

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: August 4, 2004

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT**: A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities of the District for the month of July, 2004, is attached for your review.

B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS**:

1. Thank You Letters and Notes:

- Thank you letters from David Brown, President and CEO of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce and Stephen Gehring, Cline, Williams, Wright, Johnson and Oldfather, thanking the GM for participating in the 2004 Select Tour. The successes in the Omaha area in creating Public/Private Partnerships were highlighted. Copies of the letters are attached.
- Thank you letter from Steven Ress, Communications Coordinator, University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources thanking the District for hosting presentations at the Natural Resources Center for the 2004 Nebraska Water Conference Council's Annual Water and Natural Resources Tour on June 9, 2004. A copy of Mr. Ress' letter is attached.

2. **Penny Burch**, District Secretary, attended an Excel Intermediate Class on July 9, 2004 offered by IStaff. Penny attended this class free of charge due to the District's membership in the Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce. A memo detailing the highlights of the class is attached.

C. **REPORT ON PURCHASES – CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES, PERSONAL PROPERTY**: Pursuant to Board direction, attached is a report indicating construction services, professional services and personal property purchases for the month of July, 2004. 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, Paul Peters, as of July 12, 2004. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

E. **PAPIO CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP MEETING:** The Papio Creek Watershed Partnership met on July 22, 2004 at the Natural Resources Center. Items of discussion were: watershed study action items; new interlocal agreement; and preparation for NPDES Phase II permits. A copy of the meeting minutes are attached for your review. The next PCWP meeting is scheduled for August 11, 2004.

F. **CUNNINGHAM LAKE, SECTION 1135 PROGRAM – ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT FOR FY 2005:** Attached is a letter from Rex Amack, Director, Nebraska Game and Parks commission to Senator Ben Nelson requesting the Senator's assistance in securing \$150,000 for the Cunningham Lake, Section 1135 Program – Ecosystem Restoration Project for FY 2005. It is noted that this is a coordinated effort between the City of Omaha, US Corps of Engineers, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Papio-Missouri River NRD, Douglas County, Washington County and the Nebraska Game and Park Commission to rehabilitate Cunningham Lake and its watershed. In-lake restoration will be carried out through the Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Program and will provide financial match for wetland restoration work funded by the USACE's Section 1135 Program.

G. **NEWS CLIPS:**

➔ Articles relating to Draft Multi-Reservoir Analysis – Papillion Creek Watershed:

- ⇒ July 7, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – NRD tax hike for dams a step closer.
- ⇒ July 10, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – NRD board backs slight tax increase to construct dams. A final vote on the 1-cent increase to the tax levy will be Aug. 12.
- ⇒ July 16, 2004, Omaha World Herald editorial – 'Yes' to dam fund. NRD board would gain tool to protect more Papio area from flooding.
- ⇒ July 17, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Metro-area dam plan refloated. Supporters say the proposal, rejected in the 1980s, would benefit flood control, recreation and economic development.
- ⇒ July 19, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Revival of dam project revives fears.
- ⇒ July 23, 2004, Washington Co. Enterprise article – That dam project on the table again. NRD revives plan to build several lakes in watershed
- ⇒ July 23, 2003, Washington Co. Enterprise article – As dam project resurfaces, so does opposition from group of Kennard-area landowners. Drive to stop dams begins.
- ⇒ July 26, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Dams' public-private mix a knotty issue. Developers' help in paying for up to 10 more lakes would have benefits, but the use of some of them would be restricted.
- ⇒ July 27, 2004, Blair-Washington County Pilot-Tribune article – Washington residents prepare to fight dams. NRD plan would flood most of town.
- ⇒ July 27, 2004, Washington County Pilot-Tribune – Letter to the Editor from Karen Andersen – Property and livelihood to be taken in NRD's Papio Creek dam project.

