

FROM: John Winkler, General Manager

- A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT**: No report was submitted for the month of October.
- B. **PERSONNEL/MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS**: No items to report.
- 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 October, 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 October 12, 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 October 22, 2015, Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership meeting was cancelled. The next Partnership meeting is scheduled for November 19, 2015.
- F. **NEWS CLIPS**:
- ✓ October 6, 2015, Douglas Co. Post-Gazette article, Omaha Fire Department acquires new equipment with grants
 - ✓ October 7, 2015, Bellevue Leader article, NRD outlines plan to fund levee improvements
 - ✓ October 7, 2015, Papillion Times article, Papillion to be asked to help fund levee repairs
 - ✓ October 15, 2015, Washington Co. Enterprise article, NRD board seeks to recoup attorney fees from Japp
 - ✓ October 16, 2015, Washington Co. Enterprise article, Washington County supervisors question NRD bonds
 - ✓ October 18, 2015, News Service sponsored by The Association of Defense Communities, \$25M in Levee Improvements Needed to Protect Offutt AFB
 - ✓ October 21, 2015, Omaha World Herald article, Farmers warned: Climate change will make job harder
 - ✓ October 23, 2015, Lincoln Journal Star article, Game and Parks to apply for water rights

on Niobrara

- ✓ October 28, 2015, Omaha World Herald article, Sarpy County, Bellevue will chip in up to \$3 million each for levee repair
- ✓ October 30, 2015, Washington Co. Enterprise article, County pursues Japp bond inquiry
- ✓ October 31, 2015, Associated Press article, Months after flooding, DeWitt residents wade
- ✓ November 1, 2015, Omaha World Herald article, Two key departures, but The Omaha World-Herald stays in good hands
- ✓ November 3, 2015, Washington Co. Enterprise article, Blair to apply for federal grant to complete trail system
- ✓ November 5, 2015, Omaha World Herald article, Water lost in 2014 irrigation season prompts second lawsuit
- ✓ November 5, 2015, Omaha World Herald article, Senate Oks voiding federal water rules; 'We're not giving up on this,' Fischer says as veto looms
- ✓ November 6, 2015, Omaha World Herald editorial: Concerns rise about EPA water rules
- ✓ November 9, 2015, Washington Co. Enterprise article, Map revision could remove homes from floodplain
- ✓ November 10, 2015, Omaha World Herald editorial: Offutt Air Force Base merits improved levees
- ✓ November 11, 2015, Omaha World Herald Public Pulse, Invest in Offutt instead

Report on Purchases Construction Services, Professional Services, Personal Property

October, 2015

[illegible]

Updated: October 12, 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

B = Next Board Meeting

- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Culverts Repair Project Temporary and Permanent Easements (W)
- **West Branch:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike:** (Cleveland/Petermann)
 - NRDs/NE-ARNG Interlocal for Camp Ashland Property (F)
- **Floodway Purchase Program:** (Laster/Grint)
 - ★ King Lake Purchase Agreements and Closings (B)
- **Trail Projects:** (Williams)
 - ★ West Papio Trail, Union Pacific Rail Road Right-of-Way Review Rail Bank Provisions (W)
 - ★ Hell Creek Bridge Stabilization Interlocal Agreement Amendment with Omaha/La Vista (B)
 - ★ Hell Creek Bridge Stabilization Professional Services Contract with FHU (N)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project:** (Becic)
- **USDA PL 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed:** (Schumacher/Cleveland)

- ★ Papio W-3 Eminent Domain (Camden) (W)
 - Tek/Mud PL 566 Site 41A access (F)
 - Papio PL 566 Site W-2 Issues (P)
 - ★ Pigeon Jones-8 Easement (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:** (Grint/Laster/Williams)
 - ★ Transfer Deed to City of Omaha for Zorinsky Basin 1 (N)
 - ★ Transfer Deed to City of Papillion for Prairie Queen (W)
 - ★ Contract/Agreement Amendments for DS-15A Sewer Modifications with HDR (B)
 - WP6 & WP7 final design contract with FYRA (B)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater):** (Grint)
- **Missouri River R-613 and R-616 Levees:** (Cleveland/Woodward)
 - Offutt AFB O&M Agreement (P)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Nelson)
 - ★ Fort Calhoun Lawsuits on WCRW (W)
 - WCRW – Lakeland Estates Water Main Extension Developer Agreement (W)
- **Other:**
 - ★ Elkhorn River 240th Street Land Acquisition Documents (B) (Williams)
 - ★ Groundwater Management Plan Contract with Olsson Associates (B) (Woodward)



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Omaha Fire Department acquires new equipment with grants

by Mary Lou Rodgers

The Elkhorn and west Omaha area is primarily served by two fire stations, Station 71 at 20474 Laramie Road, and Station 77 at 20220 Atlas Street. They are manned by Omaha firefighters serving in 24-hour shifts who help cover west Omaha and the Elkhorn Suburban Fire District that includes subdivisions and rural areas.

Overall, the Omaha Fire Department has over 600 sworn personnel who responded to over 45,000 fire and rescue calls in the past year. Omaha firefighters' training includes trench, high angle, swift water, dive and rescue training.

Several new items were acquired by the Omaha Fire Department in 2015, largely through grants and donations.

Four new medic units replace

four of the 15 in service. The older vehicles had high mileage and air-conditioning systems that were not functioning well for patients. New equipment for medical care also includes updated Zoll cardiac monitors for all medic units and tactical vests and helmets for rescue teams.

A water rescue vehicle was donated by a private foundation, and a water rescue boat was added with the cost split between the Omaha Fire Department and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District. The First Responders Foundation provided a community support vehicle, smoke/CO detectors and infrared thermometers.

Thirteen sets of extrication tools for vehicle and other rescues were also acquired, including gas power units and hoses for running the

hydraulic tools, rams for pushing dashes, spreaders for opening crushed cars and cutters for freeing trapped passengers. Some of the tools that were replaced were up to 30 years old.

"We have ordered three new 105' ladder trucks, one new light and air truck and are preparing to order four new fire engines," said FAE Greg Stofer, fire apparatus coordinator and water supply specialist in the technical service division of the Omaha Fire Department. "We also received a grant to purchase a specially equipped ambulance to transport people who weigh 500-plus pounds."

We should have two ladder trucks in January or February and the third by July first of 2016.

Besides answering fire and rescue calls, the firefighters engage in community service all year. Each

station invites the public to stop by any day to drop off food to distribute to those in need.

