

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager's Report

DATE: August 8, 2011

FROM: John Winkler, General Manager

- A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities for the month of July, 2011, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**
1. The District has hired Justin Novak to replace Terry Schumacher as the Blair Field Representative. Mr. Novak will officially begin the new position on Monday, August 15th. Justin started with the District March of 2005 on the Park Staff and was promoted to Surveyor/Instrument Person December, 2007. I am looking forward to working with Justin and I would like to wish him luck in his new position.
 2. The District has received a letter from Evelyn Maslonka, the Program Assistant in the Tekamah Field Office, announcing her retirement. Evelyn has proudly served the District for more than 34 years and her contributions will be greatly missed!
 3. The District received the June 2011 newsletter from the Nebraska Society of Professional Engineers Eastern Chapter. The Whitted Creek Project was recognized as the award recipient for "The Engineering Excellence Award".
- 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 for the month of July, 2011. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.
- D. **CURRENT AND ON-GOING PROJECTS – P-MRNRD LEGAL COUNSEL:** No update.
- E. **NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE – FIRST SESSION HEARING SCHEDULE:** The interim Hearing Schedule of the Nebraska Unicameral is attached.
- F. **NEWS CLIPS:**
- ✓ July 13, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – Nebraska Seeks Disaster Declaration
 - ✓ July 14, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – Senator: Corps Short of Funds
 - ✓ July 14, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – Zorinsky Lake Refill Begins

- ✓ July 19, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – Papio NRD Expects no Tax Increase
- ✓ July 20, 2011, Bellevue Leader article – Seepage Berms Building
- ✓ July 21, 2011, Dakota Co. Star article – Farmer Questions NRD Practices on Pigeon Creek, Area along Highway 35 floods for third straight year
- ✓ July 26, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – New Editor for W-H Editorial Page
- ✓ July 26, 2011, Douglas County Post-Gazette – No tax increase in 2012 NRD Budget
- ✓ July 27, 2011, Bellevue Leader article – On a Mission Close to Home
- ✓ July 30, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – Officials sure Levees will Hold
- ✓ August 2, 2011, Omaha World Herald article – Levees may not be done by spring
- ✓ August 2, 2011, Bellevue Leader article – Guard taken off Levee Patrol

/pt/Winkler/GM Reports/2011/august

July, 2011 Information/Education Report

Information

- Continued work on Summer Spectrum
- Continued work on Prairie Fire Tabloid article
- Updated Flood Fight web page and other web pages
- Completed budget recommendations
- Continued work on Trails brochure update
- Began scripting for Spring 2012 Public Service Campaign
- Began work on Blair Office opening
- Completed employee appraisal

Education

- Go Play Adventure Book deliveries to distribution locations
- Attended FNA Strategic Planning Board Meeting
- Updated the MORE Nature Website
- Continued working with Lanoha on Nature Playground at Chalco
- Met with NGPC regarding archery in summer camps
- Girls in the Wild Summer Camp – 21 9-14 year old girls
 - Topics: geocaching, edible plants, kayaking, fishing, archery, Dutch oven cooking, camping
 - Planned, coordinated and facilitated all activities
- Hamilton Heights – nature hike + animal adaptations programming = 65 5-12 year olds
- Created and finalized August E-newsletter
- Facilitated and planned PLT: Early Experiences and Growing Up WILD curriculum workshop – 20 educators attended
- Continued planning for World O! Water Festival in August
- Continued prep and planning for NRD Summer Camps
- Modified perches in owl enclosure/ordered owl food
- Mailed pictures of summer camps to OWH for Community Connections Section



Nebraska Society of Professional Engineers

A state society of the National Society of Professional Engineers
Eastern Chapter

June 2011

2010-2011

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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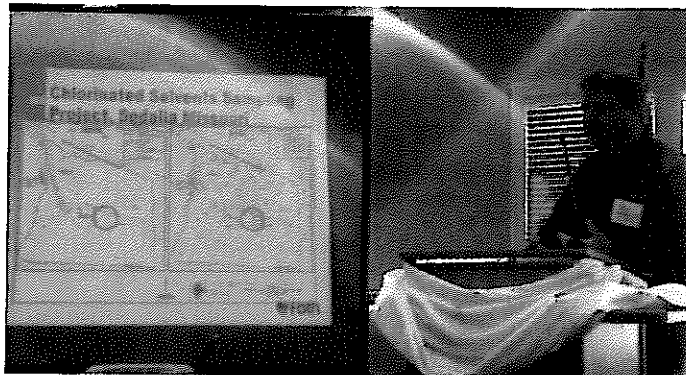
NSPE Membership

applications may be

obtained at

www.nspenebraska.org

Listen to the Trees



Matt Shurtliff, Foth Infrastructure & Environment, discussing a project where Taproot Technology was utilized.

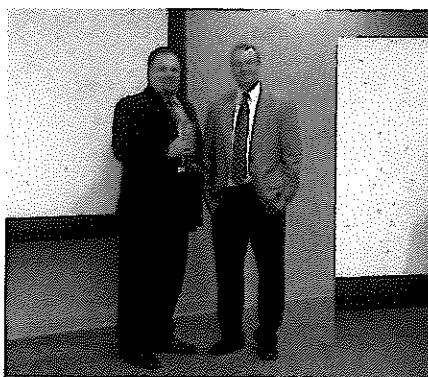
In April, the joint SAME/NeSPE meeting was held at the Field Club of Omaha. Matt Shurtliff, with Foth Infrastructure & Environment, presented on Taproot Technology and how it is being used to delineate subsurface contamination. Matt noted how simple cores from surrounding trees can help identify and map out these plumes in a more efficient and less costly method versus traditional soil drilling techniques. The sampling of trees is also a primary indicator of natural attenuation, providing actual proof the contamination is being removed. Matt also noted the technology is growing in its ability to sample for more types of contamination, such as fuel and explosives compounds.

Eastern Chapter Recognizes Award Winners

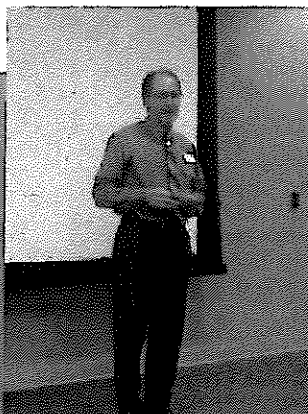
On May 24th the Eastern Chapter held their annual Awards banquet and Election of Officers at the Scoot Conference Center. It was a well-attended event and several deserving individuals were recognized for their achievements.