- ⇒ July 28, 2004, Omaha World Herald editorial – Serving a greater good. Disruption, inconvenience of public projects regrettable but necessary.
 - ⇒ July 30, 2004, Blair Enterprise article, County pulls out of Papio Watershed study. Board says dam project kept secret.
 - ⇒ August 4, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Dam-site dispute is back on surface. NRD plan disliked in Washington Co.
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- ➔ July 2, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Plan to save Big Mac may sink others.
 - ➔ July 6, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Work on trail link is almost complete.
 - ➔ July 6, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Fixing trail stretch to cost \$150,000 to \$200,000. NRD officials said it was the first time a trail has had serious cracking problems.
 - ➔ July 8, 2004, Omaha World Herald editorial – A gift to the future. Easements can prevent the deterioration of Nebraska’s natural beauty.
 - ➔ July 10, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Missouri River flow ruling appealed.
 - ➔ July 10, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Robert S. Metzler (former Papio NRD Director), 94, was big Millard booster.
 - ➔ July 12, 2004, Greenwire article – Missouri River – Enviros appeal ruling on flow disputes.
 - ➔ July 15, 2004, Papillion Times editorial – Sarpy moving forward with wastewater study.
 - ➔ July 18, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – New water law making waves. Coming changes in water allocation have some fearing water wars between towns and irrigators.
 - ➔ July 22, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – State’s new water law worries some city users.
 - ➔ July 23, 2004, Omaha World Herald Public Pulse letter by Roger Patterson, Director, NE DNR – Water links are real.
 - ➔ July 29, 2004, Dakota County Star – News from the desk of Mayor Carson – Dakota City, Dakota County seat, continues to be a pioneer in northeast Nebraska.
 - ➔ July 31, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – Project will ensure Blair’s water supply.
 - ➔ August 4, 2004, Bellevue Leader article – Two trails close to connecting.
 - ➔ August 4, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – City, county approach merger votes.
 - ➔ August 5, 2004, Omaha World Herald article – U.S. official praises Nebraska’s conservation program.

July 2004

Information & Education Report

Information

- Staffed Sarpy County Fair booth
- Continued work on “Overview” and Trails A/V Programs
- Completed work on Summer 2004 SPECTRUM
- Attended meetings on Papio Watershed Reservoir plan
- Updated web pages
- Assisted in setting up Joint Board meeting and prepared PowerPoint
- Completed preparation of Staff Survey results.

Education

- Managed 24 volunteer hours
- Developed and assembled volunteer packets for NRD receptionist to hand out during my leave
- Set up a new volunteer to shadow a naturalist at the August 3rd Chalco Hills program
- Finalized and mailed out Visitor’s Center Host schedule for July-August
- Presented Animal Adaptations Program at 2 library Summer Reading Programs
 - Arlington Public Library
 - Waterloo Public Library



GO! Greater Omaha Economic Development Partnership
Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

July 12, 2004

Steve Oltmans
Papio-Missouri NRD
8901 South 154th
Omaha, NE 68138

Dear Steve:

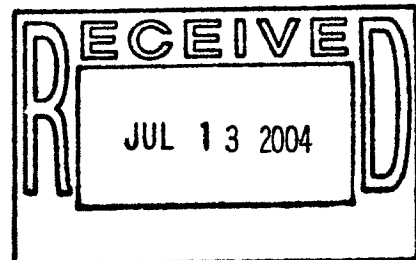
I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with the Select Tour consultants for the "Public/Private Partnerships" lunch atop the First National Bank on June 17th. The turnout was outstanding, but even more impressive was the demonstration of the success of our public/private partnerships. In fact, for many of the consultants, this was the key take-away from the 2004 Select Tour.

The consultants witnessed that Omaha is a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family. The luncheon confirmed our community's strong commitment to public/private partnerships and the great relationship that exists between the public and private sectors in our region. Thank you for your participation and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David G. Brown".

David G. Brown
President and CEO
Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce



LAW OFFICES OF
CLINE, WILLIAMS, WRIGHT, JOHNSON & OLDFATHER, L.L.P.

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DAVID R. BUNTAIN
STEPHEN H. NELSEN
MICHAEL C. MUELLER
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MARK A. CHRISTENSEN
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MARY KAY O'CONNOR
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June 30, 2004

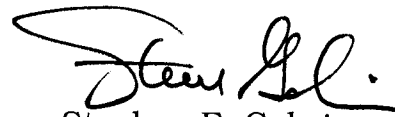
Steve Oltmans
Papio-Missouri NRD
8901 South 154th
Omaha, NE 68138

Dear Steve:

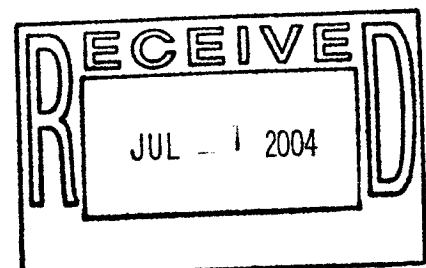
As the sponsor for the 2004 Omaha Select Tour, I want to personally thank you for your participation in the Tour. It is dedicated Omaha citizens like you who make this both a great place to work and a great place to live. In discussions with the various site selection personnel over the two days, we found them to be most impressed with Omaha and, particularly, the people that they met. Many commented that they had never seen such an effective public/private partnership.