"We placed an emphasis on training this year with our rural water supply program," said Stofer. "All members of station 71 and 77 received this training on water tender 77."

The training division trained the entire staff on automobile extrication to go along with the new hydraulic rescue tools we received.

The firefighters also offer free combination smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. They will also replace batteries in detectors. To schedule an appointment for a detector, call the Public Education Bureau at 402-444-3560 or visit the website at Omaha-fire.org.



At Station 71 in Elkhorn, Omaha Fire Department personnel serving on the A Shift include: (l-r) Chris Hatcher, paramedic/firefighter; Tim Lubrant, FAE (engineer); Ken Wood, firefighter; Seth Gruber, captain; Dan Wiley, paramedic/firefighter; and Jeff Rockwell, firefighter.



At Station 77 in Elkhorn, Omaha Fire Department personnel serving on the A Shift include: (l-r) Matt Glup, FAE; Michelle Lau, firefighter; Kim Remus, captain; Scott Crawford, paramedic/firefighter; Nicki Mitchell, paramedic/firefighter; and Scott Wachter, firefighter.



At Station 71 in Elkhorn, Omaha Fire Department personnel serving on the B Shift include: (l-r) Jason Hansen, firefighter; John Kava, paramedic/firefighter; James Fritz, paramedic/firefighter; Chris Hatcher, paramedic/firefighter; Nate Rohda, firefighter; and Tom Oehler, captain.



At Station 77 in Elkhorn, Omaha Fire Department personnel serving on the B Shift include: (l-r) Brian Fitzke, paramedic/firefighter; Brad Lucas, firefighter; Charlie McHugh, firefighter; Douglas Vawter, Sr., firefighter; and Lon Landholm, captain.



At Station 71 in Elkhorn, Omaha Fire Department personnel serving on the C Shift include: (l-r) Battalion Chief Dan Stollinski; Jim Schurkamp, FAE; Jeff Hazen, firefighter; Kyle Herber, paramedic/firefighter; Tom Weaver, paramedic/firefighter; Tim Benak, firefighter; and Chris Hubby, captain.



At Station 77 in Elkhorn, Omaha Fire Department personnel serving on the C Shift include: (l-r) Greg McClung, FAE; Amy Cummins, paramedic/firefighter; Brock Borhart, captain; Pam Klabunde, paramedic/firefighter; Kirt Soll, firefighter; and Kevin Sanders, firefighter.



NRD outlines plan to fund levee improvements

By Eugene Curtin

Leader Associate Editor

The financial realities of shoring up the Missouri River levees came into focus Sept. 29 when the Sarpy County Board was asked to contribute between \$2.3 million and \$3.3 million to the \$25 million project.

John Winkler, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, told board members the low estimate might drop to \$1.3 million depending on how much the state of Nebraska is willing to contribute. On the other hand, it might climb to \$3.3 million if the U.S. Department of Defense declines to contribute the \$4 million it has been asked to contribute.

Six governmental bodies have been asked to contribute funds to the construction project, which will increase the height of the levees by about 2 feet along their 19-mile length.

The bodies are the City of Bellevue, the City of Omaha and Sarpy County, all of which are being asked for \$2.3 million, along with the state of Nebraska, which is being asked for \$10 million, the U.S. Department of Defense, which is being asked for \$4 million, and the NRD itself, which has pledged \$4 million.

The levee improvements are mandated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency even though the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which built the levees in the 1970s and 1980s, say they meet all requirements. The mandate stems from the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans after which FEMA ordered levees improved throughout the nation.

Winkler said FEMA has declined to help pay for the improvements, as has the Army Corps of Engineers.

Nevertheless, Winkler said, the improvements must be made. If they

are not then most of Offutt Air Force Base, including the new U.S. Strategic Command headquarters, will be regarded as sitting in a floodplain and thousands of private acres south of the base will be rendered undevelopable.

That could draw unwelcome attention from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, known as BRAC, which periodically identifies military installations that could be closed.

Winkler said no one wants to endanger the continued presence of Offutt, which employs more than 10,000 people in the metro area and has an estimated annual economic impact of \$1.3 billion.

In addition, Winkler told the board, it would end interest in developing land south of Offutt which, he said, has already drawn inquiries from employers representing \$6 billion of investment and 16,000 jobs.

In addition, he said, the approach road to the Highway 34 bridge would be under water in the event of a flood, rendering the bridge useless.

While the cost might seem an unwelcome burden, Winkler said it will only get worse.

"The longer we wait and delay the more expensive the project becomes," he said. "Instead of a \$25 million project we're going to soon be talking a \$30 million project, a \$35 million project, until a point in time where we'll be unable to do it because no one will have the funds."

Commissioner Don Kelly said the importance of Offutt Air Force Base to Sarpy County requires involvement from the county, but he asked that Winkler expand the number of communities asked to contribute.

"I think we need to cast the net a little bit wider," he said. "There are as many people that work out of Offutt

Air Force Base that leave Bellevue at the end of the day and go off to residences in the county, or in Papillion, or down in Cass County, or over in Mills County or up in Omaha," he said.

"I think everybody should be a stakeholder, and limiting it to Sarpy and Bellevue is not fair. Certainly, Papillion will be directly impacted if that base goes away."

Commissioner Tom Richards said the board should sign on to the effort in order to strengthen Winkler's hand when he presents the proposal to other jurisdictions.

"I think we need to get on board so that we can get this process rolling and so that we can show some leadership," he said. "I also think it helps to get that \$10 million from the state if we show that we are serious about doing what we say we are going to do."

Winkler said he plans soon to address the city councils of Bellevue and Omaha and will sound out the willingness of other area jurisdictions to contribute to the effort.

"We've got no qualms about going out and asking for more money from other people," Winkler said. "We'll actually take that under advisement and make those conversations."

Kelly said the cause is worth the effort.

"I'm hearing all this talk about ConAgra, and that's important, but it doesn't even come close to the impact if anything ever happened with Offutt," he said.

"I've been in the military and I know how BRAC commissions work. You give them a reason to realign and they will realign, and when your runway sits in the floodplain, that's a pretty good reason."



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Papillion to be asked to help fund levee repairs

By Eugene Curtin

Times Associate Editor

The City of Papillion might be asked to help prevent Offutt Air Force Base from landing on the radar screen of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

County Commissioner Don Kelly said the effort to raise \$25 million to shore up the levees protecting Offutt from the Missouri River should be broadened to include Papillion, which he said would be directly impacted if the base ever closed.

