTP funds are divided among three categories: motorized trails (30 percent), non-motorized trails (30 percent) and diversified or shared-use trails (40 percent).

The application materials can be downloaded at <http://outdoornebraska.gov/grants/> or contact Kirk Nelson at 402-471-5513 or [kirk.nelson@nebraska.gov](mailto:kirk.nelson@nebraska.gov) for an application packet. Applications must be submitted to Game and Parks and postmarked by Sept. 1, 2017.



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## Nebraska Farm Bureau Identifies 10 EPA Regulations to Modify, Repeal

LINCOLN - Nebraska Farm Bureau has identified 10 key regulations the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should modify or repeal. The list was compiled and shared with the agency as part of a public comment request from the EPA seeking feedback on where regulatory changes are needed.

"For the past eight years, our nation's food producers have endured a near constant onslaught of new regulations and attempts to use the federal regulatory process to further the objectives of both environmental and animal rights extremists. The leaders in the new administration, however, continue to demonstrate they want feedback from those who must comply with the regulations. It's refreshing to work with an administration that follows the direction of Congress and is committed to common sense solutions that don't needlessly increase costs and red tape for our members," said Steve Nelson, Nebraska Farm Bureau president.

The list of 10 regulations Nebraska Farm Bureau recommended for modification or repeal include:

1. EPA's Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) Rule. The measure grants the EPA broad sweeping authorities to regulate waterways and land management practices on private property. Farm Bureau recommended the agency repeal the existing rule and restart the process in a separate rulemaking to ensure it adheres to the EPA's authority granted under the Clean Water Act and Supreme Court rulings.

2. EPA's Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures (SPCC) Rule. The rule originally created regulations to prevent spills at oil refineries, but the EPA modified the measure to apply new regulations to prevent spills for on-farm fuel storage. The measure brought with it significant costs in engineering design and enhanced requirements for fuel storage, despite there being no history of spill issues on farms. Farm Bureau recommended SPCC regulations for farms be repealed.

3. CERCLA/EPCRA Regulations – The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) was originally aimed at helping cleanup sites contaminated with hazardous waste and assign liability for cleanup, while the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) was designed to help communities plan for chemical emergencies. Due to a recent court ruling, farmers will be required in 2017 to calculate and report emissions from the storage of livestock manure to be used as fertilizer on farm fields under CERCLA/EPCRA rules. Farm Bureau recommended EPA take regulatory action to clarify manure for use as fertilizer is not a "hazardous waste" subject to CERCLA/EPCRA regulations.

4. Worker Protection Standards (WPS) Rule. EPA regulations currently allow individuals with a designated status to gain access to a farmer's proprietary records related to pesticide use. The rules provide no restrictions on the sharing of the information, nor does it provide protection for farmers from fraudulent claims about pesticide use. The EPA adopted the measure despite any demonstration of how the rule improves work safety, yet it exposes farmers to additional paperwork and legal liability. Farm Bureau recommended the EPA repeal this and related provisions of the WPS.

5. Clean Water Act "Normal Farming Practices." Congress established that normal farming practices are exempt from the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps 404 "dredge and fill" permit requirements. The EPA and the Corps have continually narrowed the definition of farming practices exempt from permit requirements. As a result, plowing of farm fields without permits have led to enforcement actions against farmers. Farm Bureau recommended the EPA and the Corps undertake rulemaking to re-establish the broader exemptions for normal farming practices.

6. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs). Originally TMDLs were designed

to limit pollutant loads into waterways, however, the EPA has used informal interpretations of the Clean Water Act to blur the line of authority between federal and state governments, robbing states of the ability to establish plans to meet state water quality standards. The federal overreach unlawfully puts the EPA in a position to regulate farming practices. Farm Bureau recommended the EPA revise its TMDLs regulations to clarify that state's, not the EPA, have the ability to manage water quality within their borders.

7. Prior Converted Cropland. In 1993, the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers adopted a regulation that any wetland converted to farmland before 1985 would not be designated as "Waters of the U.S." subject to federal EPA/Corps regulations moving forward. In 2005, the Army Corps changed the rule stating that wetlands previously converted to farmlands could be regulated if the ground was put into a non-agriculture use. Despite a court ruling finding the Corps rule change was illegal, the Corps continues to re-regulate prior converted cropland. Farm Bureau recommended the EPA adopt regulation to recognize the original 1993 protection of converted cropland from Clean Water Act regulations.

8. Army Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation. The designation of wetlands on farm ground brings significant regulatory requirements and restrictions for land use. The Army Corps of Engineers was directed by Congress in 1993 to develop, with public input, a final manual on wetland designations, yet the agency has failed to do so allowing them significant latitude in wetland designations. Farm Bureau recommended the EPA not use the Corps wetland designations for regulatory purposes until the Corps finalizes a wetland designation manual through the rigors and transparency of the public notice and comment process.