Award winners included Paul Woodward as Young Engineer of the Year, Maher Tadros as Engineer of the Year, Bob Matlock for the Meritorious Service Award, and Louie Caparelli for the Distinguished Service Award.

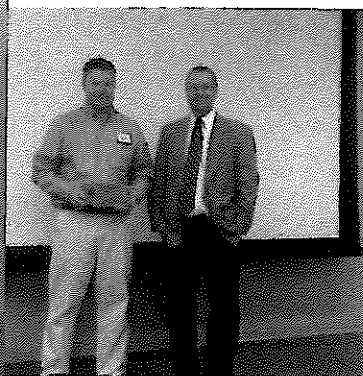
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1st Photo: Paul Woodward – YEOY, Steve McCullough – Awards Chair
2nd Photo: Maher Tadros – EOY, Steve McCullough

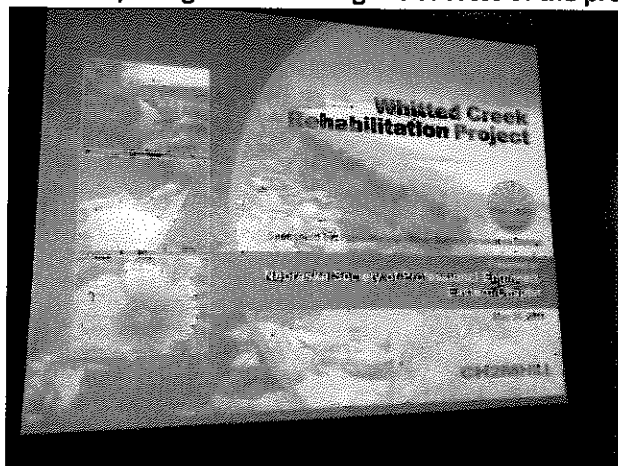


3rd Photo: Louie Caparelli – Distinguished Service



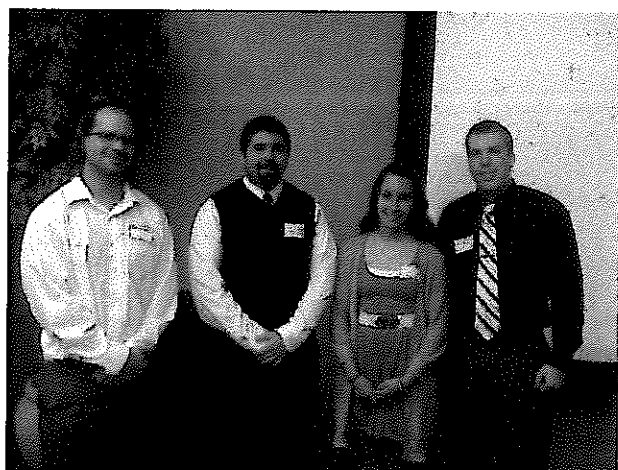
4th Photo: Bob Matlock – Meritorious Service, Steve McCullough

The Engineering Excellence Award was given to the Whitted Creek Stream Rehabilitation Project. The project focused on returning an eroding channel to a useful and habitable feature residential, recreational and public properties. A presentation by Martin Cleveland with the Papio NRD, and Emily Holtzclaw with CH2MHill, was given describing the success of the project.



Pictured: Martin Cleveland and Emily Holtzclaw.

Three Scholarships were announced at the luncheon as well, including two high school student winners, Hunter Severin and Laura Triplett. They will be attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Eastern Chapter also awarded a UNO scholarship to Chris Beaty.



Finally the new Eastern Chapter Officers were elected including Bob Matlock, President, Paul Vovk, President Elect, and Brock Beran, Vice President.

2011 Scholarship Winners. Pictured left to right: Brock Beran – Scholarships Chair, Hunter Severin, Laura Triplett, and Chris Beaty.

July, 2011

[illegible]

**NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL LEGISLATURE
ONE HUNDRED SECOND LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION
WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF INTERIM COMMITTEE HEARINGS
July 29, 2011**

Wednesday, August 3, 2011

Health and Human Services Committee

10:00 a.m. - Bosselman Conference Center, Heartland Events Center, 700 East Stolley Park Road, Grand Island, NE

LR37 (*Health and Human Services Committee*) Child Welfare Reform

Monday, August 15, 2011

Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee and Health and Human Services Committee

9:00 a.m. - Room 1524, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

Joint committee briefing on insurance exchange program by the Nebraska Department of Insurance

Open to the public, invited testimony only.

Friday, August 26, 2011

LB603 (Children's Behavioral Health Oversight) Committee

9:00 a.m. - Room 1510, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

Briefing on Medicaid changes affecting psychiatric residential treatment facilities and updates on LB603 programs

Open to the public, invited testimony only.

Friday, September 16, 2011

Urban Affairs Committee

9:00 a.m. - Room 1510, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

LR203 (*Mello*) Interim study to examine issues surrounding vacant residential and commercial properties

LR207 (*Dubas*) Interim study to examine the formation and governance of sanitary and improvement districts

LR338 (*Urban Affairs Committee*) Interim study to examine the boundaries and taxing authority of transit authorities

Monday, October 3, 2011

Education Committee

9:00 a.m. - Room 1525, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

LR211 (*Education Committee*) Interim study to examine the offering of elementary and secondary courses and high school diplomas through electronic means

Monday, November 7, 2011

Education Committee

9:00 a.m. - Room 1525, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

LR265 (*Mello*) Interim study to examine the feasibility of implementing a Career Readiness Certificate program

If auxiliary aids or reasonable accommodations are needed for attendance at a hearing, please call the office of the Clerk of the Legislature at (402) 471-2271, or for persons with hearing and/or speech impairments, please call the Nebraska Relay System at (800) 833-7352 TTY or (800) 833-0920 Voice (24 hours notice is requested). Advance notice of ten business days is needed when requesting an interpreter.

*The Interim Hearing Schedule is also available via the Internet at **www.nebraskalegislature.gov***

Published Wednesday July 13, 2011

Nebraska seeks disaster declaration

By Andrew J. Nelson
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

ADVERTISEMENT

Nebraska's governor on Wednesday requested that President Barack Obama sign a major disaster declaration for the state. Gov. Dave Heineman's formal request cited the flooding, severe storms, high winds, tornadoes, rain and hail that has occurred in all or parts of 29 Nebraska counties since May.