On behalf of our firm, please accept our appreciation for your participation. Thanks again for your dedication and your efforts.

Best personal regards,



Stephen E. Gehring
For The Firm



July 12, 2004

Steve Oltmans, Manager
Papio-Missouri River NRD
8901 S. 154th St.
Omaha, NE 68138-3621

Dear Steve,

I and the cosponsors of the 2004 Nebraska Water Conference Council's Annual Water and Natural Resources Tour planning committee want to thank you for agreeing to host presentations by Greg MacLean and Randy Stahmer of HDR, Inc. on Wednesday, June 9, as well as for "pinch hitting" as a presenter yourself.

The presentations were well received by our tour participants and made a significant contribution to the tour's overall theme of focusing on wildlife habitat and emerging urban issues in the Platte River valley.

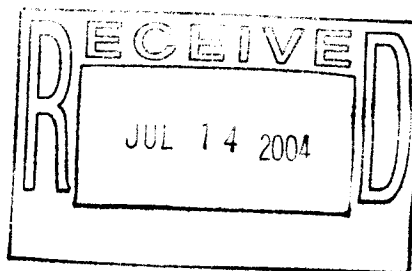
Your time and commitment toward hosting these presentations are heartily appreciated, as well as having helped expose and inform more of the public on the significance of planned development of the Platte River corridor.

Thanks again for helping to make our tour an informative and educational success. We seem to always be able to count on you and your staff in the clutch.

Sincerely,



Steven W. Ress
Communications Coordinator



MEMORANDUM

TO: Pat Teer

FROM: Penny Burch

SUBJECT: Excel Intermediate Class

DATE: July 13, 2004

On Friday July 9, 2004, Penny attended an Intermediate Excel Class located in the 1Staff building at 108th and Maple Street in Omaha. The facility was easy to find, well organized and set up, clean bright, and the staff was courteous and helpful. The Instructor Kevin Burge was exceptional; clear, nice loud voice, witty, teaching technique was good. Below is a recap of items learned:

- Learned shortcut key strokes, such as; Alt Enter, double click and drag, Control Z, (undo), F2 to edit in a cell. Fx function icon. Control, Shift, and arrow keys- highlights cells in the direction of the arrow. Shift key and F11 automatically inserts a new worksheet in a workbook. Learned how icons such as decrease/increase decimal icon works. F4 key puts \$ sign to block numbers.
- Absolute Reference, example of a formula =SUM(B\$2:B2)
- IF Function, =IF(test,true,false), example, =IF(B4>=60,"pass","fail"), may have up to seven nested functions. Closing parenthesis are needed as many as there are open ones at the end of a formula. Example, =IF(B4>=90,"A", IF(B4>=80,"B", IF(B4>=70,"C", IF(B4>=60,"D","F")))). This is an example of a formula to find students in a spreadsheet with grades of A,B,C,D and F's.
- " " example =IF(B2=" ", " ", B2/B\$15) the quotation marks means empty.
- Saving as a template in a worksheet, click save as, choose template. Example, use this for NDEQ monthly postage usage and some of Martin Cleveland and Dick Sklenars tables that are used frequently.
- Cell access only, click in Tools on the menu bar, protection, protect sheet click ok. This will not allow anyone to tamper with cells that you wish to have protected.
- When building and using more than one table on a work sheet, build it diagonally and not in the same columns.
- Select , click merge and center and text will automatically center and merge cells.
- \$ stops, / divides, coma separates series'.) closes, (is an open parentheses. Put a \$ only where needed and is necessary to choosing only rows and or columns.
- Control key (hold) and drag will make a series of what it is you type in two cells for instance, 1, 2 will continue with 3, 4,5 etc. if you click the ctrl key hold it and drag the mouse, same with a, b, will continue with c,d,e; etc. or months or days or times or dates etc.
- VLOOKUP = vertical. =VLOOKUP(G7,B5:D15,2) example

- Circular reference, means =B3 + C3 formula that C3 will keep adding to B3 continually what ever is typed into B3

2	2
3	5

Click tools, options, calculation, iteration, and maxi change 100 to 1.