The financial realities of improving the levees came into focus at the board's Sept. 29 meeting when commissioners were asked to contribute between \$2.3 million and \$3.3 million to the \$25 million project.

Six governmental bodies have been asked to contribute funds to the construction project, which will increase the height of the levees by about two feet along their 19-mile length. They are the City of Bellevue, the City of Omaha and Sarpy County, all of which are being asked for \$2.3 million, along with the state of Nebraska, which is being asked for \$10 million, the U.S. Department of Defense, which is being asked for \$4 million, and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, which has pledged \$4 million.

John Winkler, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River NRD, told board members the low estimate might drop to

\$1.3 million depending on how much the state of Nebraska is willing to contribute. On the other hand, it might climb to \$3.3 million if the U.S. Department of Defense declines to contribute the \$4 million it has been asked for.

Kelly said the importance of Offutt Air Force Base to Sarpy County requires involvement from the county but he asked Winkler to expand the number of communities asked to contribute.

"I think we need to cast the net a little bit wider," Kelly said. "There are as many people that work out of Offutt Air Force Base that leave Bellevue at the end of the day and go off to residences in the county, or in Papillion, or down in Cass County, or over in Mills County or up in Omaha," he said.

"I think everybody should be a stakeholder, and limiting it to Sarpy and Bellevue is not fair. Certainly, Papillion will be directly impacted if that base goes away."

The levee improvements are mandated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency even though the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which built the levees in the 1970s and 1980s, say they meet all requirements. The mandate stems from the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans after which FEMA ordered levees improved throughout the nation.

Winkler said that FEMA has declined to help pay for the improvements, as has the Army Corps of Engineers.

Nevertheless, Winkler said, the improvements must be made. If they are not then most of Offutt Air Force Base, including the new U.S. Strategic Command headquarters, will be regarded as sitting in a floodplain and thousands of private acres south of the base will be rendered undevelopable.

That could draw unwelcome attention from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, known as BRAC, which periodically identifies military installations that could be closed.

Winkler said no one wants to endanger the continued presence of Offutt, which employs more than 10,000 people in the Omaha metro area and has an estimated annual economic impact of \$1.3 billion. In addition, Winkler told the board, it would end interest in developing land south of Offutt which, he said, has already drawn interest from employers representing \$6 billion of investment and 16,000 jobs.

In addition, he said, the approach road to the Highway 34 bridge would be under water in the event of a flood, rendering the bridge useless.

While the cost might seem an unwelcome burden, Winkler said it will only get worse.

"The longer we wait and delay the more expensive the project becomes" he said. "Instead of a \$25 million project we're going to soon be talking a \$30 million project, a \$35 million project, until a point in time where we'll be unable to

do it because no one will have the funds."

Papillion Mayor David Black said Papillion fully supports the Sarpy County Board and the Papio-Missouri River NRD helping to shore up the levees and that because Papillion taxpayers contribute to both those bodies, Papillion is doing its share.

He seemed less receptive to a direct contribution from Papillion city coffers.

"If you start going down that path, well then what about Plattsmouth, what about Ralston, what about Springfield, what about, what about, what about," he said. "We are already contributing twice, through our county and our NRD support."

Commissioner Tom Richards said the board should sign on to the effort in order to strengthen Winkler's hand when he presents proposal to other jurisdictions.

"I think we need to get on board so that we can get this process rolling and so that we can show some leadership," he said. "I also think it helps to get that \$10 million from the state if we show that we are serious about doing what we say we are going to do."

Winkler said he plans soon to address the city councils of Bellevue and Omaha and will sound out the willingness of other area jurisdictions to contribute to the effort.

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actually take that under advisement and make those conversations."

Kelly said the cause is worth the effort.

"I'm hearing all this talk about ConAgra, and that's important, but it doesn't even come close to the impact if anything ever happened with Offutt," he said. "I've been in the military, and I know how BRAC commissions work, You give them a reason to realign and they will realign, and when your runway sits in the floodplain that's a pretty good reason."

Winkler said he will soon approach the city councils of Bellevue and Omaha with appeals for funding.

NRD board seeks to recoup attorney fees from Japp

October 15, 2015, Enterprise/Pilot Tribune newspaper/Leeanna Ellis

Arlington resident Scott Japp, who represents Washington County on the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (PMRNRD) Board of Directors, has been ordered to pay for a recent court proceeding against him.

The PMRNRD board authorized its legal counsel last week to take the necessary steps to recover attorney fees and court costs awarded as sanctions on Sept. 14 from Japp and his attorney, KC Engdahl.

The lawsuit filed by the PMRNRD in February 2014 accused Japp of interfering with a new dam site in northwest Omaha. Japp had opposed the project, which is located on the West Papillion Creek at 168th and Fort streets near Elkhorn.

The lawsuit was dismissed Sept. 21 at the request of the PMRNRD because all the land for the project was acquired and it is now under way.

Douglas County District Court Judge Timothy Burns had ordered Japp to pay court costs and attorney's fees totaling \$5,933.

John Winkler, general manager of the PMRNRD, said the board plans to take away Japp's stipend and not reimburse him for any expenses as well as research garnishing his wages and putting liens on bank accounts and property.

PMRNRD board members receive a maximum stipend of \$3,600 a year plus mileage. Winkler said the withholding of Japp's reimbursements will begin immediately.

Japp claims the lawsuit against him was dismissed without any damages.

"So I don't know where the NRD is making up these allegations," he said.

But a review of the case file shows that any money that was ordered to be paid, must be paid to the court.

Japp said he was unaware Monday of the board's decision, which was made Oct. 8, because he was asked to leave when the board entered closed session to discuss the matter.

Winkler said both Chairman David Klug and legal counsel asked that he not be included due to the conflict of interest.

Japp said when he left a Sarpy County sheriff's deputy was there.

"I have no idea why he was there," Japp said. "I didn't make a scene so I left."

Japp did not return to the meeting, which had two items remaining on the agenda following the closed session.

Japp was upset over the board's decision.

"Apparently, the Papio-Missouri River NRD Board of Directors want to waste more taxpayer money," he said.

"They've already wasted over \$100,000 on frivolous lawsuits and apparently they're not satisfied with losing enough taxpayer money."



Washington County supervisors question NRD bonds

BY KATIE ROHMAN

editor@enterprisepub.com

Washington County supervisors approved setting final tax levies before the Oct. 15 deadline, but they still question the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's (PMRNRD) use of general obligation bonds.