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency's preliminary damage estimate to public infrastructure exceeds \$14 million and is expected to increase. The cost of protective measures adds at least another \$40 million.

Heineman asks Obama to declare a major disaster for Nebraska in two categories: public and individual assistance.

Public assistance would go to help local, state and tribal governments, as well as some nonprofit organizations, in 27 eligible Nebraska counties. It can help with eligible costs to remove storm debris, take emergency protective measures and repair or replace disaster-damaged roads, bridges, public buildings and critical facilities, such as water, sewer and public power systems and other public facilities.

Those counties are: Buffalo, Burt, Cass, Cedar, Chase, Cheyenne, Dakota, Dodge, Douglas, Dundy, Garden, Hamilton, Hayes, Knox, Lincoln, Logan, Nemaha, Otoe, Phelps, Polk, Red Willow, Richardson, Sarpy, Scotts Bluff, Thurston, Washington and York.

Individual assistance was requested for Boyd, Buffalo, Burt, Cass, Dakota, Dixon, Douglas, Knox, Polk, Sarpy and Washington Counties.

The program is designed to help offset some costs of damaged homes and private buildings but would not cover someone's entire loss, said Jodie Fawl, a NEMA spokesman.

A major disaster declaration would be different from the emergency declaration the president approved June 18. That declaration was designed to help the state in its flooding response and also did not provide assistance for individual homeowners and businesses.

The new declaration would help more with recovery efforts.

Obama has authorized a major disaster declaration for six Iowa counties along the Missouri River. That approval covers the public assistance program.

Contact the writer:
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Senator: Corps short of funds

By Joseph Morton
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON — The Army Corps of Engineers does not have enough money in its emergency fund for needed repairs to the nation's flood-protection system after the Missouri River floodwaters recede, U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., told The World-Herald following a Wednesday meeting with top corps officials.

Nelson, Sen. Mike Johanns, R-Neb., and Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, were among senators from seven Missouri River region states who met on Capitol Hill with Maj. Gen. William Grisoli, the corps' deputy commanding general for civilian and emergency operations, and Brig. Gen. John McMahon, commander of the corps' Northwestern Division, which oversees the Missouri River. An aide attended for Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

Nelson said he asked during the meeting if the corps' emergency fund could cover this year's damage to the Midwest's levees.

"The short answer was 'no,'" Nelson said.

It may be some time before the corps can determine how much money it needs for repairs, Nelson said, but the corps expects to come back to Congress for those funds.

Wednesday's meeting was the first of what could be many for the "Missouri River Working Group" of 14 senators from states affected by this year's controlled-release flooding.

In the past, upriver and downriver states have engaged in heated disagreements over management of the Missouri and its competing purposes, such as recreation and water for barge traffic.

But senators leaving Wednesday described the gathering as calm, even "somber," in light of the crisis at hand.

"When it comes to flood management and flood prevention and controls, we are all in it together — from Montana on," Nelson said.

Johanns used the opportunity to pitch to his fellow senators a proposal to help people whose flood insurance policies have been deemed invalid because of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's "flood-in-progress" rules. That proposal passed the House of Representatives this week.

A primary topic of the meeting was the emphasis given to flood prevention and control in the corps' river management bible, the master manual.

Several senators, including Grassley, said the book should give flood prevention greater weight. "We need to unite around the ... purpose of flood protection," he said.

The group also discussed the flexibility that the corps should have to adjust its dam releases in the future in an effort to avoid similar flooding.

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., suggested the group meet monthly through the rest of the year and was impressed with the tone of the first discussion.

"For a Missouri River meeting, it was incredibly collegial and cooperative," McCaskill said. "With all the fighting going on in the Capitol right now, this has been the highlight of my month."

Contact the writer:

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Published Thursday July 14, 2011

Zorinsky Lake refilling begins

By Nancy Gaarder

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

ADVERTISEMENT

The refilling of Zorinsky Lake has begun after it was drained for seven months in an effort to kill off the invasive zebra mussel.

The Army Corps of Engineers closed the gates to the lake Tuesday.

Victory has been cautiously declared, but the zebra mussel is notoriously difficult to kill off. The goal behind draining the lake was to freeze out any living mussels. Because dirt clogged access to the drain, the lake was not completely emptied. As a result, it is possible that some mussels survived, especially around the 168th Street bridge, officials say.

How quickly the lake refills depends on the weather, said Jolene Hulsing, natural resources manager for the corps.

Dave Tunink of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission said the state probably will restock the lake this summer or fall with bass, bluegill and channel catfish.

Hulsing said the lake could fill in three months if rains are heavy, based on data from the wet year of 1993, or could take as long as 15 months if the region heads into a dry period like 2003.

Hulsing said many dead mussels were found during shoreline inspections. Water samples this year yielded no larvae. Additionally, no larvae have been found in other area lakes.

As of Tuesday, the lake was at a sea-level elevation of 1,092 feet. It will be considered full when the water level has risen 18 feet.

Local, state and federal officials agreed to drain the popular lake because the alternative was to allow the mussel a shot at taking over. Zebra mussels, their shells sharp as shards of glass, adhere to hard surfaces and clog inlets. The mollusks also can help deplete fish stocks by competing for food.

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Published Jul 19, 2011

Published Tuesday July 19, 2011

Papio NRD expects no tax increase

By Kevin Cole

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

For the fifth consecutive year, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District expects to pass a budget with no tax increase.

John Winkler, general manager of the NRD, said Monday that the tax levy has held at the same level or dropped every year since 2008.

The proposed 2012 budget calls for a property tax levy of .032753, the same as in 2011. That means that the owner of property valued at \$100,000 would pay \$32.75 in property taxes next year to support NRD projects and programs.

"This (budget) is being proposed despite the elimination of a half-million dollars in state aid to the NRD and the historic Missouri River flood fight in which NRD levees are protecting Offutt Air Force Base, portions of Bellevue and Omaha's Papillion Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant," Winkler said.

Winkler said the board of directors proposed a budget of \$83.6 million, with property taxes paying for \$16.81 million of it.

NRD revenue includes the tax levy, bonds, federal and state cost-sharing for specific projects and income from special assessment landowners.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD area includes all of Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties, plus the eastern 60 percent of Burt and Thurston Counties.

The NRD board of directors will hold a public hearing and vote on a final budget at its Aug. 11 meeting.

Contact the writer: 402-444-1272, kevin.cole@owh.com

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Seepage berms building

By Scott Stewart
Leader Staff Writer

Not much has changed in the past couple of weeks with the flooding situation, a city spokesman said Tuesday.

