

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager's Report

DATE: March 10, 2015 - Updated

FROM: John Winkler, General Manager



A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** The Information and Education Report detailing the department's activities for the month of February, 2015, is attached for your review.

B. **PERSONNEL/MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:**

1. The District received the "new" Prairie Queen Recreation Area brochure. A copy of it can be found in the front pocket of the Director's book.

C. **REPORT ON PURCHASES – CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AND PERSONAL PROPERTY:** Pursuant to Board direction, attached is a report indicating construction services, professional services and personal property purchases from the month of February, 2015. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.

D. **CURRENT AND ON-GOING PROJECTS – P-MRNRD LEGAL COUNSEL:** Attached is a copy of the current and on-going projects for District Legal Counsel, Husch Blackwell, as of February 18, 2015. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

E. **PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP REPORT:** The Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Meeting for February was cancelled. The next Partnership meeting is scheduled for March 26, 2015.

F. **NEWS CLIPS:**

- ✓ February 19, 2015, Bellevue Leader article, Iske Place buyout major step in riverfront wars
- ✓ February 26, 2015, Dakota Co. Star article, Order Trees Now for Spring Planting
- ✓ February 26, 2015, Dakota Co. Star article, Attracting Backyard Wildlife Can Be Simple
- ✓ February 26, 2015, Dakota Co. Star article, Concrete base poured at Danish Alps Recreation Area
- ✓ February 27, 2015, Omaha World Herald editorial: Court frames way forward on Republican River
- ✓ March 2, 2015, Omaha World Herald article, Emergency Funds: New policy to let

February, 2015 Information/Education Report

Information

- Set up and helped staff a booth at the Omaha Boat Sports and Travel Show.
- Completed work and began distribution of Prairie Queen Rec Area brochure.
- Distributed news releases
- Updated Web Page, created new page for Prairie Queen Rec area
- Updated Facebook page – Post on Prairie Queen opening received by over 10,000 Facebook users
- Responded to requests for information received thru the NRD web site
- Began preparations for Prairie Queen opening and dedication
- Began work on co-grand opening with Game and Parks for Kramper Lake/Danish Alps State Rec Area
- Completed CPR and First Aid training

Education

February Programming Schedule:

2/3- Gomez Heritage Elementary- Food Chains- 46 students (4th grade)
2/4- Sump Library- Lizards- 34 children
2/5- Sandoz Elementary Tiger Explorers- Snakes- 53 students
2/9- Trumble Park Elementary- Surfacewater- 56 students
2/10- Benson West Elementary- Bird Nests- 45 students (1st grade)
2/11- Crestridge Elementary – Animal Adaptations- 67 students (6th grade)
2/12- Benson West Elementary- Bird Nests- 45 students (1st grade)
2/17- Westbrook Elementary– Surface/Groundwater- 63 students
2/18- La Vista Junior High – Animal Adaptations- 21 students (7th-8th grade)
2/22- Midwest Boat and Travel Show booth
2/24- Metro Regional Envirothon
2/25- Mary Our Queen – Surfacewater- 63 students (3rd grade)
2/26- Girl Scout Program-Owls-10 in attendance
2/26- Sandoz Elementary Cub Explorers– Snakes- 62 students (1st-3rd grade)
2/27- Rockwell Elementary—Environmental History—70 Students (2nd grade)

Planning:

Spring Nature Nights
Boat Show Set up and Staffing
Updates/Monitoring of Papio-Missouri River NRD Facebook Page and Web Pages
2015 Metro Envirothon- informational/reminder email, Registration flyer printed/mailed, final prep, proctoring
2015 Tree Program--e-mail, order tree bags/tent cards
Developed Energy Flow Program
Water Works--Database Updates, School Selection
General NRD Animal Care
Douglas County West and Washington County Pheasants Forever Grants
Toured Lauritzen and Zoo for possible I&E Meeting locations
Earth Day Grant/Planning

Meetings/Training:

Water Works Meeting
Envirothon Conference Calls
World O! Water Meeting

Report on Purchases

Construction Services, Professional Services, Personal Property

February, 2015

[illegible]