- Click box next to Fx to name a range, bunch (highlight entire table range)
Name box next to Fx NUMS – combo box useful along with VLOOKUP function.
- Do not highlight when sorting A ↓
Z ↓

- Freeze pane is located in Windows on the menu bar.
- Custom filter, click data, filter, autofilter. Range of dates is > or = to 1/1/1995 and is , or = to 12/31/1995.
- All labels in a row of cells you can; copy, edit, paste special, transpose. This will copy all and put where you want them to be repeated in the same work sheet or a new one.
- To do a VLOOKUP for large spreadsheets and using names. Make 2 or more columns and name one numbers and one name. Formula for names is = D2 & “,” & E2 then click Ctrl N. =VLOOKUP(C\$2,EMPS,3)
- To select multiple worksheets, shift, hold down and select each work sheet to select all can make sheets multiple and the same or identical, Ctrl C, paste special, transpose. And name the worksheets by double clicking on the label of the worksheet to highlight it.

I hope to utilize 1Staff again and again. Thank you for allowing me to attend this class – complements of The Chamber of Commerce.

July, 2004

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Updated: July 12, 2004

**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 = PFP's Portion Completed

- **Big Papio Channel Project - West Center Road to West Dodge Road (Woodward):**
- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (W)
 - Appraisal review (90th to Giles) (F)
 - ⊗ Purchase Agreements, deeds (90th to Giles) (W)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - Closing with Bundy's (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
 - Complete easements – three dikes and one drainage ditch (F)
 - ⊗ Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National and Bundy Properties) (W)
 - Levee ROW Documents (RSP, etc.) (P)
 - Cabin ROW Documents, as needed (P)
 - ⊗ Design Build Phase II Agreement (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements as needed (F)
 - Flood Mitigation Planning and Mapping Assistant Agreement w/ Blair (F)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Bennington Trail Interlocal Agreement (P)

- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - California Bend – Final settlement with tenant (Wright's) (W)
 - Lower Decatur Bend – Appraisal Review, ROW documents and habitat easements (W)
 - Missouri River Pedestrian Bridge Professional Services Contract Review (P)
- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
 - Pigeon/Jones Creek Site Easements – as needed (W)
 - Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (W)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
 - ★ Papio Site S-27 (Fox Ridge Estates) Trail Easements (W)
 - D-17 Agreement (Waterford) ROW (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:**
 - Dam Site 19 agreement (Petermann) (F)
 - Dam Site 13 Agreement (Petermann) (F)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
 - NRD Bonding Authority Legislation (W)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
 - ★ Agreement with SID 296 for WCRW #1 (W)
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
 - ★ NRD/Village of Waterloo Agreement (N)
- **Other:**
 - Interlocal Agreement with Bellevue for Missouri Riverfront Development (P) (Becic)

**PAPILLION CREEK
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP**

MEETING MINUTES



**Meeting on Comprehensive Stormwater Management
July 22, 2004 - 10 AM to Noon - Board Room
Natural Resources Center, 8901 S. 154th Street, Omaha, NE**

Attendants

The following were in attendance: Laurie Carrette Zook (HDR), Lyle Christensen (HDR), Kent Holm (Douglas County), Mark Wayne (Sarpy County), Joe Soucie (La Vista), David Goedeken (Bellevue), Marty Leming (Papillion), Doug Cook (Washington Co), Marty Grate (Omaha), Nina Cudahy (Omaha), Karen Klein (Omaha), Robert Hayes (Boys Town), Mike Kemp (Offutt AFB), Robert Hall (NRCS), Steve Tonn (Douglas/Sarpy County Extension), Rick Asch (NDEQ), Donna Luckner (NDEQ), Michael Crisco (NDEQ), Marlin Petermann (P-MRNRD), and Paul Woodward (P-MRNRD).

Purpose

A Partnership meeting was held on the above date in order to discuss topics stated in the attached agenda. The meeting began at approximately 10:10 AM.

1. Introductions

- Marlin Petermann (P-MRNRD) opened the meeting and everyone introduced himself or herself. An agenda and sign-up sheet were distributed.