9. Revisions to State Administered EPA Permits. States, like Nebraska, often take on the responsibility of issuing

federal permits on the EPA's behalf. Because states often have limited staff, they can and do establish a process to administratively continue existing permits versus reissuing new permits upon expiration. This saves the state and the permit holder time and money. The EPA is now proposing to give itself the power to object to this process, eliminating these benefits. Farm Bureau recommended the EPA withdraw its proposal to intervene in states' ability to administratively continue permits.

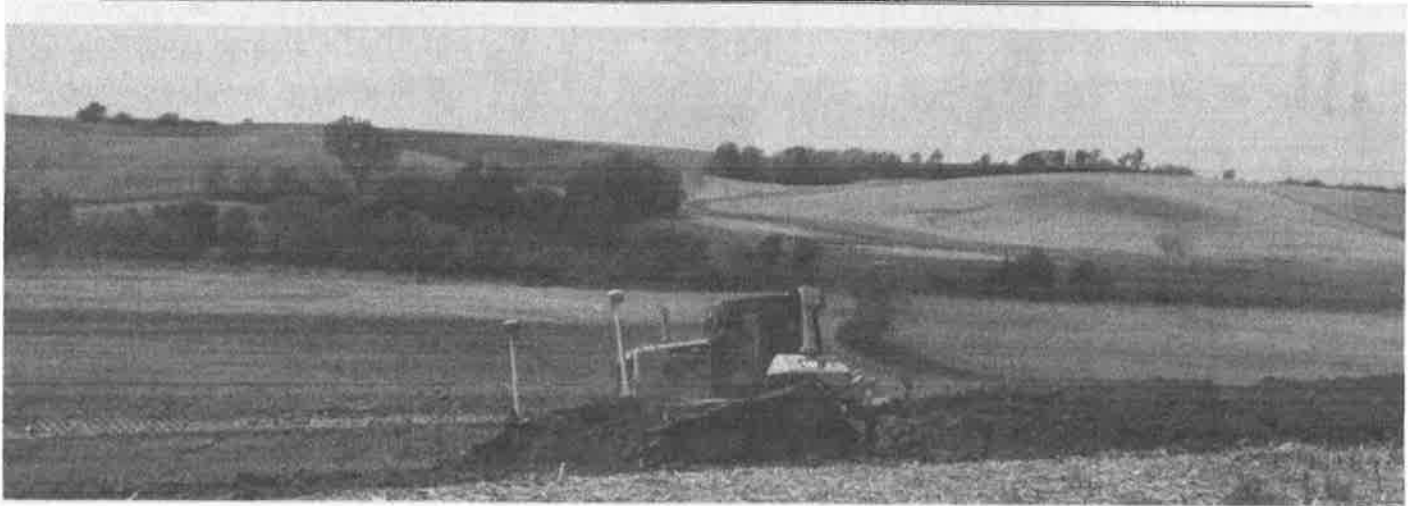
10. National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for Course Particulate Matter. These regulations deal with emissions into the air known as course particulate matter. The current definition of course particulate matter is overly broad and doesn't account for naturally occurring sources of particulate matter such as dust on farms. Farm Bureau recommended EPA reexamine these regulations to ensure agriculture operations aren't pulled in under NAAQS regulations based on naturally occurring emissions like dust on farms.

"We appreciate the administration's willingness to examine these regulations. Farmers and ranchers are true environmental stewards and are committed to taking care of land and water resources that provide for them and for future generations. There is a time and place for environmental regulations, but they must be based on common sense and not founded in expanding regulatory power for a federal agency which was the basis of many of the regulations introduced under the previous administration," said Nelson.

The Nebraska Farm Bureau is a grassroots, state-wide organization dedicated to supporting farm and ranch families and working for the benefit of all Nebraskans through a wide variety of educational, service and advocacy efforts. More than 61,000 families across Nebraska are Farm Bureau members, working together to achieve rural and urban prosperity as agriculture is a key fuel to Nebraska's economy. For more information about Nebraska Farm Bureau and agriculture, visit [www.nefb.org](http://www.nefb.org).



## DETLEFSEN CONSTRUCTION BUILDS TERRACE



COURTESY OF NRD

**Detlefsen Construction of Laurel, Nebraska, constructs a terrace on the James Hartnett farm south of Hubbard in Dakota County. This terrace system is designed to protect cropland below the structure by reducing runoff water and soil erosion. The farm is also located within the Pigeon/Jones Creek Special Watershed project area. Cost-share for this conservation measure will be provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) Conservation Assistance Program. It was surveyed and designed by the Papio-Missouri River NRD.**



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# Danish Alps Ponderosa pine planting

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD), Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) recently planted 480 ponderosa pine seedlings at the Danish Alps State Recreation Area southeast of Hubbard, Nebraska. The pine planting is one of sixteen test plantings across the state to evaluate the initial survival and growth of four different seedling stock sizes. The seedlings will be tallied and measured for three years to track which

seedling type has the best survival and early growth. Later studies may involve comparing long term growth and possibly some excavation of selected trees to see how root growth may be different between stock-type.