Phil Davidson, the city's community relations coordinator, said the unified command that includes the City of Bellevue, Sarpy County, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and others continues to prepare for the possibility of a flooding disaster while monitoring the Papio NRD's levee system. The unified command continues to meet regularly to monitor the situation.

Davidson said among the ongoing projects is an effort to secure some anti-venom for the Bellevue Medical Center in case of a bite from a poisonous snake. The Bellevue Police Department and the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office are also supporting a construction effort at the levees near Haworth Park.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers awarded a contract last week to construct about 400 feet of emergency seepage

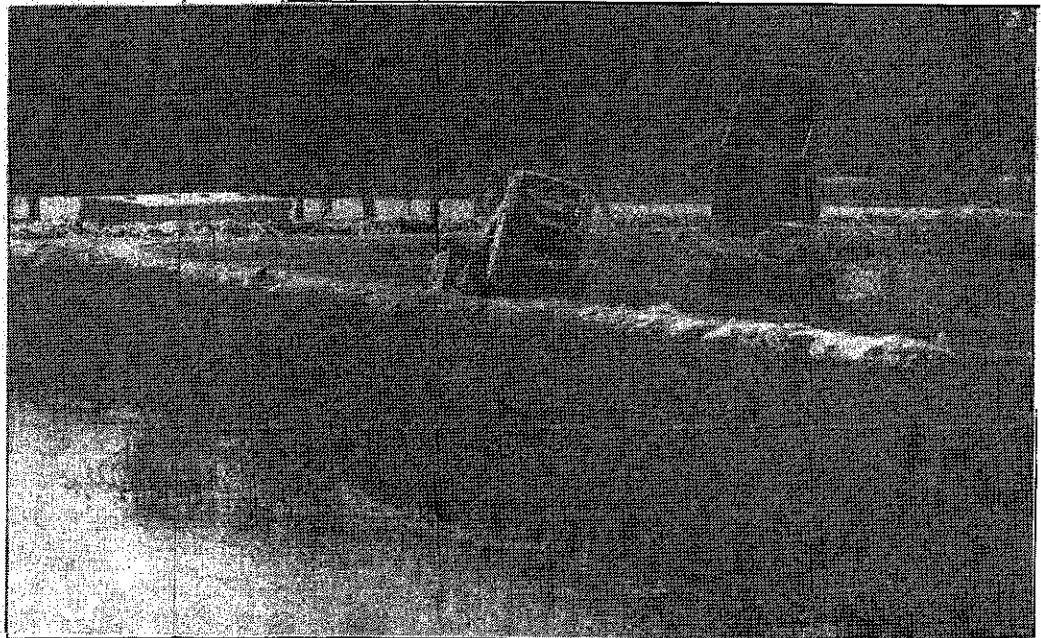
berms along the Papio NRD levees near Haworth Park, according to a press release.

The levees provide flood risk reduction for the Papio Creek Waste Water Treatment Plant southeast of Offutt Air Force Base.

A seepage berm is a protective barrier bordering a levee to allow excess water pressure to seep through the levee and into the berm.

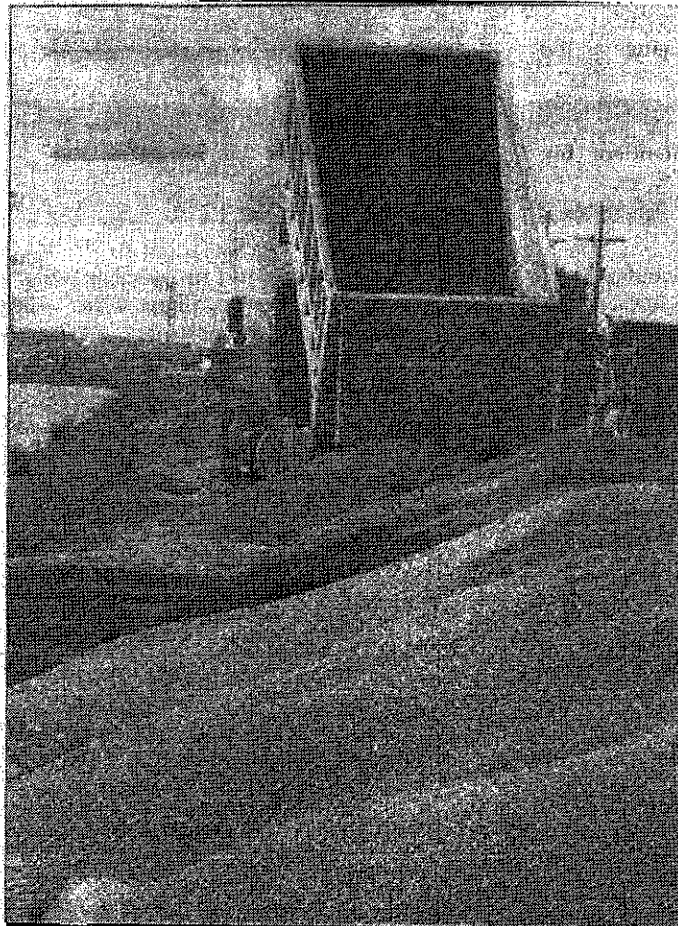
The \$146,000 contract was awarded to DPS Construction

Inc. of Omaha. Work began this weekend and was expected to be finished by Wednesday if not earlier. The levee near Haworth Park was reinforced about two weeks ago, and the new seepage berm is an extension of that effort.

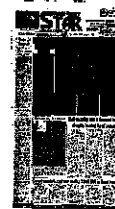


Photos by Scott Stewart

A crew works on building a seepage berm along a levee in Haworth Park on Tuesday morning.



A dump truck delivers gravel to Haworth Park on Tuesday morning as part of DPS Construction Inc.'s effort to build seepage berms along the nearby levees.



Farmer questions NRD practices on Pigeon Creek

Area along Highway 35 floods for third straight year

By Jim Headley
Star Managing Editor
Email: dakotacountystar@gmail.com

Ken Baker probably won't have a very good year farming this summer as most of his land is under water.

Unfortunately a bad crop is something he's getting used to.

The flooding, that has consumed Baker's farm, is not connected with the flooding Missouri River but rather from the mismanagement of Pigeon Creek by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) according to Baker.

"Everyone thinks this is associated with the river problem, but we've dealt with this problem three years in a row now - but this is the worst," Baker said.

Several thousand acres of farm ground are flooded near Hubbard along the Pigeon Creek drainage.