2. Watershed Study Action Items

- Lyle Christensen (HDR) reviewed the recent work on the database concerning the City of Omaha's sampling program and other work needed to complete the Watershed 'Tools' Guidance Manual. He concluded that a final draft of the manual would be completed by the end of July and would be made available for review prior to the next subcommittee meeting.
- Recent articles concerning the Multi-Reservoir plan from the Omaha World Herald were handed out and reviewed. Laurie Carrette Zook (HDR) presented a slideshow of the proposed dam sites and results of their analysis. Financing the costs of the reservoirs was discussed and it was noted that the NRD plans to extend HDR's contract to prepare another chapter in the report on financial feasibility. Marlin Petermann (P-MRNRD) reviewed the upcoming outlook of constructing some of these dams in cooperation with developers and the expansion of Omaha's development zone. Lyle Christensen (HDR) suggested that both new plans for City Sewer Systems and these proposed reservoirs should be compared. Kent Holm (Douglas County) recommended that planning and zoning jurisdictions throughout the watershed should be made aware and requested to

plan for these potential dam sites if that was a recommendation of the study, approved by the NRD. It was also questioned if prioritizing the dam sites caused a negative impact on the potential to build the dams ranked lower.

3. New Interlocal Agreement

- Paul Woodward (P-MRNRD) handed out and reviewed a memo and revised Exhibit “C” which requested that the Partnership allow Washington County to participate for an annual contribution of \$10,000 instead of \$15,000. Marlin Petermann (P-MRNRD) had attended the Washington County Board meeting on Tuesday, July 13, 2004 and recalled this request was the action taken by the Board. He also noted that the exhibit had been similarly changed when Washington County and Kennard choose not to participate in the previous agreement. It was questioned if Washington County would be allowed to participate in activities besides the Master Planning. Kent Holm (Douglas County) explained that it was important for Washington County to participate in the other activities, especially implementing standards consistent with the rest of the Watershed. Paul Woodward (P-MRNRD) noted that a reduction for Washington County not being permitted as a NPDES Phase II entity had already been accounted for in most of the proposed activities. Kent Holm (Douglas County) explained that he would have to abstain from any decision because he is not the authorized representative for the County. There were no other objections to allowing Washington County to participate for an annual contribution of \$10,000 provided that their contribution be reevaluated by the Partnership if future requirements, such as a TMDL or NPDES permit, were implemented by NDEQ in Washington County. **Therefore, Washington County’s request was approved by a consensus of executive committee members present.** Marlin Petermann (P-MRNRD) concluded the discussion by explaining that Washington County might possibly appoint an elected representative to the Partnership. He also noted that he would be willing to discuss this matter with Washington County at a Board meeting scheduled for next Tuesday, July 27, 2004, where he would be presenting information about the proposed reservoirs.

4. Preparation for NPDES Phase II Permits

- Donna Luckner (NDEQ) explained that the public notice period had recently ended without any comments received from the public or EPA. She stated that the General Permit for Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington County along with the submitted Notices of Intent for the required urban areas would be **issued on August 1, 2004**. She also noted some comments had been received for Offutt AFB during the public notice period and Dakota County’s general permit was under internal review.
- Paul Woodward (P-MRNRD) suggested that a future public meeting, stormwater design manual updates and the draft stormwater ordinance be addressed at an upcoming NPDES Permit Subcommittee meeting. A meeting date was established for **August 11, 2004 beginning at 10 AM**.

5. Stormwater Legislation

- Marlin Petermann (P-MRNRD) announced that the Natural Resources Committee of the Nebraska Legislature was planning to have a hearing on August 31, 2004 at 1:30 PM here at the Natural Resources Center. He noted scheduled agenda items include stormwater funding legislation and legal council for the committee would be drafting a new bill calling for ½ fees and ½ property taxes. He also noted the committee was planning to take a tour of stormwater concerns and projects throughout the metro area in the morning of the 31st, and that the City of Omaha and the NRD would work together to develop an itinerary for the upcoming subcommittee meeting.

6. Financial Report

- Paul Woodward (P-MRNRD) handed out and reviewed a summary of the Watershed Fund. Following the receipt of all contributions remaining from the previous agreement by August 1, 2004, he noted the balance will be approximately \$265,000 with about \$75,000 already obligated to existing contracts.

7. Other Items of Interest

- Steve Tonn (Douglas/Sarpy County Extension) reviewed the recent meeting of the Cunningham Lake Watershed Council on July 12, 2004. He noted that the next meeting will be held on August 11, 2004 to discuss project goals and objectives.
- Nina Cudahy (Omaha) reported that nearly 200 people attended the 2 day NPDES Phase II workshop put on by EPA in Kansas City on July 20th and 21st. She also explained that a video and CD with information from the workshop is available for others upon request.