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is coordinating these plantings with the hope of identifying the best seedling type for increased survival rates for Ponderosa pine seedlings. Steve Rasmussen, District Forester, at Wayne

explains, "Ponderosa pine is being recommended more often now for conservation plantings across the state due to less interest in eastern red cedar trees and pine wilt killing Scotch and Austrian pines. Ponderosa pine is the primary native pine for Nebraska occurring naturally in north-central and northwestern Nebraska." Rasmussen added, "Ponderosa is one of the best adapted pine for conservation plantings with the hot summers and dry winter winds that we have in the Nebraska."

For more information on conservation tree planting for energy savings and beautification around your home, increased yields on crop ground, livestock protection, wildlife habitat, or erosion control, contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Papio-Missouri River NRD in Dakota City at (402) 494-4949; or Steve Rasmussen, District Forester for the Nebraska Forest Service at Wayne, at (402) 375-0101 or by email at [srasmussen2@unl.edu](mailto:srasmussen2@unl.edu)

## 480 PONDEROSA PINE SEEDLINGS PLANTED AT DANISH ALPS



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE RASMUSSEN, DISTRICT FORESTER, NEBRASKA FOREST SERVICE

(From left) Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) staff – Terry Schumacher, Land & Water Programs Coordinator; John Zaugg, Field Representative; Jon Krause, Conservation Technician; Justin Novak, Field Representative; Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) – Kyle Madsen, Danish Alps Park Superintendent; and Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) – John Duplissis, Program Leader; take part in planting 480 ponderosa pine seedlings at the Danish Alps State Recreation Area southeast of Hubbard, Nebraska. The planting is one of sixteen test plantings across the state to evaluate survival and growth of four different seedling stock sizes.

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## TREES PLANTED ON SWANSON FARM



COURTESY OF NRD

Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) staff, Justin Novak, field representative at Blair, operates the tractor, while Jon Krause (left), conservation technician, and Lance Olerich, rural water superintendent of Dakota City, plant tree seedlings on the Ken and Marlene Swanson farm west of Dakota City. The trees and machine planting were cost-shared through the Conservation Assistance Program (CAP) which is administered by the Papio-Missouri River NRD and the Dakota-Thurston County Pheasants Forever Chapter.



## Tribal members of MRRIC discuss draft EIS

The Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) met in Sioux Falls, May 23-25, and visited Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery, and Gavins Point Dam, where they learned about efforts to supplement the population of the endangered pallid sturgeon and about flood risk management efforts and hydropower operations at the dam. They also toured an 18-mile stretch of the Missouri River by boat to see the recovery efforts for the Least Tern and Piping Plover.

They discussed the findings of an independent External Peer Review panel regarding its review of the MRRP's draft Missouri River Recovery Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was released by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in December.

An accompanying draft Adaptive Management (AM) Plan serves as the framework for implementing potential actions described in the EIS. MRRIC discussed its more active engagement in governance of the AM program in

the future and approved a restricting of its work groups to implement the new approach.

Members also shared the highlights of their comments on the EIS and AM Plan with one another and with major General Spellmon, Northwest Division Commander for the Corps. The Committee charged a new work group to develop possible consensus recommendations concerning the MRRMP for MRRIC consideration at its August meeting.

MRRIC and the tribal members welcomed Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Kip Spotted Eagle, newly-appointed member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe. Shannon Wright represented the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska.

MRRIC is a 70-member committee that comprises stakeholders and representatives of tribal, state and federal governments throughout the Missouri River Basin. The committee provides recommendations to federal agencies on the current and future activities of the MRRP.



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TOP STORY

## 1.8M gallons of sewage leaks into Blair tributary

Katie Rohman Jun 5, 2017 Updated 10 min ago



Courtesy Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality

The City of Blair submitted this photo to the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality of a broken sanitary sewer pipe leaking into an unnamed tributary, also known as "South Creek."

A sanitary sewer pipe leaked an estimated 1.8 million to 2.25 million gallons of untreated sewage into a Blair tributary over approximately nine days in May.

The City of Blair was notified at about 12:30 p.m. May 25 that a sanitary sewer line was leaking into an unnamed tributary, commonly referred to as "South Creek," near 565 S. Third Ave. That area of the shallow tributary — surrounded by a thick cover of trees — runs between Sandvold Rentals on South Third Avenue and DJ's Repair on South Fifth Street. It feeds into the Missouri River.



