



The Coordinator's Corner

Quarterly Report from the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance * Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator
For the period of July through September 2007

What's Up with WRDA?

A few words from the Coordinator: The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) is a biennial federal act that is intended to authorize water projects to be studied, planned, and developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). It also provides the legislative means to implement policy changes regarding the USACE water resources programs and projects. The first WRDA bill was passed by Congress in 1974 and the idea was to re-authorize a new WRDA bill every 2 years. However, after 1976, there was a 10-year gap before the next WRDA bill was passed due to a standoff between the House, Senate, and the White House over mitigation policies and costshare criteria for USACE programs. In 1986, Congress passed a landmark WRDA bill that included over 300 new projects, deauthorization for outdated projects, and a requirement for a local costshare requirement. Since this time, WRDA bills have been passed in the following years: 1988, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1999, and 2000. No WRDA bill has passed since 2000, where 3 projects from the Lower Platte River & Tributaries Study were authorized: Western Saryp/Clear Creek, Sand Creek, and Antelope Valley. We continue to holdout for passage of WRDA 2007 which contains a \$12 million authorization for Lower Platte Restoration efforts. As of this report, WRDA has been passed by both houses and forwarded for the President's approval or veto. He has 10 days to respond or else the bill passes automatically. If he threatens to veto as is the rumor, then both houses have indicated they will vote to override - - and it looks like there would be enough votes to do so.

FEATURED PROJECT

LPRCA Water Quality Open Golf Tournament - Sept 5th, 2007

Once again this year, we had a very successful Water Quality Open golf tournament and educational excursion. I emphasize the word "educational" since we provide so many learning opportunities during the entire event. How can a golf tourney be educational? We provide presentations, demonstrations, and trivia all on natural resources topics such as conservation, water quality, rivers, endangered and threatened species, and erosion to name just a few. We also, have these learning opportunities in the clubhouse as well as ON the holes. This year, we had 144 players on 36 teams - two team per hole, which is the maximum we could have. Looking at the roster of teams and players, we had participants from government (all levels), environmental consultants, private business, LPRCA members, and several members of the public. The day started off prior to the tournament with a presentation by Roch Gaussoin, UNL Professor and Turfgrass Extension Specialist, on types of turfgrass and their water use characteristics. He discussed appropriate types of turf for both golf courses and homes and dispelled some common myths about certain types of grass such as bluegrass and tall fescue. His presentation was entitled, "Turfgrass Water Use: What you think is true, probably isn't!" Golf participants were "encouraged" to attend this educational presentation with an incentive that gave teams 2 strokes off their golf score if all team members attended. We had seven teams take us up on this offer, which proved to be the deciding factor in the final scores. Overall, 39 people attended this presentation. *Cont. on next page*

Lower Platte River
CORRIDOR ALLIANCE

WATER QUALITY OPEN 2007
September 5th, 2007

Quarry Oaks Golf Club
Near South Bend, Nebraska

www.lowerplatte.org
*So much fun, you don't know you're learning
about water quality and conservation*

Lower Platte River
CORRIDOR ALLIANCE

Water Quality Open 2007
Sponsored by NERCO

Demonstrations
This year, we have added even more demos on the course in to illustrate the many issues and topics important in the Lower Platte River Corridor. The theme of these demos is the "10 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River." Please take time to visit the demos, remember one of them will be the "Land Share" demo. Below is a list of the Demonstrations you will see and who is sponsoring them.

- **Public Water Supply**
McKenzie Barry & Ariana Kennedy
Lower Platte South NRD
- **Recreation & Tourism**
Rachel Heppel
NE Groundwater Foundation
- **Fish/Fishing/Aquatic Habitat**
Andrea Gude
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission/Alsburn Aquarium
- **Housing/Development/Land Use/GIS**
Troy Thompson
Lower Platte North NRD
- **Mining**
Mary Berlingger Brown/Cris Thody
Terra & River Partnership
- **Wildlife Habitat**
Russ Schultz
Lower Platte Wetland Management
- **Agricultural Production/Rural Lands**
Christine Jacobson, Jolene Kohout, Sonya Carlson
Pappo-Missouri NRD

Lower Platte River
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Water Quality Open 2007
Sponsored by NERCO

Thank You to our Sponsor & Donors:

Tournament Sponsorship
NERCO, Inc.

River Milestone Level - \$1,000 or more
Union Bank & Trust Company

River Guardian Level - \$250 to \$999
CDM
HDR Engineering, Inc.

Social Time Sponsorship - Open Bar
Olsson Associates

Hole Sponsorship - \$100
HIGH
DATASTOR, INC.
Nebraska's NRDs (NARD)
BEZCO Technologies
JED Consulting Group, Inc.
Miller Seed Company
Lamp Ryanson & Associates
Midwest Right of Way Services, Inc.
Metropolitan Utilities District (MUD)
Raffly & Weaver, P.C.
Friedman Farms

Donor Plates - Various
Diggers Hotline * Lower Platte South NRD
Lower Platte North NRD * Pappo-Missouri River NRD

This educational event would not be possible without the support of these organizations and individuals. Thank, thank, thank!