During the Sept. 22 county board meeting, Scott Japp, who represents the county on the PMRNRD board, asked the supervisors to send a letter to the PMRNRD board questioning how it is able to pass general obligation bonds. County Attorney Scott Vander Schaaf received a response from PMRNRD attorney David Newman on Monday ask-

ing for a more detailed request in writing.

According to Nebraska Statute 2-3226, "Each (natural resources) district shall have the power and authority to issue revenue bonds for the purpose of financing construction of facilities authorized by law. Issuance of revenue bonds must be approved by two-thirds of the members of the board of directors of the district. The district shall pledge sufficient revenue from any revenue-producing facility constructed with the aid of revenue bonds for the payment of principal and interest on such bonds and shall establish rates for such facilities at a sufficient level to provide for the operation of such facilities and for the bond payments."

The PMRNRD fiscal year 2015 property tax levy is 0.032753. The owner of property valued at \$100,000 will pay \$32.75 in property taxes next year. The PMRNRD's levy is estimated to produce \$18 million in revenue. Total spending is estimated at \$83.4 million. Approximately 25 percent of its budget comes from federal and state cost sharing for specific projects.

On Tuesday, the county board voted 5-2 to approve the final tax levies, with Vice Chairman Ron Hine, District 7-Fort Calhoun and supervisor Paul Cerio, District 1-Fort Calhoun, voting nay.

The county can adjust the PMRNRD levy after the Oct. 15 deadline.

\$25M in Levee Improvements Needed to Protect Offutt AFB

Posted On: Oct 18, 2015 11:20 pm/from daily news service sponsored by Association of Defense Communities

The state of Nebraska, DOD and the communities neighboring Offutt Air Force Base are being asked to contribute to a \$25 million levee improvement project needed to protect the installation from flooding.

The cities of Bellevue and Omaha, and Sarpy County are each being asked for \$2.3 million for the project, which would increase the height of 19 miles of levees along the Missouri River by two feet. The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, which is spearheading the effort, has pledged \$4 million. The district is asking the state to pitch in \$10 million, and DOD for \$4 million, reported the [Bellevue Leader](#).

The improvements are mandated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) even though the Army Corps of Engineers, which built the levees in the 1970s and 1980s, says they meet existing standards. FEMA ordered the upgrades after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005. Neither FEMA nor the Army Corps is willing to help pay for the improvements, said John Winkler, general manager for the natural resources district.

If the levees are not raised, much of Offutt Air Force Base would be regarded as sitting in a floodplain, according to Winkler. In addition, thousands of acres south of the installation would be rendered undevelopable.

"The longer we wait and delay the more expensive the project becomes," Winkler told the Sarpy County Board last month. "Instead of a \$25 million project, we're going to soon be talking a \$30 million project, a \$35 million project, until a point in time where we'll be unable to do it because no one will have the funds," he said.

Commissioner Don Kelly said the importance of Offutt to Sarpy County requires the county to pitch in, but he asked Winkler to expand the number of communities asked to contribute to the project.

"I think we need to cast the net a little bit wider," he said. "There are as many people that work out of Offutt Air Force Base that leave Bellevue at the end of the day and go off to residences in the county, or in Papillion, or down in Cass County, or over in Mills County or up in Omaha," he said.

Farmers warned: Climate change will make job harder

POSTED: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2015 12:30 AM | UPDATED: 12:39 AM, WED OCT 21, 2015.

Farmers warned: Climate change will make job harder By Nancy Gaarder / World-Herald staff writer The Omaha World-Herald

LINCOLN — Farmers and ranchers are likely to have a tougher time making a living in the decades ahead as climate change more aggressively affects weather patterns.

That was the message Tuesday at a University of Nebraska-Lincoln workshop designed to brief the agriculture community on the latest science while gathering suggestions for research and policies needed to help producers cope. About 30 representatives of academia, UNL extension, government and agriculture attended the daylong workshop, the seventh of eight being held this fall.

Don Wilhite, a UNL climatologist and expert on drought, said Nebraska can expect years like 2012, the state's hottest and driest on record, to become routine by the end of the century if nothing is done to curb greenhouse emissions.

Extreme heat arrived early that year, and McCook, Nebraska, recorded more than a month's worth of days over 100 degrees. Its average is about 11.

Nebraska saw unprecedented declines in groundwater levels as a result of intense pumping. In 90 of 93 counties, groundwater levels dropped more than a foot, and some areas saw a 25-foot drop, according to a UNL study.

John Hansen, president of Nebraska Farmers Union, one of those attending the workshop, said that kind of year is unsustainable.

"We're still healing our aquifers from the drought of 2012," Hansen said. "If all of a sudden years like that occur four in 10 years ... it won't be possible to heal."

During 2012, Nebraska's temperature averaged about 4.3 degrees above the 20th-century average, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.

By the end of this century, the state's average temperature is expected to rise by 8 degrees to 9 degrees if nothing is done to curb emissions, according to UNL.

"This is uncharted territory," Wilhite said.

Gene Takle, a physicist, meteorologist and one of the nation's foremost experts on climate change and agriculture, also addressed the Lincoln audience. Takle, director of Iowa State University's climate science program, said American agriculture largely has been able to adapt to climate change up to this point. That's going to change as it accelerates.

"By mid-century, things are going to be much more severe," he said.

Takle said he has a "one-floor elevator speech" that he gives to explain changes ahead: Dry areas of the planet will become hotter and drier; wet climates will become wetter and more humid. Additionally, in areas like Nebraska and Iowa, there are likely to be extreme swings between the two.

Since 2010, Iowa already has experienced one extreme year after another, Takle said, citing 2013 as emblematic of an overall trend toward rainier springs. That year, wet weather during planting season made it hard for farmers to get into their fields. Ultimately, Iowa farmers left 700,000 acres of high-quality land unplanted.

"This has a big, big economic impact," he said.

Farmers are adapting, but it's coming at a price. Changes underway include boosting the capacity of fields to drain water and purchasing larger, more expensive machinery so farmers can plant more quickly when days are dry.

Takle described several areas where research could help ag producers, including:

- » Better seasonal forecasts to guide seed selection and other cropping decisions
- » Changes in field management so that soil can hold more water

State Sen. Ken Haar, who attended Tuesday's workshop, said he will propose a climate-action plan to the Nebraska Legislature in 2016. The final all-day workshop at UNL will be Thursday on energy. For information, visit go.unl.edu/climatechange.