Updated: February 18, 2015

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

- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Culvert Repair Interlocal Agreement w/Omaha (N)
 - Culvert Repair Project Consultant Contract (N)
- **West Branch:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (W)
- **Western Sarpy Dike:** (Cleveland/Petermann)
 - ★ NRDs/NE-ARNG Interlocal for Camp Ashland Property (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program:** (Laster/Grint)
 - ★ Iske Place Closings (W)
 - King Lake Closings (F)
- **Trail Projects:** (Williams)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project:** (Becic)
- **USDA PL 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed:** (Schumacher/Cleveland)
 - ★ Papio W-3 Eminent Domain (Camden) (W)

- Papio W-3 Access-Quiet Title Action (F)
- Tek/Mud PL 566 Site 41A access (F)
- Papio PL 566 Site W-2 Issues (P)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:** (Grint/Laster/Williams)
 - ★ DS-15A purchase agreements, deeds and easements (W)
 - ★ DS-15A Eminent Domain (Hunzeker) (W)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater):** (Grint)
 - Interlocal Agreement w/City of Omaha on NDEQ 319 Grant (W)
- **Missouri River R-613 and R-616 Levees:** (Cleveland/Woodward)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Nelson)
 - ★ Fort Calhoun Lawsuits on WCRW (W)
 - TCRW (Rosalie) Easements for Waterline (N)
- **Other:**
 - ★ Elkhorn River 240th Street Land Acquisition Documents (W) (Williams)
 - ★ Glacier Creek Interlocal Agreement w/UNO (W) (Grint)
 - ★ City of Blair Interlocal Agreement on Flood Mitigation Project (F) (Grint)
 - ★ Second Addendum to NE Land Trust Agreement (N) (Becic)
 - Chalco O&M Shop/156th Street ROW (W) (Cleveland)

Bellevue Leader 2-19-15

Iske Place buyout major step in riverfront wars

By Eugene Curtin / Leader Associate Editor The Omaha World-Herald



File photo

Iske Place buyout major step in riverfront wars

Orange condemnation stickers were the norm on riverfront properties following the flood of 2011.



File photo

Iske Place buyout major step in riverfront wars

Flood damaged homes in Iske Place photographed Tuesday November 15, 2011. Sarpy County Board members will vote Tuesday on whether to participate in the Missouri River floodway buyout of homes in Iske Park and Elbow Bend.

POSTED: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2015 10:00 AM

Iske Place buyout major step in riverfront wars

The slow march toward a residence-free riverfront took a big step Thursday when the board of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resource District voted to buy the remaining properties in Iske Place.

Amanda Grint, project manager for the NRD, said board members agreed to pay approximately \$1.5 million for 21 properties.

For more than 20 years, the Papio-Missouri NRD joined with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the City of Bellevue and Sarpy County to clear houses from the banks of the Missouri River in three communities prone to flooding. Holub's Place, the

northernmost of the three communities, has already been cleared. The demise of Iske Place leaves only Elbow Bend in place, with approximately a dozen properties.

Grint said all but two Elbow Bend residents rejected an earlier buyout offer and that the NRD is unlikely to renew the effort in the near future. She said the FEMA grant will not pay more than market value for properties and so Elbow Bend will likely remain in place.

Nevertheless, the closing of Iske Place represents a major achievement for FEMA and the NRD.

It was a long, protracted and often contentious struggle between government agencies tired of bailing out properties after floods, and residents unwilling to surrender their riverfront lifestyles.

FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program will pay 75 percent of the \$1.5 million cost, with the lottery-funded Nebraska Environmental Trust covering an additional 12.5 percent. The remaining 12.5 percent will be split equally between the NRD, the City of Bellevue and Sarpy County.

The reward for FEMA is that it will no longer have to provide flood insurance for houses that sit in the Missouri River floodway. Such insurance is unavailable privately, forcing FEMA to pay repeatedly for flood damage.

For the city, the county and the Nebraska Environmental Trust the reward is the restoration of the riverfront to a natural state.

Although the effort to clear the floodway reaches back more than 20 years, the historic flood of 2011 gave it fresh impetus with approximately 30 houses being declared beyond repair and their owners barred from rebuilding. Those homeowners, faced with ruined homes and legally prevented from restoring them, took the buyouts. Some residents, however, whose houses were declared by licensed appraisers to have sustained less than 50 percent damage, were legally permitted to rebuild.

In the early 1990s, bristling at the effort to deprive them of their riverfront lifestyle, Iske Place residents put up a united front by forming a homeowners corporation that bought the land under their houses.

That forced the NRD to negotiate with the association as well as individual homeowners, complicating the process but resulting, eventually, in Thursday's vote.