The city estimates heavy rains starting May 16 caused the creek bank to erode and the sanitary sewer line to separate, resulting in leaking sewage lasting nine days.

Two contractors were called to repair the line, Blair City Administrator Rod Storm said Monday.

"Those were wet conditions," Storm said. "When they built it (the sewer line) back in the late '70s, early '80s, they probably got it a little closer to the bank than it should have been, but that would just be speculation.





"Unfortunately, it got us this time," he said. "Now, it's a matter of repairing it, and getting it stabilized."

On a public notice posted on its website, the city states an estimated "200,000 gallons of wastewater leaked per day" for nine days. According to the city's report submitted to the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ), however, the leak was estimated at 250,000 gallons of sewage per day.

NDEQ spokesperson Brian McManus told the Pilot-Tribune on Friday that, comparatively, the leak in Blair "was a big one."

"The approximately 250,000 gallons per day is a larger leak," he said.

The NDEQ doesn't plan to fine the City of Blair or take other action, McManus said.

"We typically look at the procedures they took and the actions, and we wouldn't typically be looking at fines if reasonable actions were taken," he said.

The leak was fixed within seven hours of its discovery, which McManus called "good responsiveness."

The city isn't required to post or publish a public notice about the leak, McManus confirmed. The city's report to the NDEQ, received May 30, said public notices would be posted in "three sites in the city" and on the radio station KBLR 97.3.

"There isn't a regulatory requirement," McManus said. "If it was more of a catastrophic event, basically."

NDEQ would also request the city issue a public notice if it was a planned bypass — or "leak" — to conduct maintenance on equipment, for example.

The impact of the leak is, in the short-term, "health-related," McManus said.



City of Blair workers replaced a broken sanitary sewer pipe May 25 in the bank of an unnamed tributary that leaked untreated sewage into the water for an estimated nine days.

Courtesy Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality



The City of Blair submitted this photo to the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality of workers replacing a broken sanitary sewer pipe following a leak at an unnamed tributary, also known as "South Creek."

Courtesy Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality

"The concern of bacteria, and over time mixing with water, and as this waste biodegrades," he said. "Basically, as it's occurring and shortly subsequent to that, you'll want to let people they shouldn't be having contact with the water."

The city does not have a cost estimate yet for cleanup and repair, Storm said.

"There's still more work to be done," he said.

# Public bike-sharing system expands to Sarpy County

- [By Kelsey Stewart / World-Herald staff writer](#) / 6.7.2017

Heartland B-cycle is expanding its public bike-sharing system into Sarpy County.

B-cycle stations have been installed in downtown Papillion and at the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District headquarters. Both stations are expected to open this week, said Ben Turner, executive director of Heartland B-cycle.

“It’s part of a broader reach of our program,” he said.

B-cycle stations allow users to rent bikes for a fee and ride them for as long as they like. The bikes can be returned to any B-cycle kiosk when riders are finished.

The bulk of the bike-sharing system’s stations are in downtown Omaha. They’re intended for transportation and recreational use.

Sarpy stations are geared toward recreation, though a city spokesman called the downtown Papillion location a first step in public transportation.

City and NRD officials approached Heartland B-cycle about the project. The kiosks and bicycles are owned by the City of Papillion and the NRD. Papillion paid \$27,000 for its six bikes and nine-stall kiosk. The NRD paid \$33,000 for its eight bikes and 11-stall kiosk. Heartland B-cycle will be responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the equipment.

City leaders chose the downtown spot near First and Washington Streets because of its central location in the city and close proximity to the trail system.

“It’s another way of encouraging our residents to be active,” city spokesman Trenton Albers said. “Our residents have an opportunity where they can take a B-cycle and they can explore some different areas of Papillion.”

Albers said the city is considering kiosks at Shadow Lake Towne Center, Werner Park and Prairie Queen Recreation Area, among others.

The NRD station is at Chalco Hills Recreation Area, near 154th Avenue and Giles Road. It’s a pilot project at the recreation area, said natural resources planner Eric Williams.

“Not everyone can easily make it to one of those recreation areas or easily transport their bike to recreation areas,” Williams said. “We’re glad to be able to provide that for people here when they come to visit the lake.”

Heartland B-cycle has 199 bikes and 35 stations in Omaha, Council Bluffs and Sarpy County.

To rent a B-cycle, users must purchase a pass, which includes the first hour of the ride. Additional hours cost \$4.

A 24-hour pass costs \$6. Monthly passes cost \$10, and a yearly pass is \$80.

Kiosks give users the option to rent bikes using credit or debit cards.

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