In the big picture, all eyes are on Paris. At the end of November and in early December, countries will gather there to negotiate limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

"There is hope," Wilhite said. "But hope is based on action."

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Game and Parks to apply for water rights on Niobrara

10-23-15

By ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS / Lincoln Journal Star JournalStar.com

FAIRBURY – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on Friday voted to move forward with an instream flow application for the Niobrara River in north-central Nebraska.

The unanimous vote was the culmination of nearly a decade of work by the commission and its partners to protect one of the state's most scenic and popular recreational rivers.

"The goal is to maintain those flows for all Nebraskans," said Deputy Director Tim McCoy in an interview after the commission's meeting at the Union Bank and Trust in Fairbury.

The application is for a state permit to appropriate waters for instream flows on the Niobrara River from just below the Spencer Hydro Facility to the confluence of the Missouri River.

Instream flow protection, which is basically a water right, would be used for the conservation of fish, wildlife and recreation.

The quantity of water needed to provide adequate instream flows would vary from 2,084 cubic feet per second in January to 1,969 cfs in December. About 1,424 cfs would be required from May through August for piping plover nesting habitat.

A state treasure, the Niobrara attracts thousands of canoers, kayakers and inner tubers annually. A 76-mile stretch was designated a National Scenic River in 1991.

In early September, the Nebraska Public Power District agreed to sell its Spencer Hydro Dam and associated water rights and 250 acres plus easements for \$12 million to Game and Parks and a coalition of five natural resources districts that oversee the Niobrara River basin.

The commission is working with the following NRDs: Upper Niobrara White, Middle Niobrara, Lower Niobrara, Upper Elkhorn and Upper Loup.

The instream flow application will be submitted jointly to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources once each party signs it, McCoy said. The commission was the first agency to do so. McCoy said the commission hopes to have all of the signatures by the end of the year.

Instream flow water rights exist for an 8-mile stretch of Long Pine Creek, a wild trout fishery in north-central Nebraska, and for most of a 240-mile segment of the central and lower Platte River from Lexington to the Missouri River.

Under a 1984 law, Game and Parks and the state's 23 NRDs have the right to file an instream flow application to protect fisheries, wildlife and other natural resources.

Sarpy County, Bellevue will chip in up to \$3 million each for levee repair



levees - map

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Sarpy County, Bellevue will chip in up to \$3 million each for levee repair By Cody Winchester / World-Herald staff writer The Omaha World-Herald

A funding package for levee repairs around Offutt Air Force Base is beginning to take shape, with two local governments pledging up to \$3 million each for the project.

This week, the Bellevue City Council and the Sarpy County Board separately approved a memorandum of understanding with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, which is managing the \$25 million project.

The repairs are needed to recertify 19 miles of levees that protect the base and the surrounding community from Missouri River flooding.

The NRD has been working toward that goal since 2010. If the levees aren't brought up to stricter Federal Emergency Management Agency standards, the land they protect will revert to floodplain status — land that includes the base, the City of Omaha's wastewater treatment plant and a planned development corridor along Highway 34.

Under the agreement, the NRD would pay \$5 million for the project.

Bellevue, Sarpy County and the City of Omaha each would pay up to \$3 million.

The NRD board and Omaha City Council will take up a memorandum of understanding next month. The memorandum is essentially an IOU. Once the financing picture is clear, each entity would need to approve a separate, binding agreement to help pay for the project.

NRD General Manager John Winkler said an agreement that shows local support will improve the NRD's chances both with the state and the federal government.

If the local governments get on board, the project still would need to find about \$11 million in funding.

Attempts to secure federal funding — from FEMA, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — so far have been unsuccessful. Likewise, the federal government rebuffed requests to waive the new requirements.

Winkler said local officials and Nebraska's congressional delegation are "working at the highest levels of the Pentagon" to obtain federal money for the project, noting that Bellevue Mayor Rita Sanders has become known around Washington, D.C., as "the levee mayor."

In December, NRD officials will apply for state money for the project. The NRD will ask for \$10 million to \$15 million, depending on what the military contributes.

Given the importance of the base to the entire metro area, Bellevue Councilman Steve Carmichael said he was "a little disappointed" that other local governments aren't kicking in money.

Sarpy County Board member Don Kelly has singled out the City of Papillion as a potential donor. Winkler said he approached Papillion officials about contributing some money, but they "respectfully declined" to contribute.

Papillion City Administrator Dan Hoins said it's simply a matter of tax policy, noting that his city's residents are contributing by paying taxes to the county and the NRD.

"Boundaries mean something," Hoins said. "Where do you stop?"

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County pursues Japp bond inquiry

**NRD general manager:
Allegations 'baseless'**

BY KATIE ROHMAN
editor@enterprisepub.com

The general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District is defending its use of general obligation bonds after Scott Japp, the Washington County representative on the PMRNRD board, questioned whether they were issued legally.

On Sept. 22, Japp asked the Washington County Board of Supervisors to send a letter to the PMRNRD board questioning how it is able to pass general obligation bonds. County Attorney Scott Vander Schaaf received a response from PMRNRD attorney David Newman requesting more detailed information in writing.

PMRNRD General Manager John Winkler told the Enterprise that its attorney was not able to provide a more detailed legal analysis of the situation without

additional information on Japp's "baseless allegations."

"Notably and not surprising, nothing in the documents provided identify the specific bonds the District has issued that Mr. Japp believes were issued illegally," said Winkler, who cited three state statutes supporting his argument.

"All of the bonds issued by the District have been issued pursuant to and in compliance with the law," he said.

Vander Schaaf asked Japp to provide him information about the bonds, which he received as requested; however, that information amounts to about 850 to 900 pages, he told the county board Tuesday. He requested 30 days to review the bond information.

The county board approved setting final tax levies Oct. 13, but if the county finds that the PMRNRD needs to make a correction to its levy, "it's done by them," Vander Schaaf said.

"It's not set by Washington County," County Clerk

Merry Truhlsen said.

Supervisor Steve Kruger, District 6-Arlington, said the issue is "whether they should have been able to pass this bond in the first place."

"I don't disagree that they've abused them in the past," Vander Schaaf said. If the PMRNRD needs to correct its levy and doesn't do so, the county could possibly file a lawsuit.

Supervisor Carl Lorenzen, District 4-Blair, said he still wants PMRNRD officials to "come here and explain."

Winkler said that the PMRNRD "stands ready and willing to engage with the Washington County board in a fruitful and productive exchange of information and discussion on how best the two political subdivisions can work together to best serve the public."