Order Trees Now for Spring Planting

"Time is running out to order trees for spring planting" said Kelly Fravel, programs assistant for the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD). "Tree orders will be accepted through the end of March at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office located at 1505 Broadway in Dakota City. Some of the varieties are already in low supply, so early orders are encouraged," added Fravel.

Landowners can order from a list of some forty species of trees and shrubs including three new varieties; Concolor (White) Fir, Diamond Willow, and American Linden which are available through the conservation tree program for the first time this year. The price for 25 seedlings is \$22.00 plus 5.5% sales tax; a bundle 25 weed barrier mats is \$40.00 plus sales tax when ordered through the Lower Elk-

horn Natural Resources District (NRD).

The Papio-Missouri River NRD offers a tree planting cost-share assistance program which pays the landowner 75 percent of the costs to purchase and plant the trees with a minimum tree order of 100 seedlings. In addition, the Dakota-Thurston County Pheasants Forever Chapter offers a cost-share program which pays the landowner 25 percent of the same costs. Weed barrier mats are also eligible for cost-sharing assistance through the NRD when ordering a minimum of 25 mats.

For more information regarding tree orders, planting or the NRD's cost-share program contact the Dakota City Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office at (402) 494-4949.



PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT



8901 S. 154th St., Omaha, NE
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FEBRUARY 2015

Attracting Backyard Wildlife Can Be Simple

Does a yard exist that doesn't have room for wildlife? It's unlikely. A yard suitable for wildlife can be as simple as a window box or narrow strip between units of a city apartment complex or as vast as grassland acres surrounding a farm in the countryside.

Attracting wildlife to your backyard has many benefits. Obviously, the enjoyment of watching wildlife is a primary motive for making the area around a home more appealing to birds, some insects and small animals.

To attract wildlife, a backyard must have four basic elements: food, water, shelter and living space. These habitat requirements will vary somewhat by wildlife species, so you can make your plans as simple or as complex as you wish.

Food usually comes to mind first, when considering the four basic elements. Each wildlife species has special needs and preferences. For example,

while squirrels are attracted to plantings that produce nuts, rabbits need grasses, forbs and shrubs. Birds are drawn to seeds, berries and insects. A natural balance of foods can be achieved and maintained by planting trees and shrubs that will produce food for wildlife throughout the year.

Another habitat essential is access to water. It does not have to be available in the immediate area, but should be close enough for wildlife to use without hardship. Some animals can travel a fair distance without difficulty, but others can't move far for water.

Remember, water is a good magnet for wildlife, and a birdbath kept operational all year will produce many wildlife surprises.

Like people, wildlife need "elbow room" or living space, which can quickly become an established territory, particularly for certain birds. Again, the number and variety of spe-

cies will depend on the diversity of habitat in your backyard.

Perhaps the most important component of wildlife habitat is shelter. This includes resting space, protection from weather and predators, and safe nesting areas. A hollow tree can offer comfortable quarters for woodpeckers, squirrels, or raccoons. For rabbits, thick brush and tall grass are ideal. Trees and shrubs shelter many bird species; even vines like honeysuckle and bittersweet are good cover for backyard birds.

Take some time to read up on varieties of plants, how they look throughout the year, types and colors of fruits and flowers they produce, and their growth rates. Wildflowers will attract butterflies and other insects, which in turn attract birds. As your trees, shrubs and vines bear fruit, you may find that new wildlife visitors have discovered your backyard also.



Concrete base poured at Danish Alps Recreation Area



Operators for Midwest Concrete Pumping of South Sioux City maneuver a concrete boom truck to form a concrete base for a holding tank and dump station at the Danish Alps Recreation Area southeast of Hubbard, Nebraska. Dixon Construction Company of Correctionville, Iowa, continues to oversee the installation of amenities planned for the park. This project is a cooperative effort of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD), Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET), Nebraska Natural Resources Commission (NNRC), Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ), and Dakota County. Opening of the multi-purpose reservoir project is anticipated for July 2015.

World-Herald editorial: Court frames way forward on Republican River

World-Herald editorial: Court frames way forward on Republican River

2-27-2015

Kansas has waged a legal war with Nebraska over Republican River water for decades.

This week, the U.S. Supreme Court may have helped set both states on a path toward peace.

True, the high court's decision will force Nebraska taxpayers to pay \$5.5 million to Kansas for overuse of river water and the economic damages of Kansas lacking access to it.