Baker said they constructed a decent drainage system along Pigeon Creek many years ago.

"Our forefathers spent a lot of time, a lot of money and a lot of effort. We used to have a local ditch board who collected the taxes and who maintained it. If something ever went wrong or if something didn't work right under the bank of the dike or if the dike needed to be dredged out, they would take our tax money and they would always have somebody working on the dike to maintain it," Baker said.

Times changed and now "we've given that power over to Papio-Missouri NRD. I don't know how that even happened - I guess we thought they had even deeper pockets than our local people did. We thought we'd really get things done," Baker said.

Instead, the Pigeon Creek drainage is not being well maintained according to Baker.

"Since they took it over, I don't think they have done any dredging on it. The problem with Pigeon Creek is that it is silted in and it doesn't drain," Baker said.

According to Baker, the banks of Pigeon Creek near Hubbard don't contain the wa-

ter as it wanders out of the dikes and onto Highway 35.

"The water escapes and gets out of the banks - the banks are not adequate. It runs down the highway right away and spreads out for miles. That would be the easiest first - to try to contain the water," Baker said adding that the dike in that area only runs half-full as "the water is escaping out the bottom."

For years, the NRD has been working on building a system of dikes and dams in the area to control drainage waters. They have one large dam left to build along Pigeon Creek near Hubbard.

"They have been telling us that for years. I think the land prices have escalated to the point where they can't afford to buy the ground from farmers. They keep dangling that carrot in front of us and you know that (the dam) would solve our problem. They have not even acquired any land as far as I know. The farmers I have talked to that have had offers just laughed. I have just given up on that project. They just dangle that out in front of

us to keep us hanging on with something to hope for. They need to maintain what we have," Baker said.

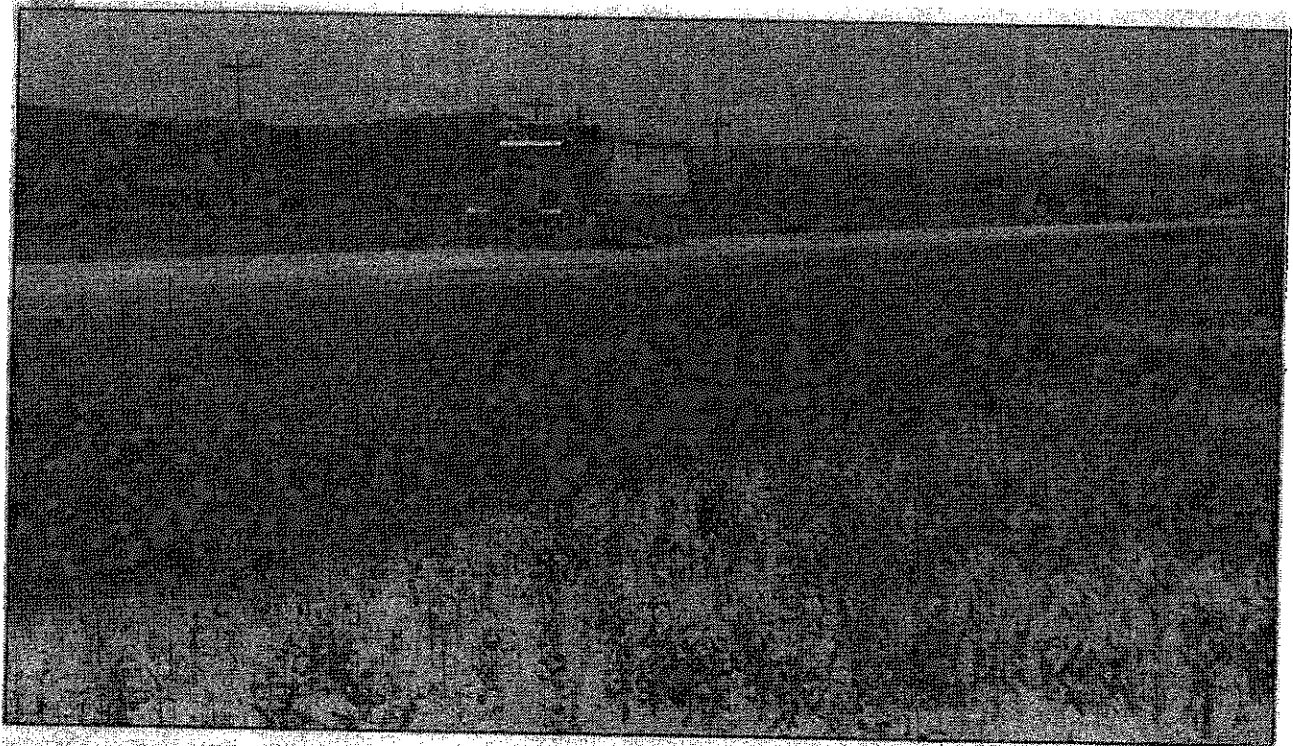
Meanwhile, as the dream of a nice new dam seems to fade away, "our problems just keep getting worse here," according to Baker.

He questioned if the dam project is 10, 15 or more years away, saying, "We're going to go out of business down below here. There are probably 2,000 or 3,000 acres out there under water."

Baker said he wants the NRD to answer to landowners about why they won't maintain the Pigeon Creek dikes.

"I can't see them building more upstream from us when they can't even maintain what they have now. Back when it was locally controlled they were dredging Pigeon Creek all the time so it would actually drain," Baker said.

Repeated calls and messages to John Winkler, general manager of Papio-Missouri River NRD in Omaha, went unanswered while other local NRD employees refused to comment on the Pigeon Creek flooding.



As the waters of Pigeon Creek escape their banks near Hubbard, farmers and motorists exist with the threat of flooding. Between 2,000 and 3,000 acres are under water for the third year in a row according to Ken Baker, a farmer in the area.

Photo by Jim Headley/Dakota County Star

W-H
Published Tuesday July 26, 2011

New editor for W-H editorial page

The World-Herald is invigorating its daily editorial page with the naming of veteran newsroom editor Michael Holmes to lead its staff.

Holmes takes over as editorial page editor effective immediately, Publisher Terry Kroeger announced Monday.

"Readers will see forceful, clearly stated opinions on a broad array of local and regional issues under Holmes' leadership," Kroeger said.

"Our basic philosophy will not change. We treasure our tradition of common-sense, fair-minded conservatism and independence," Kroeger said. "Mike's job is to build on that tradition — and build readership — with interesting, entertaining, plainspoken and strongly-stated views."