The board tabled the issue so Vander Schaaf could have more time to review the bond information.

Months after flooding, DeWitt residents wade

Posted: Saturday, October 31, 2015 1:00 am

Associated Press |

DEWITT, Neb. (AP) — When the storm hit in May, waist-deep water swamping houses and businesses was a visible disaster. Now, as neighbors struggle to repair damaged homes, it's become an invisible one.

Floodwaters caved in foundation walls, turned basements into dirty swimming pools, backed up sewers, destroyed furnaces and water heaters and ruined vehicles and countless personal possessions.

"The sad thing with the flood is right now, it's an invisible disaster. You drive through town, and it looks pretty good," said Liz Poessnecker, who has lived in DeWitt periodically for 46 years. "But when you look in basements, it's a whole different story. When you look in bank accounts, it's a whole different story."

The May 6 and 7 storms dropped up to 11 inches of rain on parts of southeast Nebraska. DeWitt, which sits at the confluence of Swan and Turkey Creeks and the Big Blue River, was covered in waist-deep water. Many of the town's 513 residents had to be evacuated, the Lincoln Journal Star reported.

Flood insurance was hit or miss. Some families didn't have policies because the premiums were too expensive — the town sits in a flood plain — or they no longer had a home mortgage.

After the waters receded, church groups and volunteers came in to help DeWitt clean up, but residents did a lot of the work themselves and got the job done in about a week, said Tim Garrison, a lifelong resident.

But that was only on the surface. There was still a lot of foundation and basement damage.

Last month, DeWitt Fire Department volunteers knocked on doors to get information on damage and unmet needs of residents; 258 households responded to their survey. Furnaces and water heaters were listed as a top priority.

There are eight to 10 people in town who need furnaces, which cost between \$2,500 and \$3,000 each, Garrison said.

Three furnaces are being installed, thanks to the generosity of Comforttechs Heating and Cooling, a Lincoln company that donated two furnaces, Garrison said. One of the company's customers also donated money to buy a third furnace.

The DeWitt Area Recovery Team was formed to help raise funds to pay for more furnaces and water heaters and help residents with other needs. The information obtained in the fire department's survey has been downloaded into a database.

"When I was working on the database, I periodically had to stop because my heart broke so bad for what these people are going through," said Poessnecker, a member on the team.

Garrison, chairman of the team, said caseworkers from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will use the database to determine each household's needs.

Poessnecker is concerned some residents who can't afford a new furnace will buy several space heaters, and the result could be fires this winter.

"Let's face it: It's late October, and you don't have a furnace — it's scary," she said.

She's also worried the costs to repair basements is exorbitant — based on the values of homes in cities, rather than small towns like DeWitt.

Ron Hinzman, owner of the Red Zone, said his bar sits on a high spot, so it was dry, but the basement of his home, which is on the same block, was full of water. Two basement walls caved in, and another cracked from the floodwater.

Hinzman said he and his wife, Suzanne, own their home and did not have flood insurance. The hardest part was pumping the water out of the basement so they could make repairs, which were completed a month ago.

"We're still in the process of getting a furnace put in," Hinzman said. "Basically, we went on a waiting list for everything."

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Two key departures, but The Omaha World-Herald stays in good hands



Mike Holmes

Cate Folsom

Two key departures, but The Omaha World-Herald stays in good hands By Terry Kroeger / Publisher The Omaha World-Herald POSTED: SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2015 1:00 AM

I'm writing today to convey some important changes that are on the horizon at the Omaha World-Herald. And I write this with mixed feelings as we prepare to say goodbye to two of the best newsmen in our industry.

Larry King, our vice president for news and content, plans to retire at the end of 2015. Larry just passed his 40th employment anniversary here at The World-Herald and has done an outstanding job of reporting, editing, counseling, managing and working hard for those 40 years.

In his current role, Larry has served as an adviser to editors at our dozens of newspapers across the country, negotiated and managed our syndication contracts with providers, led our marketing and sponsorship efforts and provided wise counsel to me on a wide range of matters, both in the news arena and on corporate or business issues.

Mike Holmes, our editorial page editor, plans to retire in mid-2016. Mike is capping off a 44-year career in news, with the last 11 here at The World-Herald, first as regional editor before moving over to the editorial page. Mike actually began his journalism career as a writer in the U.S. Navy, then interned at The World-Herald before beginning a lengthy career with the Associated Press. He returned to the W-H in 2004.

These men are both my friends, so I am truly happy for them as they look to their retirements. Both intend to play a good deal of golf, though they both claim to "not be any good." Anyone negotiating a game with either of them on the first tee should be wary of such sandbagging.

While I'm happy for Larry and Mike, it causes those of us NOT looking to lower our handicaps to think about how to fill the shoes of these true industry luminaries.

I am pleased to report that we have selected some extremely able staffers to replace Larry and Mike.

Larry will be replaced by parceling out his responsibilities to some very capable managers in our company. Mike Reilly, who is the executive editor of the Omaha World-Herald, and Kris Worrell, executive editor in Atlantic City, New Jersey, will both become vice presidents of their respective newspapers and will become the counselors for our editors across the country. Mike and Kris are two seasoned news veterans, and this role is, indeed, in terrific hands.

Mike Reilly also will assume responsibility for our news content contracts, as well as our role at Media of Nebraska, which addresses important legal issues such as the public's right to know and other First Amendment matters.

Larry's marketing and public relations responsibilities will be taken on by Rick Thornton, who joined us this year from our sister paper in Richmond, Virginia. Rick has been a great addition to both Omaha and The World-Herald.

Mike Holmes' editorial page responsibilities will be taken by Cate Folsom, a 35-year World-Herald veteran who has overseen local and regional coverage during much of her career. Cate will bring sound judgment and strong writing and editing skills to this important job. She will work with Mike Holmes starting in January, and I look forward to working closely with Cate as she takes command of the editorial page department.

I also am pleased to tell you that Connie White will become metropolitan-regional editor, replacing Cate in January. Connie started at The World-Herald in 2000 and previously worked as managing editor of the Columbus Telegram.

While we lament the approaching departures of Larry and Mike, I'm pleased to report that your newspaper is in fine hands as we turn to experienced colleagues to handle these very important jobs.

Thank you for your readership. We will continue to work hard to provide the most credible, complete news report available to our readers.