But that's tens of millions less than Kansas had demanded.

The ruling also laid the groundwork for correcting the formula that determines how much water Nebraska can use and how much Kansas can expect to receive.

That should give leaders in both states confidence that irrigators and state and local water officials can move past this dispute. Because Nebraska taxpayers don't want to write this check again.

Courts are there to settle these kinds of disputes. Nebraska was right to fight Kansas' push to shift the river into federal control and halt irrigation on about 200,000 productive acres.

As the special master determined, Republican River irrigators did pump too much water for crops in the historic drought year of 2006.

But in recent years, local irrigators and natural resources districts have stepped up admirably. Working with the state, they implemented sensible pumping restrictions. Officials worked to keep more water in the river, removing brush and even supplementing surface water with groundwater.

Kansas now receives the amount of water to which it is legally entitled under a 1943 compact where the states agreed to set aside 49 percent of the river's water for Nebraskans, 40 percent for Kansans and 11 percent for Coloradans.

Many Nebraskans, working with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Kansas State University and others, now have a head start on strategies to use less water to grow more crops.

Politicians this week jostled to claim public victory for Nebraska or Kansas. But both states have something to boast about.

Nebraskans noted that Kansas originally sued for \$80 million and was awarded \$5.5 million. Kansans argued that the court set a key precedent of awarding economic damages for improper water use.

“We’ve all learned there are better ways to do business than in a courtroom,” Jasper Fanning, manager of the Upper Republican Natural Resources District, told The World-Herald.

The court’s decision is a victory for common sense, grounded in science, guiding the management of a river that stretches its lifeblood from Colorado’s mountains through Nebraska’s croplands to the wheat fields of Kansas.

The victory is mutual, because it answers some of the water dispute’s longest-running questions. It sets two states too long at war over water on a path toward fruitful collaboration on the future of the river they share.

EMERGENCY FUNDS

New policy to let Nebraska cities get quicker reimbursement after disasters

POSTED: MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2015 12:30 AM

New policy to let Nebraska cities get quicker reimbursement after disasters

By Jordan Pascale / World-Herald staff writer The Omaha World-Herald

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency is changing its rules so communities rebuilding after disasters can get reimbursed more quickly.

The change is welcome news to communities along the Missouri River that have been waiting more than three years for repayment after the historic 2011 flood. Until a few months ago, the Nebraska agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency still owed communities a total of \$7.2 million.

The agencies have paid out more than \$2.7 million to four communities in recent weeks, according to city administrators. More projects are being closed out each week, Nebraska officials said.

Omaha is still waiting on the largest share, \$3.6 million. The Nebraska agency's assistant director, Bryan Tuma, said that should be closed out by the end of the year.

"We have closed out a number of projects," Tuma said. "Things are looking much better than they were a couple of months ago. We're making progress."

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency's new procedure will reimburse communities after each individual project has been completed.

Previously each community had to finish all of its projects before getting paid, which put a crunch on some smaller communities that had to take out loans and pay interest while waiting to be reimbursed.

"We wanted to modify our process to be more responsive to communities," Tuma said.

FEMA pays 75 percent of project costs and the state pays 12.5 percent. Local communities pick up the rest.

Grants from the state and federal agencies helped pay to remove debris, set up emergency protection measures and restore infrastructure.

NEMA's new policy is more in line with that of Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management, which long ago paid out its \$38.6 million in 2011 flood claims.

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, director of NEMA and adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard, told a legislative committee that there was a reason for the old policy.

"We were having trouble getting that final piece of documentation from communities to certify that the money was used appropriately," Bohac said. "But I think we can do a better job by strengthening relationships with the communities themselves before we get to that point."

Bohac said he plans to use federal money to hire one or two people to work on community engagement. He hopes the additional employees mean quicker inspections and fewer delays in getting projects reviewed for FEMA approval.

"I believe these actions will significantly alleviate any cash flow concerns by applicants and improve our relationship with them," Bohac said.

Bellevue received \$905,000 in mid-February. City officials previously called the process "lengthy and frustrating." Bellevue officials had 49 phone calls and emails with NEMA staff trying to get payment for the city's 13 flood projects.

Bellevue is still owed about \$700,000.

About \$4.5 million is still owed by the federal and Nebraska agencies. That's out of the \$16.9 million originally requested reimbursements for the 2011 flood. Tuma said the rest should be closed out soon.