FEATURED PROJECT *-continued-*

LPRCA Water Quality Open Golf Tournament - Sept 5th, 2007

As was the case last year, NEBCO sponsored our tournament this year and provided a nice donation, marketing of the event, and they fielded a team. We also had over \$3,600 in additional donations from 15 separate organizations (see graphic on previous page for names). Without these generous donations, this event could not happen since it is funded ENTIRELY by donations, sponsorships, and registration fees. The 7 demonstrations we had this year featured the "8 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River" (recreation and tourism were combined) and were strategically located throughout the course to catch golfers as they waited to play. Once again, the 3 NRDs came through by each developing and delivering a demo activity. Other agencies such as the NE Game & Parks Commission, the Tern & Plover Partnership, the Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) group, and the NE Groundwater Foundation, also provided us with a demonstration (see graphic on previous page for specific demos and organizations who delivered them). In addition to the demos on holes, there were 17 trivia signs on various holes, each asking



various river, water resources, and other natural resources questions. These trivia signs were all individually sponsored by our donors and sponsors. In the clubhouse, the LPRCA and NRDs had displays on programs, projects, and current issues. LPSNRD staff helped snap photos that were printed and posted for players to view and take home as a memento of the event. Once golf play ended around 6 pm, we held a burger and brat buffet dinner followed



by the awards ceremony. Thanks to generous donations of golf balls, hats, jackets, and shirts from a variety of donors, we drew for door prizes. As has been the tradition for the past four years, we then awarded the "Landshark" award given to a player who took the time to visit our demos and as a way to promote the educational component of the event. It was a very tight race this year for first place, but after factoring in the 2 strokes off for attending the educational presentation at the beginning of the day, we had a repeat winner with the Pedon Boys taking home the honors. Last year, all



but one of these players also took first place under the N.E.W.S. team name. All players received a booklet, the official WQ Open hat, and a variety of info on the LPRCA programs. We have received nothing but positive reviews for the event. The LPRCA will be conducting strategic planning efforts this fall and winter and this program will be examined to see if we will continue with it in the future. From what I saw regarding participation in the educational components, I think the blend of recreation and learning works very well.



Programs / Projects / Activities

Environmental Suitability Assessment (ESA) Project. PHASE II of this project is well underway as HDR, our consultant, is setting up and holding meetings with local land use jurisdictions to get input as part of a Needs Assessment. This info will be used to help us develop a land use tool for natural areas comprised of a Geographic Information System (GIS), geo-database, and McHargian-style analysis that looks at environmental features of the Corridor. We are asking NRD staff and directors help the LPRCA set up some of these small group meetings. Several are already scheduled or completed. Additionally, the LPRCA submitted a grant to the NE Environmental Trust for funding of PHASES II & III of the ESA project in the amount of \$100,000. Word on whether the grant will be awarded will occur in February of 2008.

NE Alliance of Conservation and Environment Education (NACEE) Conference. NACEE held its annual conference near Scottsbluff this year at Trails West YMCA Camp. This beautiful setting was a great backdrop for the theme of this conference, "Pioneering the Spirit of Conservation." Highlights included presentations by: North Platte General Manager Ron Cacek on the Platte River Recovery Plan; Heather Haberman, teacher with Scottsbluff High School on getting kids involved in natural resources by supplementing curriculum with field trips, afterschool clubs, special projects, and involving environmental professionals in activities; Travis Miller, Director of ESU #13, on the book *Last Child in the Woods* and how we can use the ideas in this book to reconnect kids to nature; Harry Haefer, Keep Lincoln/Lancaster County Beautiful, on Stormwater issues; Kathy Kropuenske, Keep Scottsbluff/Gering Beautiful, on a unique program to collect old pharmaceuticals instead of flushing them; Buffalo Bruce, Western NE Resources Council, on Nebraska's aspen communities and how rare they are; Dr. Pat Reece, Platte River Basin Environments, on the Wildcat Hills; Mike Sarchet on a program to control invasive species such as Russian olive trees and salt cedar along 9-Mile Creek; and Todd Nordeen, NG&PC, on the NE bighorn sheep introduction program in Nebraska. We also had several fieldtrip opportunities including: a bird walk through the badlands and a prairie dog town; tour of 9-Mile Creek to see areas where invasive species have been removed and have not; a walking tour of Scottsbluff National Monument; and a drive out to view re-introduced bighorn sheep in the Wildcat Hills. Although there was a relatively small number of attendees (20), the conference was an excellent chance to see a very different landscape, yet hear about issues that are common to all of us.