8. Next Meeting Dates

- The next Partnership meeting will be held on **Thursday, August 26, 2004 at 10:00 AM in the Board Room** of the Natural Resources Center. An NPDES Permit Subcommittee meeting will be held on **Wednesday, August 11, 2004, at 10:00 a.m. in the Lower Level Conference Room** of the Natural Resources Center.

9. Adjourn

- The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:05 PM. An agenda, attendance list, and the handouts passed out at the meeting are available to those members who were not present at the meeting **upon request**.

Please contact Paul Woodward at 444-6222 regarding any questions or comments concerning these meeting minutes.



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

2200 N. 33rd St. / P.O. Box 30370 / Lincoln, NE 68503-0370

Phone: 402-471-0641 / Fax: 402-471-5528 / www.outdoornebraska.org

June 30, 2004

E. Benjamin Nelson
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Nelson:

I am writing on behalf of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to request your assistance in securing \$150,000 earmarked (named) for the Cunningham Lake, Section 1135 Program, Ecosystem Restoration Project for Fiscal Year 2005. The purpose of the project is to rehabilitate Cunningham Lake and its watershed. This project has been in the feasibility phase since 1999 and needs funding to finish this aspect so the full design and construction phases can begin. This project is a coordinated effort between the City of Omaha, the U.S. Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Papio-Missouri River NRD, Douglas County, Washington County and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Partners working on watershed erosion problems include representatives from the political entities listed above as well as a public Watershed Advisory Council composed of stakeholders using or affected by this resource. In-lake restoration will be carried out through the Commission's Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Program and will provide financial match for wetland restoration work funded by the USACE's Section 1135 Program. The Section 1135 program allows us to work in partnership with the Corps of Engineers on environmental projects that are important to Nebraska.

I urge you to support this much needed restoration project on Glenn Cunningham Lake in Omaha.

Sincerely,

Rex Amack
Director

c: Congressman Lee Terry
Larry Foster, Omaha Parks & Rec
Steve Oltmans, P-MNRD

Omaha & the Region

NRD tax hike for dams a step closer

7-7-04

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Dam taxes. Really.

Property owners in the Omaha metropolitan area and a handful of counties to the north are a step closer to a 1-cent increase in their property tax rate, which translates to a \$10 increase in taxes for the owner of a \$100,000 home.

The finance subcommittee of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District voted 3-2 Tuesday night to recommend that the full board approve the tax hike. The money — about \$3.6 million — would be earmarked for dam construction in the immediate Omaha metropolitan area.

"I bet you never thought you'd see me call for a tax increase,"

What's next

Papio-Missouri River NRD board meets 8 p.m. Thursday and 8 p.m. Aug. 12, NRD headquarters, 8901 S. 154th St.

Property owners affected: Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties and eastern Burt and Thurston Counties.

board member Rich Tesar said after the vote. "I'm convinced that if we don't do something, and quick, there will be a loss of life. People talk a lot about tornadoes, but you're a lot more likely to get flooded than hit by a tornado."

The Papillion Creek system, which flows through the heart of the metro area, remains vulner-

able to sudden and devastating flooding, said Steve Oltmans, NRD general manager. And the danger will only increase as more farmland is converted to rooftops and pavement.

The full board is expected to vote on the tax increase at its August meeting when it considers the full \$32 million budget. Public comment can be made at a meeting Thursday and at the one in August.

The location of the dams, and the timing of their construction, would depend upon the partners that emerge to help pay for them, Oltmans said. Dam construction would rely heavily on public-private partnerships like the one for the new lake near Bennington.

Board member Joe Neary voted against the increase, saying he could support a half-cent

increase but not the full penny, because it would "create too much of a war chest."

Of particular concern to Neary was that the NRD would pay for the dam and then subsidize for private developers, at top dollar, the land that would be flooded.

Board member Melissa Gardner also voted against the measure, saying this isn't the right time.

Oltmans, however, has said that timing is crucial. Land prices are escalating, he said, and the day will soon come when the dams will be too costly to build.

The dam most likely to be built first, he said, is at 192nd Street and West Dodge Road, where the city wants to build a park. The city owns 80 acres there.