NEMA has closed out more than 560 individual projects and four disasters in the past 10 months, Tuma said.

Contact the writer: 402-444-1276, jordan.pascale@owh.com, twitter.com/jwpascale

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NRD tree program ends March 15

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (PMRNRD) is taking orders for trees and shrubs through March 15.

The orders will arrive at the PMRNRD Blair NRD Office mid-April. Those who ordered trees and shrubs for hand planting will be notified of the scheduled pickup dates.

The NRD tree-planting crew will plant trees and shrubs in rows on preplanned windbreaks, shelter belts and wildlife plantings. These orders will be stored in the tree cooler at Chalco Hills until the site is ready to plant — usually in late April and early May. Pre-planning sites is necessary for all projects.

The NRD has cost-share available for projects.

An order form is available at the NRD Office, USDA Service Center, 1060 Wilbur St., Blair. For assistance with site planning or to have trees and shrubs planted by the district staff, call Justin Novak, PMRNRD field representative, 402-426-4782 ext. 1009. Novak

manages the tree-planting program for Washington County and will visit residents' sites and assist with planning.

For more information, call Darlene Hensley, NRD program assistant, at 402-426-4782 ext. 1001, or visit the PMRNRD office at the USDA Service Center, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Omaha W-H 3-4-15

Levee project was vital to public safety

Each spring, Nebraska's Platte River presents challenges to those tasked with protecting lives and property from flooding due to ice jams. In 1993, there were 18,000 acres of cropland flooded, Interstate 80 was closed for nearly two days, Highway 6 was closed for months and the City of Lincoln water system suffered severe damage. Flood damages were estimated at \$14 million.

The 2015 Platte River ice conditions mirrored conditions in 1993. This year, excellent coordination among emergency management personnel, the Army Corps of Engineers and three natural resources districts, coupled with timely ice jam breakups and a greatly improved Western Sarpy/Clear Creek Levee, controlled potentially destructive high water. The result was only minor lowland flooding.

Improvements to this levee will be completed this year thanks to federal funding authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 2014. A special thank you to Sen. Deb Fischer, Congressman Jeff Fortenberry and former Rep. Lee Terry for their leadership in securing this final piece of federal funding required to finish construction of this vital piece of public safety infrastructure.

The combination of state and federal funding, as well as the utilization of NRD bonding authority, allowed this levee project to be improved in time to divert a disaster.

John Winkler, Omaha
General manager, Papio-Missouri River
Natural Resources District

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La Vista creek makeover due

City leaders in La Vista have approved a contract that will green-light the reconstruction of a portion of Thompson Creek.

Tuesday, the City Council awarded a \$1.3 million contract to Omaha-based Anderson Excavating Co. to begin the project, generally between Park View Boulevard and Valley Road, from 72nd Street to Edgewood Boulevard.

City Engineer John Kottmann said the project, decades in the works, will help address flooding and erosion that have plagued nearby homeowners.

City officials studied the creek in the 1970s. Some work was done decades ago to address street flooding, but backyard erosion continued. Officials studied the creek again in the 1990s, particu-

larly a problematic area with exposed sanitary sewers.

Eventually the city acquired and demolished 24 homes to make way for restoring a large section of the channel.

The entire project, which has a \$2.4 million price tag, is being paid for with \$1 million in grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust and \$240,000 from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality. The city and Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District are paying the rest, the former contributing \$400,000, the latter \$700,000.

The creek reconstruction is expected to start in April and wrap up this fall. The city also has plans to look at landscaping, tree replacement and trails, Kottmann said.

— Emily Nohr



Reconstruction work on part of La Vista creek to start soon

By EMILY NOHR
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

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City officials studied the creek in the 1970s. Some work was done decades ago to address street flooding, but backyard erosion along the creek continued. Officials studied the creek again in the 1990s, and it was suggested the city acquire private property along a particularly problematic area with

exposed sanitary sewers.

Eventually the city acquired and demolished 24 homes between Edgewood Boulevard and 72nd Street to make way for restoring a large section of the channel. Since then, site clearing and utility relocation along the creek have been underway.

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Contact the writer:
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NRDs say giving them bonding power for projects would save money, help them respond faster to floods

By Martha Stoddard / World-Herald Bureau | Posted: Friday, March 6, 2015 10:30 pm

LINCOLN — Nebraska's 23 natural resources districts could tackle bigger projects and fix problems quicker if they could issue bonds like other government subdivisions.

