



From the Coordinator...

Monthly Report for the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance for the month of March 2005

Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator

New Temporary Office Location

Last week the Lower Platte South NRD in Lincoln temporarily moved its office for the next 6-9 months while the permanent location at 3125 Portia Street is enlarged and remodeled. Along with the NRD, the LPRCA also moved along since I am housed in the same location. The new address is 285 S. 68th Street Place, Suite 2, Lincoln, NE 68510. We have retained the same phone number (402) 476-2729, fax number (402) 476-6454, and mailing address P.O. Box 83581 Lincoln, NE 68501. If you plan to have a meeting at the new location, please check with our receptionist extraordinaire, Brenda, since the meeting room is a bit smaller than at our other office location. Stop in and say hello. Parking is available on the west side of the building.

Water Issues Conference I recently attended a water conference in Ogallala, "Exploring Nebraska's Water Future - A Water Resources Seminar." The event kicked off on March 29th at Lake McConaughy. I spent a little time beforehand driving around the lake and was astonished how much it has shrunk. The beaches are now really big beaches and the surrounding wetlands, inlets, and coves are also beaches. Even without its normal volume, it is still a very big body of water. On the first night of the conference we heard from the USGS on symmetry and topography of the lake. They have very sophisticated tools to study including 3-D software to do a virtual flyover into the lake basin. We also heard from NDEQ on developing Total Daily Maximum Loads (TMDL's) for Lake Ogallala- or the maximum amount of contaminants/pollutants that can enter the lake without degrading the water quality. The second day focused on recent drought issues and competition for water in Nebraska. Congressman Osborne opened the 2nd day and discussed a myriad of water-related problems for agriculture particularly in western Nebraska. Jim Goeke with UNL Conservation & Survey Division give an interesting presentation on geology of Western Nebraska and how it relates to groundwater quality and quantity. We then heard from Jim Cook with the NDNR on LB 962 and implementing integrated management plans in Nebraska as a result of LB 962. This bill will study all of our river basins to see if they are "over-appropriated," "fully-appropriated," or still have water available for development. The western and southwestern part of the state has already undergone this evaluation primarily due to priority status and several multi-state water compacts. The Lower Platte River Basin will be on the table in 2006 for evaluation. There is always the possibility that our basin could be deemed "fully-appropriated" particularly in light of the fact that some large-scale water projects will be coming on line in the near future. Planned use will be calculated into the equation to determine if a basin is fully or over appropriated. Following this presentation, there was a panel discussion on

implementing integrated management plans. The panel was primarily made up of NRD managers in the areas working on such issues. We had a great luncheon speaker - Ernie Niemi with ECONorthwest - who spoke on changing paradigms and how we can survive in Nebraska even if irrigated agriculture is reduced. To do this, we must look outside the box and adapt to the limitations and possibilities we have. He used Oregon as an example and how the reduction in logging due to T&E species changed the economy from logging to natural resources and recreation. Our next speaker was ill so we moved up a presentation by the Bureau of Reclamation on conservation case studies in Nebraska and Kansas. The final element of the conference was a panel discussion on future activities and what is ahead for Nebraska. Most people understand that we are in changing times and we cannot continue as is. It took a drought crisis to get us to address the idea of water conservation. The drought cycle may end, but we cannot loosen our grip on conservation practices for water because drought is cyclical and will return.

Cumulative Impact Study (CIS) We are still plugging away and trying to finish the Scope of Work (SOW) for Phase II. We been working to pin down cost estimates and elements of the scope. We should be ready for data gathering by the summer or fall of this year.

River Obstruction Project We have determined a cost estimate for the Hwy 50 pilot project and will be approaching the NRDs to help fund this portion for FY06. Once funding is secured, we can proceed with removal of the very dangerous obstructions at Hwy 50.

Environmental Carrying Capacity Project Just had a meeting with HDR to get the acquisition kicked off. The LPRCA has assembled a lot of the materials needed for the study including comprehensive land use plans and zoning regulations.

****CHANGE IN TIME/DATE ****

For Next LPRCA Quarterly Meeting

Originally Tuesday, May 24th, 2005 * 9:30 a.m. * PMRNRD
BUT we are still looking for a new date. Stay tuned.