Holmes said he welcomed the challenge: "I hope that our opinion pages can help readers understand issues that are important to them. We won't preach. We will try to offer well-reasoned analysis and engage in a conversation with our community."

Holmes is joined in the effort by the former editorial page editor, Geitner Simmons, who will remain as senior editorial writer, as well as cartoonist Jeff Koterba, Public Pulse editor Chris Olson and editorial writers Virginia Bensheimer and Jim Anderson.

Holmes, 61, has been The World-Herald's breaking news and online editor since 2008. He also has supervised news coverage of regional politics, Iowa news, the Nebraska Legislature and military issues since returning to the newspaper's staff in 2004.

A Navy veteran of two tours in Vietnam, Holmes graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He began his newspaper career with The World-Herald and the Lincoln Journal Star before spending 27 years with the Associated Press as a reporter, editor and news executive in Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio and Texas.

As the correspondent in charge of the AP's bureau in Austin, Texas, from 1984 to 2000, he led the news service's coverage of politics and state government in the nation's second-largest state. He covered two nationally known Texas governors, Democrat Ann Richards and Republican George W. Bush.

After reporting on Bush's 2000 presidential campaign, Holmes returned to Nebraska, where as bureau chief he oversaw all AP news and business operations.

Holmes is the father of a son, Ian, a sophomore at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



No tax increase in 2012 NRD budget

At its meeting on July 15, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District Board of Directors proposed a Fiscal Year 2012 general operating budget that once again calls for no tax levy increase.

"Following final review and adoption in August, this would be the fifth consecutive year that the NRD has held steady or reduced its property tax levy," said John Winkler, NRD general manager.

"This is being proposed despite the elimination of a half million dollars in state aid to the NRD and the historic Missouri River flood fight in which NRD levees are protecting Offutt Air Force Base, portions of Bellevue and Omaha's Papillion Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant," he said.

Considerable NRD financial and staff resources are being utilized to protect these facilities that are of national and statewide importance. The levees have been bolstered and are being constantly monitored.

The proposed budget calls for a FY 2012 property tax levy of .032753, the same as the current FY 2011 tax levy. This levy would mean that the owner of property valued at \$100,000 would pay a total of \$32.75 in property taxes

next year to support NRD projects and programs. The levy is based on an estimated .5-percent increase in valuations across the District. The Papio-Missouri River NRD area includes all of Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties, plus the eastern 60 percent of Burt and Thurston Counties.

The budget outlines total spending estimated at \$83.6 million. Of this amount, \$16.81 million in revenue will be raised through the property tax levy. NRD revenue includes the tax levy, bonds, federal and state cost sharing for specific projects and income from Improvement Project Areas.

The NRD Board of Directors will hold a public hearing and vote on a final budget at its August meeting.

NRD Board chooses officers

Rick Kolowski of Omaha was elected by the Board to serve a second one-year term as chairman. Kolowski, the founding principal of Millard West High School, has served on the Board since 2005. David Klug was elected to serve a second term as vice-chairman. Klug has served on the Board since 2007 and represents

western Sarpy County.

Richard Tesar of Waterloo was re-elected as secretary and John Conley of Omaha was re-elected as treasurer. Tesar was also selected to serve another term as the representative on the Nebraska Association of Resources District's Board.



National Guard Sgt. Jillian Kinzer points out a sand boil the patrol has covered and has been monitoring. The boil is just beyond another enormous sand boil that was patched along the levee with gravel. The area is just south of Haworth Park.

Photo by Trenton Albers

Published Wednesday July 27, 2011

On a mission close to home

By Eugene Curtin
Leader Staff Writer
« Bellevue Leader
Share

Some call Columbus home, others Kennard, Shelton or Hastings.

Three of them are from Sarpy County — La Vista and Bellevue.

They are 18 strong, all members of the 110th Medical Battalion of the Nebraska Army National Guard. They have spent July patrolling 7 miles of levees protecting residents of eastern Sarpy County from the swelling waters of the Missouri River, while another battalion patrols the remaining 6 miles of levees.

Through an intense heat wave, they have battled swarms of mosquitoes spawned by standing water, snakes, skunks, badgers and beavers — all angered by this military incursion into their riverbank world.

But the ruffled rodents will just have to put up with it.

At stake are Offutt Air Force Base, the businesses and residential communities lining Harlan Lewis Road as well as homes and corn fields scattered across eastern the Sarpy landscape.

County Board Chairman Tom Richards felt moved at a recent board meeting to thank the National Guard for service he said has saved the county many thousands of dollars in overtime that would otherwise have been paid to Sarpy County deputies.

For the work must get done.

The guardsmen keep a 24-hour watch along levees stretching from the Platte River bridge in the south to Haworth Park in the north, searching for signs that they are weakening.

They arrived July 5 and will be on site until July 31, though an extension seems likely.

1st Lt. Clifford Erwin, a Kennard native who commands the operation, said there are three patrol shifts a day with six people per shift.

He said the intensely humid heat has been more challenging than the dry heat he experienced during a 2005 deployment to Iraq.

Caution, he said, has been high on the agenda.

"Being out in the sun all day you need to stay hydrated," he said. "We do a lot of buddy checks."

Responding to disaster is the specialty of the National Guard in every state, Erwin said.

"A lot of people join to do exactly this," he said. "We're proud to be out here. We're serving the community, helping our neighbors, and that's what it's all about."

"There's always talk about a possible big deployment, but the state mission is what we're here for."

Out on the levees, Sgts. Jillian Kinzer and Mary Beave are doing what they're there for, inspecting the levees around Haworth Park and the Bellevue Marina, measuring water levels and inspecting floodwater gates to make sure they're closed and not adding water to the Papio Creek. The Missouri has absorbed all the Papio Creek water it can, and is now pushing it back. The last thing they need is more water in the bloated Papio.

It takes a full shift for Kinzer and Beave to patrol the whole expanse. They are looking for holes dug by various animals that could weaken the levee. They mark them with a red flag, which alerts repair crews with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

They also keep a look out for sand boils, tiny bubbling springs that seep from below. There are many of them. If they're clear they're not likely a problem, but if they're cloudy then they may be eating away at the substance of the levy.

Again, these are marked with a red flag. If they are very numerous, NRD workers will lay down a seepage blanket, which is quite literally a very big blanket that they then cover with tons of gravel.