That's the pitch Omaha State Sen. Rick Kolowski made Friday in support of his Legislative Bill 344.

But opponents of Papio-Missouri River NRD projects argued that the proposal would amount to a blank check for the districts.

LB 344 would authorize NRDs to issue general obligation bonds, which would be paid off with property tax revenues.

Kolowski said that without bonding authority, districts must save money over several years or try to pay for projects piece by piece.

Either approach means delays in resolving the flood risk or other problems the projects are aimed at addressing and an increase in spending as inflation pushes up the cost.

"For each of the NRDs, this is a tool for their tool chest," Kolowski said.

Currently, the Papio-Missouri River NRD is the only district that is allowed bonding authority, and that authority expires in 2019.

The NRD's general manager, John Winkler, said the district has issued \$71.3 million worth of bonds since 2010. The bond proceeds were combined with other funding to complete \$149 million worth of projects.

Without the bonds, those projects would have taken 30 years to build, he said.

"By decreasing completion times and leveraging historically low interest rates and construction costs, the district was able to save millions of dollars," Winkler said.



Rick Kolowski

Rick Kolowski

More importantly, he said, the district was able to provide flood protection more quickly for district residents and property.

John Hansen, president of the Nebraska Farmers Union and a former NRD chairman, said the proposal to expand bonding authority would be a cost-effective tool for districts to use.

Along with flood control, NRDs are working on projects aimed at making water use more sustainable and boost groundwater levels, he said.

But some residents of the Papio-Missouri River NRD turned out to oppose the bill, citing their prolonged battles with the Omaha metro area district.

Mick Mines, a lobbyist for the Papio Valley Preservation Association, said LB 344 would amount to a property tax increase.

He said the bill has no safeguards for taxpayers, such as a provision requiring voter approval for bonds or language requiring districts to pay for bonds within their existing property tax levy limits. State law limits NRDs to a levy of 4.5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation.

The association's members are largely rural people who live in areas that have been identified as potential dam sites, Mines said.

In 2009, the group persuaded lawmakers to set a time limit on the NRD's bonding authority and require that bond payments be made within the levy limits.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD levy this year is 3.2 cents per \$100, about one quarter of which goes to make payments on the outstanding bonds.

The previous legislation also limited the size of projects and gave counties the ability to block projects within their boundaries.

Kolowski said he would be willing to consider some types of limits on the bonding authority in LB 344, if need be.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD has about \$240 million worth of projects lined up to be done but no current plans to issue additional bonds, Winkler said.

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

Contact the writer:

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WHAT OTHERS SAY

Ruling bodes well for future

Lincoln Journal Star

The ruling handed down last week by the U.S. Supreme Court in a lawsuit filed by the state of Kansas means that all the tough irrigation restrictions implemented by Nebraskans in the Republican River basin paid off.

The decision was a valid reason for Nebraska officials to celebrate. The livelihoods of hundreds of farmers and a chunk of the state's economy were at stake.

As Don Blankenau, the outside attorney hired by Nebraska, said, it was a win-win for the two states.

Consider the circumstances. Kansas filed the lawsuit because Nebraska irrigators were using so much water that the flow of water in the river at the state border was below the amount set in a 1943 compact.

Under the ruling Nebraska still had to pay \$5.5 million for violating the terms of the compact. Kansas, however, initially had sought \$80 million. The settlement exceeded Kansas's legal cost by only \$1 million. Importantly, the ruling excluded water that migrates from the Platte River into the Republican River basin from calculation of damages.

The high court's ruling upheld the findings of a special master who in 2013 wrote that Nebraska "began turning over a new leaf in 2007 and thereafter, planning for compliance with more care and urgency."

In a 2013 report, the three Natural Resource Districts in the basin reported that allocations of water for irrigation had dropped an average of 25 percent. The NRDs also agreed to reduce groundwater pumping volumes 25 percent by this year. They had already made considerable progress toward that goal in 2013.

"Rules and regulation have helped produce rising aquifer levels in some regions, stabilized levels in others and significantly slowed the rates of decline in other areas," the NRD's reported. Of the three, the NRD in the worst shape is the Upper Republican NRD in the southwest corner of Nebraska, where groundwater levels have been declining for decades.



NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

NRDs want bonding power for projects

Opponents, however, want limits in place, like requiring voter approval

BY MARTHA STODDARD
 WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

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"By decreasing completion times and leveraging historically low interest rates and construction costs, the district was able to save millions of dollars," Winkler said.

More importantly, he said, the district was able to provide flood protection more quickly for district residents and property.

John Hansen, president of the Nebraska Farmers Union and a former NRD chairman, said the proposal to expand bonding authority would be a cost-effective tool for districts to use.

Along with flood control, NRDs are working on projects aimed at making water use more sustainable and boost groundwater levels, he said.

But some residents of the Papio-Missouri River NRD turned out to oppose the bill, citing their prolonged battles with the Omaha metro area district.

Mick Mines, a lobbyist for the Papio Valley Preservation Association, said LB 344 would amount to a property tax increase.

He said the bill has no safeguards for taxpayers, such as a provision requiring voter approval for bonds or language requiring districts to pay for bonds within their existing property tax levy limits. State law limits NRDs to a levy of 4.5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation.

The association's members are largely rural people who live in areas that have been identified as potential dam sites, Mines said.

In 2009, the group persuaded lawmakers to set a time limit on the NRD's bonding authority and require that bond payments be made within the levy limits.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD levy this year is 3.2 cents per \$100, about one quarter of which goes to make payments on the outstanding bonds.

The previous legislation also limited the size of projects and gave counties the ability to block projects within their boundaries.

Kolowski said he would be willing to consider some types of limits on the bonding authority in LB 344, if need be.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD has about \$240 million worth of projects lined up to be done but no current plans to issue additional bonds, Winkler said.

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

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OPINION

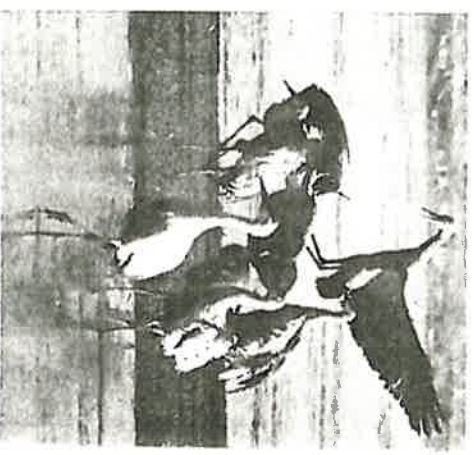
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Pilot Tribune

Blair, Ne.

To submit items for the Opinion page, call Katie Rohman
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Bringing Forward



JOE BURNS / PILOT-TRIBUNE

hundreds of years, a half-million and more
merged along the Platte River, and each
and the world flock to central-Nebraska
as been described as the greatest wildlife
ca.

Where have all of the conservatives gone?

To the editor,

Local news "perspectives" characterize the proposed expansion of the Allwine Prairie Preserve as pragmatism that Nebraska taxpayers can take pride in.

But, the real story — if conscientious reporters would bother to look — is much seedier. SID 531, which is part of NS — The Heritage, LLC's land development efforts, is millions of dollars in debt.

Because the developer refuses to take a loss on its investment, the PMRNRD must subsequently purchase the land from NS — The Heritage, LLC and, through an inter-local agreement, sign it over

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

to UNO for educational purposes. PMRNRD ratepayers, meanwhile, are stuck holding the bill.

Nonetheless, here are some relevant facts that you may not know. The PMRNRD is currently represented by the Husch Blackwell law firm.

One of the senior partners with Husch Blackwell (and an adviser to the PMRNRD) is none other than the University of Nebraska regent, Hal Daub. Add Steve Grasz, another PMRNRD advising attorneys and one of Gov. Pete Ricketts' confidantes, and one is left with the impression that the University of Nebraska system might stand to surreptitiously benefit from this arrangement at the expense of local taxpayers.

But, it gets even better. In addition to Husch Blackwell, the PMRNRD also has contractual deal-

ings with Fullenkamp, Doyle, and Jobeun and with E&A Engineers, Inc. Does anybody care to guess who is also represented by these two firms?

That's right, it's the principals of SID 531, the heavily-indebted sanitary improvement district at the heart of the proposed NS — The Heritage, LLC bailout.

As opportunistic RINOs and their special-interest cronies gamely attempt to denigrate the conservative movement, we must forever remain vigilant.

For, as Mr. Smith said, "Great principles don't get lost once they come to light. They're right here; you just have to see them again."

Scott Japp
Papio-Missouri River
Natural Resources District director

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