UNL Water Law, Policy, and Science

Conference This annual UNL conference was held on April 7 & 8, 2005. The focus this year was on drought and climate change and how these affect water management in the Great Plains. One of the highlights from the first day was the plenary session, which focused on water management and policy and the increasing competition for water. This session was presented by Dr. Peter Gleick from California. He said that we are better able to weather droughts today, but we still need to work on our planning. The water crisis is real and is not only national, but international. In the world today, 1.1 billion people lack availability to clean water and waste management systems. We are changing the climate since we are changing the hydrologic cycle. Dr. Gleick outlined 6 characteristics of long-term sustainability and pointed out the need for new ideas and thinking. The first day also had Dr. Don Wilhite of our own UNL, who is an expert in the area of drought and drought monitoring. He pointed out that drought is a normal part of our natural system and we need to prepare even when times are good. We need to be proactive and develop drought preparedness plans, instead of waiting for a crisis. Drought is the most costly natural disaster in the US. After several other presenters, the conference ended on the first day with a banquet at Morrill (Elephant) Hall at UNL. We actually ate in the room with the fossils of mammoths and mastodons looking over us. Day 2 started with a panel of Congressional staffers discussing relevant water issues. Following that session, we had presentations on taking our science and our findings and translating them into policy. One presenter gave two reasons why there is so much litigation and regulation: (1) There is bad science, and (2) Decisions are not always determined by science, but by judgment. One point all presenters made is that although drought is not good, a crisis does provide opportunity and probably is the catalyst for addressing the problem and prepare for future droughts. One panelist said that many water resources managers lack

the big picture mindset, hate uncertainty, and don't formally address risk. We finished the conference with two editors from the "High Country News" newspaper, which addresses a variety of environmental issues and particularly water management in the west. Throughout the conference the media had been taking jabs, so the newspaper folks wasted no time in taking their turn. They mentioned that media is often criticized for not understanding the issue, painting a on-sided story, and not having people with science backgrounds on their staffs. The scientific community also needs to be able to convey their message better, more concisely, and in a manner that both media and the general public can understand. I enjoyed the conference and would recommend it anyone with an interest in Nebraska's water.

D.C. Trip On March 9 & 10, the Lower Platte River (LPR) NRD's and I traveled to D.C. to make our presence known and push for funding of the LPR Feasibility Projects - Sand Creek, W. Sarpy, and Antelope Valley - and to work for inclusion of LPR environmental restoration funding authorization in the next WRDA bill. It was a quick, yet necessary and effective trip. We have received tremendous assistance from our Congressional officials (Sen. Nelson, Rep. Terry, Rep. Osborne, Sen. Hagel, and Rep. Fortenberry) and they know the right people to work with and contact to get the funding sent our way. I have to give kudos to our legal representative in D.C., Bob Weaver, who has been instrumental in the process and finding us the funds in a tough budget time.

LB 546 The I-80 Innovation Zone Commission legislation looks to be headed for the law books and has been placed on select file and advanced for engrossment with several amendments. The LPSNRD and PMRNDRD have seats reserved on the commission, which consists of a 19-member board that will help identify economic development opportunities for the area on I-80 between Omaha and Lincoln. It is an advisory committee only but will work with zoning jurisdictions and recommend consistent zoning rules and regulations.

Upcoming/Recent Meetings and Activities

- **LPNNRD Board Meeting** - Monday, April 11th, 2005 * 7:00 p.m. - LPNNRD Office - Wahoo
- **PMRNDRD Board Meeting** - Thursday, April 13th, 2005 * 8:00 p.m. - Nat Res Center @ Chalco Hills Rec Area - Omaha
- **LPSNRD Board Meeting** - Wednesday, April 20th, 2005 * 7:00 p.m. - LPSNRD Office - Lincoln @ 285 S. 68th Street Place, Suite 200 - - The former Gallup Bldg near Shopko.
- **LPRCA Quarterly Meeting** - Looking for a date and time - - Stay Tuned. Meetings was originally scheduled for Tuesday, May 24th, 2005 * 9:30 a.m. - PMRNDRD - Omaha, but this has changed.