Contact the publisher: terry.kroeger@owh.com

Blair to apply for federal grant to complete trail system

Washington Co. Enterprise, Katie Rohman 11-3-15



A City of Blair trail connectors project will include 14th Street to 10th Street, and the extension of the trail on 10th Street from Grant Street to Jackson Street.

The City of Blair is applying for a federal grant to develop and construct connectors to complete its trail system.

The project includes connectors for the Dana Trail from 24th and Nebraska streets east to 13th Street, and from 14th Street to 10th Street. It also includes the extension of the trail on 10th Street from Grant Street to Jackson Street.

The Dana Trail connector would complete the loop of the trail system along Nebraska Street, tying the Depot Trail connector, which was completed a couple of years ago. The trail on 10th Street will loop that trail to the other trails on the north side of Blair.



The City of Blair project includes trail connectors for the Dana Trail from 24th and Nebraska streets east to 13th Street, and from 14th Street to 10th Street. It also includes the extension of the trail on 10th Street from Grant Street to Jackson Street. Pictured is the railroad crossing at Jackson Street, River Road and Blaine Street

"It will give you a nice internal trail system," Director of Public Works Al Schoemaker told the city council Oct. 27.

The total estimated cost is \$1.14 million. The city will request 80 percent funding from the Transportation Alternative Program (TAP); Blair would be required to pay \$228,000. It would then apply for possible cost-share funding from the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, which would pay half of the cost. The net cost of the project for the city would be \$114,162.

The city council unanimously voted to apply for the grant; council member Marty Shepard, Ward 4, was absent.

Water lost in 2014 irrigation season prompts second lawsuit

POSTED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2015 12:30 AM | UPDATED: 12:41 AM, THU NOV 5, 2015.

Water lost in 2014 irrigation season prompts second lawsuit By Lori Potter / World-Herald News Service The Omaha World-Herald

CAMBRIDGE, Neb. — A second lawsuit seeking damages for lost irrigation water has been filed on behalf of Frenchman Cambridge Irrigation District water users.

According to a press release from the district, the new lawsuit seeking “just compensation” for damages during the 2014 irrigation season was filed Friday in Furnas County District Court after a favorable ruling in September on a similar lawsuit over 2013 water allocations.

In that Sept. 28 ruling, District Judge James E. Doyle IV ruled on a motion by defendants — the State of Nebraska and Nebraska Department of Natural Resources — to dismiss a class-action lawsuit on behalf of Frenchman Cambridge water users who did not receive their full 2013 water allocation.

The irrigators’ attorney, Dave Domina of Omaha, said the farmers contend that the state took surface water that was available to the irrigators for 2013 crop production and gave it to Kansas to comply with the Republican River Compact.

Doyle dismissed the 2013 lawsuit’s claim that the state failed to regulate groundwater use that has depleted streamflows and surface water supplies. He quoted several Nebraska Supreme Court decisions that concluded that the Department of Natural Resources has no statutory duty to regulate groundwater to protect surface water appropriations and no independent authority to do so.

However, Doyle decided that the compensation issue should return to Furnas County District Court for a decision.

Senate OKs voiding federal water rules; 'We're not giving up on this,' Fischer says as veto looms

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Senate OKs voiding federal water rules; 'We're not giving up on this,' Fischer says as veto looms By Joseph Morton / World-Herald Bureau The Omaha World-Herald

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday approved a resolution that would void new environmental rules that are aimed at protecting smaller waterways from pollution but have riled farmers and ranchers concerned about the potential burden on their operations.

All four senators from Nebraska and Iowa supported the resolution authored by Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa. The Senate approved it 53 to 44.

In a statement following the vote, Ernst called it an important step in shutting down the new rules, known as Waters of the United States.

“It is abundantly clear that the WOTUS rule is ill-conceived and breeds uncertainty, confusion, and more red tape that threatens the livelihoods of many in Iowa and across the country,” Ernst said.

Republicans predicted that the resolution would pass the House but conceded that they won't have the votes to override an expected presidential veto.

The Obama administration says the rules issued by the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in May would safeguard drinking water for 117 million Americans. In its veto threat, the White House said that more than 1 in 3 Americans get their drinking water from rivers, lakes, and reservoirs that are at risk of pollution from upstream sources.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, noted that federal judges have already put the rules in limbo while they weigh legal challenges. More than half of the states have sued over the rules.

“As written, this rule could result in significant red tape and expense for Iowa farmers, home builders, golf course managers, construction companies and probably a lot of other people as these businesses continue routine decisions about how best to use the land and run their businesses,” Grassley said after the vote.

Sens. Ben Sasse and Deb Fischer, both Nebraska Republicans, joined advocates on a call with reporters to highlight their opposition to the rule, along with Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., who has helped lead the charge against it in the House.

Sasse predicted that the rules ultimately will be eliminated one way or another and supported all legislative avenues to achieve that.

Fischer noted that she held a field hearing on the subject in Nebraska earlier this year and pointed to home builders who say the cost of new houses has been driven up by the cost of regulations.

“We’re not giving up on this,” Fischer said. “This is action by the EPA that affects everybody in this country.”

The EPA has argued that criticism of the rules is overblown. Since the rules were originally proposed last year, the agency has been working to clear up misconceptions, such as some critics’ assertions that average backyard puddles would be regulated. In addition, the EPA says, current exemptions from the Clean Water Act for farming practices, including plowing, seeding and the movement of livestock, will continue.

This report contains material from the Associated Press.

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World-Herald editorial: Concerns rise about EPA water rules

POSTED: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2015 1:10 AM

World-Herald editorial: Concerns rise about EPA water rules

The U.S. Senate sent an important message this week when it voted, 53 to 44, to pass a much-needed measure aimed at restraining the Environmental Protection Agency's "waters of the U.S." regulations.

The heavy-handed rules, on hold at present due to federal court action, require costly permitting for many bodies of water not previously subject to federal control when landowners want to dredge or put in drainage ditches or terracing.

Wednesday was authored by Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, and backed by all Nebraska and Iowa senators. The U.S. House is expected to take up similar legislation. Passage is likely, since the House previously approved a bill with similar intent.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, correctly characterized the EPA regulations when he said that "as written, this rule could result in significant red tape and expense for Iowa farmers, homebuilders, golf course managers, construction companies and probably a lot of other people as these businesses continue routine decisions about how best to use the land and run their businesses."

John Winkler, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, has said the EPA's approach amounts to "federal overreach." The new rules, he says, are "inflexible, unfunded, one-size-fits-all federal regulation."

The appropriate course would be for the administration to put the rules on hold and work constructively with the states to craft a practical, balanced alternative.