This is volunteer duty for Kinzer and Beave. In their civilian lives both are teachers. In their military roles, Kinzer is a dispatcher and Beave a clarinetist in Lincoln's 43rd Army Band. In Iraq, Kinzer was a medic.

"It's been horribly buggy," Kinzer said. "The bugs will fly and stick to you."

Kinzer said neither she nor Beave had any experience looking for levee breaches.

"We got a quick little class," she said. "Just a quick tour, and then we'd stop and they'd show us what we need to look for."

Beave said the levees are holding well so far.

The test, she said, will be how well they hold over time as water continues to press and soften them.

There is a meeting with NRD staff every morning, Kinzer said, where the guardsmen are briefed on developments with the levees and they report to the NRD what they found over the past 24 hours.

"That way you keep an open line of communications with everyone," she said.

Erwin is keen to express appreciation for all the support he says his team has received, from accommodations provided by Offutt, office space provided at the Papio Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant and the generally warm reception the community gives.

"It allows us to be right here all the time since we don't all live in the area," he said. "And the community has been very supportive. We get thank-you's when we go to lunch and things like that."

Larry Lavelle, director of emergency management for Sarpy County, said the guardsmen's work is brutal given the heat wave that shows no sign of abating.

"It's tough duty," he said. "It's hot as Hades out there right now, and some of those mosquitoes are getting landing clearance from Offutt."

He said the guardsmen, who patrol in full uniform, have taken to hanging mosquito netting from their helmets.

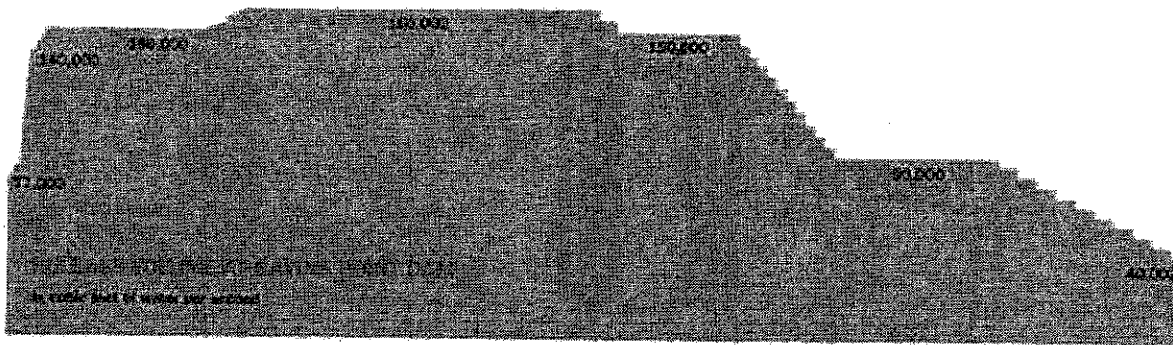
Lavelle said the troops are officed at the Omaha water treatment plant off Harlan Lewis Road near the confluence of the Papio Creek and the Missouri River.

Richards said Gov. Dave Heinemann and officials with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency have been "very gracious" in allowing such a significant force to patrol the levees.

"If not for them the sheriff's office would be doing it, or the Bellevue Police Department," he said. "Somebody has to watch things. It's very beneficial for us."

Richards said he took the opportunity recently to thank Nebraska Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy directly when Sheehy inspected the levees.

"I also told him we're going to need them for a little while until the water gets down to manageable levels," he said.



MISSOURI RIVER AT OR ABOVE FLOOD STAGE

The Corps of Engineers says tonight the Missouri River continues back within its banks by the middle of the end of September. The river expected flood stage on the 35 at Council

Page 10 SOURCE: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers July 2 Page 1 Page 1 Page 1

Published Saturday July 30, 2011

Officials sure levees will hold

By Nancy Gaarder
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

There is reason to hope that even in a worn-down state, levees along the Missouri River can withstand the one to two months of flooding that remain, officials say.

On Friday, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced its schedule for cutting back releases from the six upstream dams whose unprecedented discharges have burst downstream levees and flooded homes, farms and highways.

Continued high releases threaten levees protecting the homes of 40,000 people and billions of dollars of infrastructure in the greater Omaha area, including Eppley Airfield, Offutt Air Force Base and Fort Calhoun Nuclear Station.

From a high of 160,000 cubic feet per second — the rate water flowed Friday — releases from Gavins Point Dam are scheduled to be cut nearly in half by the end of August and three-fourths by the end of September.

Based on Friday's schedule, the river should be back in its banks at Omaha by mid- to late September, said John Remus, chief of the hydrologic engineering branch for the Omaha corps.

Local officials say conditions should start to improve much sooner.

Council Bluffs Mayor Tom Hanafan said the city calculates the river could drop off the Bluffs' levees within about a month. That's because the river will drop below the bottom of the levee before it drops below flood stage.

The homes of about 30,000 Council Bluffs residents are at risk from a levee breach, and the city has 28 miles of levees to protect.

"We're doing everything humanly possible and financially possible to hold those levees," Hanafan said. "Do I have perfect confidence? I can't say that. I can say this: I feel more confident today than I did when we started."

Communities and businesses have been battling flooding since late May.

Like Hanafan, those managing the flood fight for Omaha, Eppley Airfield, Sarpy County and Offutt Air Force Base say the levees are holding up well.

In Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie Counties, as elsewhere along the river, workers have extended and elevated levees, plugged drainage holes and blanketed mushy areas with heavy layers of sand and gravel. Continuous monitoring allows workers to more quickly identify and repair sand boils and rodent burrows.

Martin Cleveland, construction engineer for the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, said improvements and repairs since late May have kept the floodwaters at bay. The NRD maintains the levees that protect Sarpy County and Offutt Air Force Base. "We feel pretty secure — there's been two months of this now. We feel that they (Corps of Engineers) have a good handle on how to react to problems that do occur," Cleveland said.

Marty Grate of the Omaha Public Works Department said the city could open some floodgates in about a month if releases occur as scheduled. That would allow for more normal drainage of rainwater and would lessen the likelihood of pooling in eastern Omaha.

"The good news is now we have something to plan against," Grate said. "Being totally in the dark is uncomfortable. . At least now we can plan and we can work toward that end."

Steve Coufal, executive director of the Omaha Airport Authority, said airport consultants and staff will be analyzing the corps' schedule to see how it will affect the levees and groundwater levels. Pressure from groundwater is what would collapse runways — something the airport has been able to avoid by installing 70 wells.

"There's light at the end of the tunnel," Coufal said.