Cumulative Impact Study – PHASE II. CIS partners met on Oct 4 at the LPSNRD. We are still working towards a deadline of Dec 31, 2007 for completion of the GIS. The final report may take a little longer to complete. The Hydrologic Component (conducted by the USGS) is near 99% complete. The entire study will be included in the CIS Final Report as an appendix and a summary will be added in the text portion of the report. This information will be used to determine trends in river hydrology. The partners are currently developing the final report format and contents. The next partner meeting will be November 27th, 2007 at the LPSNRD starting at 10 am.

Water Quality Monitoring Network. The USGS is finishing up year 1 of this program. We experienced several problems this year due to high river levels including damage to monitoring sensors and delays in taking samples. Because of these problems, we have modified our monitoring and sampling approach for next year. A website has been set-up to allow access to the monitoring and sampling data. Go to <http://ne.water.usgs.gov>.

UNL Community & Regional Planning Class. Recently, I made a presentation to a UNL Community & Regional Planning undergrad/graduate class on the Lower Platte River Corridor. I also had the privilege of assisting with a class tour of the region and will continue to help out as the class conducts projects related to the future development in the Lower Platte River Corridor.

Programs / Projects / Activities -continued-

Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project – PHASE II

After a lot of project planning, PHASE II of this project is ready to commence. Working with Olsson Associates, we prepared the specifications for this phase of the project, which will remove the final 6 concrete former Hwy 6 Bridge and 11 additional wooden pilings further upstream from Camp Ashland. Bids packets were distributed over the past month and on Oct 2, bids were opened. We had a lot of interest in the project and received 3 bids ranging from a low base bid of \$250,749 to a high of \$372,680. A bid summary is listed below. The base bid (Bid Section I) is for removal of the 6 concrete obstructions only (from the east or Beacon View side), while Bid Section II is for removal of the 11 wooden pilings. Bid Section IA is for removal of the 6 concrete obstructions from the west side (Camp Ashland side). The LPSNRD reviewed and acted on the bids at a recent board meeting and accepted the low bid of \$250,749 for Bid Section I and \$35,400 for Bid Section II both from Valley Corporation of Valley, NE. We hope to start in mid-November.

	Valley Corporation	Zeiger Construction Co.	Pavers, Inc.
Bid Section I - Removal of 6 concrete obs - Access from east side	\$250,749.00	\$265,175.00	\$372,680.00
Alternate Bid Section IA - Removal of 6 concrete obs - Access from west side	NO BID	\$398,350.00	NO BID
Bid Section II - Removal of 11 add'l wooden pilings	\$35,400.00	\$88,000.00	\$185,000.00
TOTAL Bid I & II	\$286,149.00	\$353,175.00	\$557,680.00
TOTAL Bid IA & II	NA	\$486,350.00	NA
Engineering Costs	\$23,800.00	\$23,800.00	\$23,800.00
LOWEST TOTAL COST	\$309,949.00	\$376,975.00	\$581,480.00

Bids did come in higher than the engineering estimate of \$235,000. Thus, we re-allocated funds from other projects and have acquired additional contributions from project partners to carry out the project including removal of both the concrete obstructions and wooden pilings. Funding for this project comes from the 3 Lower Platte River NRDs, the NE Military Dept (NE National Guard), and the NE Game & Parks Commission (NG&PC) Boating Safety Grant program.

Lower Platte River Basin Determination / NG&PC Biological Opinion

I am tackling these two issues together since they are somewhat intertwined at the moment. Some of you may have heard that the DNR made the PRELIMINARY determination that the Lower Platte River Basin is **NOT** fully appropriated and thus still has available surface water rights. However, DNR has 90 days to look at other information to make a FINAL determination.

The NG&PC has also recently released its draft Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the Lower Platte River Basin related to suitability of habitat conditions for 3 species: least tern, piping plover, and the pallid sturgeon. According to the NG&PC draft opinion, "A biological opinion may include reasonable and prudent alternatives for an action with a jeopardy determination and /or recommendations as to how an action would enhance conservation of an endangered or threatened species or critical habitat." The BiOp essentially states, "...there be no additional degradation in the magnitude and structure of the hydrograph and the continued issuance surface water appropriations by the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources for the action area including the lower Platte River Basin, the Loup River Basin, the Elkhorn River Basin, and the Salt Creek Basin will jeopardize the continued existence of the least tern, piping plover and pallid sturgeon in Nebraska." Information on the BiOp can be accessed at: <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/news/linknews.asp?NewsID=3322> .

DNR can use a variety of information such as a BiOp to factor into a basin determination, but the question that is currently under review is whether a BiOp can be the reason to declare a basin as fully appropriated since this issue is not explicitly stated in the LB962 legislation. The NG&PC will be presenting information at the October 30 quarterly meeting on this subject.