Although President Barack Obama has said he will veto any legislation seeking to block the new regulations, the administration needs to pause and reflect on the wide range of concerns that have surfaced over the rules' practical burdens and constitutionality:

» Majorities in both houses of Congress have now voted in favor of legislation directing the EPA to step back and revamp the regulations.

» Twenty-nine states have filed legal action against the rules.

» Two federal courts — a U.S. district judge in North Dakota and a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Cincinnati — have put the rules on hold. Two judges on that appeals court panel wrote that legal challenges to the regulations have “a substantial possibility of success.” It is “far from clear,” the judges said, that the rules comply with guidelines set out in a 2006 U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

» This week, 11 Democratic U.S. senators jointly signed a letter to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy voicing concern over aspects of the rules. The senators wrote that while they did not support legislation by Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., similar to Ernst’s resolution, federal regulators should “provide clearer and concise implementation guidance to ensure that the rule is effectively and consistently interpreted.”

“Farmers, ranchers, water utilities, local governments and contractors deserve this clarity and certainty,” the letter added. “Should the EPA not provide this clarity or enforce this rule in a way that erodes traditional exemptions, we reserve the right to support efforts in the future to revise the rule.”

As all of this shows, it’s undeniable that legitimate concerns exist about what the EPA is trying to do. The administration cannot dismiss these concerns as the mere complaints of extremist cranks or hard-line partisans.

The best course is for the EPA to press the pause button and work with the states to recast the rules. There’s a positive consensus to be achieved, one that provides a balanced approach and much-needed clarity.

World-Herald editorial: Offutt Air Force Base merits improved levees

Posted: Tuesday, November 10, 2015 1:10 am

The people who work at Offutt Air Force Base protect our nation and our hometowns.

The base is home to the Air Force's 55th Wing and the U.S. Strategic Command, which oversees our nuclear deterrent. It employs more than 10,000 people and adds more than \$1.3 billion a year to the Midlands' economy.

So when Offutt needs help, it's an all-hands-on-deck moment for local, state and federal officials with ties to the Midlands.

The feds no longer consider the 19 miles of levee adequate to protect the base from Missouri River and Papillion Creek flooding. The cost of getting them up to snuff is \$25 million.

Without improving the levees to new federal disaster standards, much of Offutt-area land could be reclassified as flood plain, leaving the base's future in doubt. Even recent federal money to repave an Offutt runway would have been in jeopardy if not for the commitments of regional governments to act on the levees.

Failure to improve them would put Offutt at increasing risk of stagnation or being targeted for closure. That must not happen.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and a Bellevue-led group of local governments are doing all they can to show state and federal leaders their commitment to funding the federally required levee improvements. The City of Bellevue and the Sarpy County Board recently pledged up to \$3 million apiece toward the levee repairs. That's a good start. The City of Omaha is next on the list of local governments preparing to commit to protecting this strategically important national asset.

Committing some local dollars to the levee project can help secure millions more in state and federal funds. The broader the show of local support, the greater the chances of success.

It's clearly in the interest of our entire region to make sure Offutt's place in the defense hierarchy is secure and its long-term potential maximized.



Offutt study

The control tower and bird strike avoidance radar system at Offutt. Among topics the study is looking at are nearby conditions or obstructions affecting military pilots.

Washington and the Pentagon are more likely to respond to funding requests from communities and states that show unified commitment to an important federal asset like Offutt.

Map revision could remove homes from floodplain

Washington Co. Enterprise, Katie Rohman Updated Nov 9, 2015

When the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued its new flood maps, about 90 structures that weren't in Blair's floodplain were designated as such.

Steve and Donna Jones' house on South 17th Street in Blair was built about 9 feet above the flood stage in 1978. It is adjacent to an unnamed tributary often unofficially referred to as "South Creek." After the remapping, their house was moved from a floodplain to a floodway.

But the major concern is the change in their flood insurance rates. They learned they could eventually have to pay as much as \$14,000 per year.

Their son, Doug, who lives directly behind them with his wife, Emma, bought his 1800s-era home in February 2013. About a year later, he was notified his insurance would increase from about \$550 per year to \$5,500 per year.

Both Jones families, however, got temporary relief with a law passed in 2014.

The Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 was authored to de-subsidize FEMA. The Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014 repealed and modified certain provisions of the Biggert-Waters Act, and slowed some flood insurance rate increases to policyholders hit by insurance premium increases in 2013 and early 2014.

On Oct. 1, 2013, the subsidized rates for pre-flood insurance rate map buildings began to phase out. At renewal, nonresidential policyholders received a 25 percent rate increase.

The rate increases are set to continue until rates reflect the property's true risk. Rates are at full premium in 2018.

The Jones families don't know what the future will bring if they have to pay full premium rates, but they might never have to find out.

The Blair City Council approved a contract in January with FYRA Engineering of Omaha to design a stormwater detention facility north of Hollow Road along U.S. Highway 30. FYRA determined that with some additional surveying, it may be possible to significantly reduce the floodplain with a FEMA map revision, an engineer told the city council on Oct. 27.

According to Director of Public Works Al Schoemaker, 85-90 percent of structures could possibly be removed from the floodplain. Most of the structures now in FEMA's floodplain are west of U.S. Highway 75, in the area between Butler and South streets. A stormwater detention facility was estimated at \$3 million to \$4 million; this plan could cost less than \$100,000, Schoemaker said.

The survey is expected to be done in early 2016, and then the city can submit a formal request to FEMA for a map revision. FEMA will have 90 days to review the city's request, but it could take up to a year for FEMA to secure funding. It will cost the city an estimated \$5,000 to \$8,000 to submit its request.

Those structures removed from the floodplain would not be required by the federal government to pay for flood insurance, but mortgage companies may still mandate it, although the cost would be much less, Schoemaker said.

Omaha World Herald Public Pulse, November 11, 2015

Invest in Offutt instead

The juxtaposition of Tuesday's editorial on the need for levee upgrades near Offutt Air Force Base and Public Pulse writer Jane Wilson's suggestions for other uses for \$10 million dollars of taxpayer money got me thinking.

Wouldn't it be far more productive for Omaha to commit the \$10 million toward levee improvements rather than help a business move from one place in the city to another place?

Filling in the downtown skyline at the expense of other parts of the city (remember, there will be a vacant campus if HDR moves from its current location) just doesn't seem worth it to me when the same money can help maintain the base, which employs 10,000 in the metro area.

Stephen Bartelt, Omaha