Col. Robert Ruch, commander of the Omaha district of the corps, said the reservoir reductions do not mean the danger has passed.

"Now is the time to really make sure we double-down on our . forces and make sure we're watching levees," he said. "My fear is not seeing something coming."

That's because problems continue to occur, as both Ruch and Hanafan noted.

Hanafan said a problem popped up Thursday night along the Bluffs' levees. Several sand boils were discovered just south of Interstate 80. Crews on Friday were laying a heavy blanket of sand and gravel to suppress the boils and plugging a nearby culvert.

In Omaha, crews are putting the finishing touches on a sand blanket to cover a mushy spot that developed last weekend.

Brig. Gen. John McMahon said concern about levee conditions was the reason the corps decided not to empty any more water from the reservoirs this winter than required to return to a normal flood-storage level before next year's runoff season.

"We're concerned that the longer we keep water on them, the greater the risk of failure," said McMahon, commander of the corps' Northwestern Division, which oversees the Missouri River.

This summer's unprecedented flooding is the result of higher-than-normal snowpack and spring rains. McMahon said the corps calculates runoff reaches that level once every 500 years. That doesn't mean the same thing couldn't happen next year, but the odds are against it, he said.

At the end of August, the corps will pause its release reductions to assess whether the drawdown is damaging either the dams or the levees. The corps is concerned that soggy soil could slough off levees and dams if water levels drop too quickly.

If the dams and levees look good, the corps will continue to lower releases to about 40,000 cubic feet per second by Oct. 1. At that level, the corps believes the valley will be able to fully drain of flooding and the river can return to its banks.

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Levees may not be done by spring

By Robynn Tysver
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

This is a race the Army Corps of Engineers expects to lose.

Corps officials say it's doubtful all the federal levees on the Missouri River can be repaired in time for next spring's runoff.

There is too much work to get done before next March, but the levees that protect "dense population centers" will get priority, Brig. Gen. John McMahon told The World-Herald Monday.

He also said the cost of repairing the levees and work on the river's six upstream dams in the Dakotas and Montana could eclipse \$1 billion.

That includes only the corps' costs.

It excludes the millions of dollars homeowners and farmers lost in property and crops and the millions counties and cities shelled out to fight the flood. It also excludes state and county costs for fixing damaged bridges, roads and other infrastructure.

It's also not the final number.

"It's a running estimate," McMahon said.

The corps is starting to look toward the future as an end to this year's flooding approaches. By mid- to late September, the Missouri is expected to recede back into its banks, ending this spring and summer's flood.

However, McMahon and others cautioned that local and state officials and others need to stay just as vigilant in monitoring the system's levees, including those at Omaha and Council Bluffs.

"We're still fighting a pretty tough fight on some of those levees," said Col. Robert Ruch, commander of the Omaha district, noting a "large and aggressive" sand boil fought recently near Council Bluffs.

He said the threat of a levee breach remains real as long as the levees are holding back water.

Ruch also said the levees need to be monitored aggressively.

In Nebraska, the state in recent days turned over the monitoring of Omaha's levees to the city, removing the Nebraska National Guard. Omaha officials objected but said they would use city workers and private contractors to monitor the levees.

The corps expects to begin work on the levees as soon as the Missouri returns to its banks.

That work will not be easy.

First, it will take time for water on the flood plain to recede. Some of that water may be trapped behind roads, hills and other structures, requiring local officials and others to force the water back into the river.

The volume of water on the flood plain is three times the amount held in the reservoir at South Dakota's Gavins Point Dam, the corps said.

And, once the water recedes, contractors and others will have to wait until the ground is dry enough to get to and repair certain levees.

McMahon said the corps was unlikely to get all the federal levees back into pre-2011 shape for the spring thaw.

The good news is that a repeat of the 2011 flood is highly unlikely. The chances of it happening again: roughly 1 in 500, said Jody Farhat, director of the water management division of the corps' Omaha District.

"This was a rare event, and the chance of getting another event again next year is remote."

Guard taken off levee patrol

Bellevue Leader
Published Tuesday August 2, 2011

By Scott Stewart
Leader Staff Writer

Local officials resumed levee watch duty from the Nebraska Army National Guard on Sunday after the state determined that assistance was no longer necessary.

The Sarpy County Unified Command released a statement saying **the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District**, the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office and the City of Bellevue took over levee monitoring from the National Guard at 6 p.m. on Sunday. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also continues to provide technical assistance, according to the statement.

"The Sarpy County Unified Command appreciates the time and effort the men and women of the Nebraska National Guard put into the inspection and monitoring duties on the levees in Sarpy County," the statement said. "The on-going mission of inspection, monitoring, patrolling and repairing the levees will continue as needed."

Phil Davidson, a spokesman for the City of Bellevue, said the unified command is working with an outside group to provide levee watch support as early as later this week. However, a deal had not been reached as of Tuesday morning.

Davidson said the unified command was dividing up **patrols between the NRD and Corps during the daytime hours Tuesday**, with Bellevue and the sheriff's office taking patrols Tuesday evening. Similar monitoring will continue until other arrangements are made.

"It is definitely being patrolled right now by the joint effort," Davidson said.

The levees will need to be monitored as long as the Missouri River remains in flood stage, which is expected to last into September, according to a strategy announced Friday by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Brig. Gen. John McMahon, commander of the Corps' Northwestern Division, said in a press release that the timeline for the releases was made to balance the need to prepare for next year's runoff while minimizing damage and risk to those communities affected by flooding or that remain dry behind levees.

"A rapid drawdown with high flows could cause extensive bank erosion and slumping in the levees," McMahon said. "Too slow of a drawdown could leave high water on temporary and permanent levees, dams and other critical infrastructure, further increasing risks for overtoppings and breaches."

The Corps dropped releases Monday from Gavins Point Dam to 150,000 cubic feet per second, and that rate will continue until about Aug. 16 to help make room in the reservoir system to aid future flood control.

Then the Corps plans to step down releases by 5,000 cfs daily until 90,000 cfs is passing through the Gavins Point Dam by about Aug. 27.

McMahon said the Corps will maintain the 90,000 cfs rate for two weeks to allow for preliminary inspections of the levee systems and infrastructure.

After the inspections, the Corps will continue to step down releases from the South Dakota dam to 40,000 cfs, which is slightly above the typical fall release rate, by the end of September.

As the release rate returns to normal, the Missouri River is expected to recede from flooded properties in the metropolitan area. The Corps estimates that water levels should be low enough for repair projects to begin by December.