NRD board backs slight tax increase to construct dams

■ A final vote on the 1-cent increase to the tax levy will be Aug. 12.

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

7-10-84
Slightly higher taxes and the return of increased dam construction appear to be in the future for Omaha metro area residents and their neighbors to the north.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District Board on Thursday indicated its clear support, with a preliminary vote of 7-2, for raising its property-tax levy by 1 cent. The increase would generate about \$3.6 million to be earmarked for building new dams in the Omaha area.

Voting in favor were John Conley, Dick Conneally, Rich Jansen, Barb Nichols, Rich Tesar, Jim Thompson and Fred Conley. Voting against the increase were Joe Neary and Melissa Gardner.

For a taxpayer with a home valued at \$100,000 for tax purposes, the increase translates into about \$10 a year. The NRD receives about 1.5 percent of the property taxes paid in Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties and eastern Burt and Thurston Counties.

The increase will require an annual vote but is expected to remain in place for a number of years while the district helps finance a series of dams.

The dams would be built in conjunction with developers,

which NRD general manager Steve Oltmans said is the only way to get the work done.

At Thursday's meeting, two people questioned the district's plans. Doug Kagan of Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom asked that the NRD pledge that the money be spent only on dams and not on other improvements that would make developers' investments more profitable.

Pat Rinne pulled out a \$10 bill and asked how someone from central Omaha would benefit from the tax increase.

The Papillion Creek watershed, which flows through the heart of Omaha, is one of the most dangerous in the region, Oltmans has said, and will become more dangerous as rural areas are converted to rooftops and pavement.

The board also unanimously voted to have Oltmans' staff draw up some guidelines on how the dams will be developed.

A formal public hearing and vote is scheduled for the Aug. 12 board meeting, which starts at 8 p.m. at the district's headquarters, 8901 S. 154th St.

Omaha World-Herald

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July 16, 2004

'Yes' to dam fund

Raising property taxes, even a small bit, is rarely popular. But when lives and property are at risk, investing tax dollars in protection needs to be considered.

That is the situation faced by Omaha-area residents and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Board members have indicated their support for a tax increase of 1 cent per \$100 of taxable value, added to the 2.5 cents per \$100 that the NRD already raises from property taxes. A public hearing and a final vote will be next month.

It would take NRD staff members several years to develop the projects with the new tax proceeds.

The additional penny, about \$3.6 million a year (an additional \$10 for each \$100,000 of a property's value), would be earmarked for dam construction to protect property against flooding by Papio Creek. Portions of the creek already are confined by flood-control structures. But, because of the city's growth, they become less effective every year.

As more residential, commercial and industrial buildings go up and more parking lots are paved, there is less open land into which rain can soak. The amount of runoff increases both in volume and speed. That means downstream Papio Creek receives more water faster, potentially overwhelming flood-control measures.

Without more upstream dams to retain and control water, the future of the Papio Creek flood plain (which also will grow as the amount of water increases) looks truly wet.

The NRD has been working from a flood-control plan devised in 1968;

**NRD board
would gain
tool to protect
more Papio area
from flooding.**

some of its projected dams, such as the one that created Cunningham Lake, are in place.

NRD General Manager Steve Oltmans

said that, with land prices rising, dams not under construction in the next decade ultimately could cost too much to build.

One dam project may serve as a worthy model for others. It was a public-private partnership that resulted in the NRD's \$1 million Prairie View Lake and Recreation Area near Bennington.

The agency also spent \$2.8 million on flood control at the site. Horgan Development Co. donated the land for the park and flood control; it built Newport Landing, a residential project, on adjacent land.

The possible partnership projects are, in general, the smaller ones outlined in the 35-year-old study. Thus, they won't control downstream flows as well as some of the larger—and significantly more expensive—structures would.

The NRD, if its board members are wise, will work not only on developing its cooperative relationships with developers to build the smaller dams but also on realizing one or more of the bigger projects. A likely candidate is Dam Site 3 in Washington County, north of the Bennington development project.

The NRD has been a responsible, conservative steward of the public's money. It has proved to be a trustworthy guardian of the environment as well as a visionary agency in planning for an ever-shifting future.

By approving the tax increase, board members would be giving themselves a tool to use in making the community's future better.

Metro-area dam plan refloated

■ Supporters say the proposal, rejected in the 1980s, would benefit flood control, recreation and economic development.

7-18-04

BY NANCY GAARDER
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OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

After two decades on the shelf, a controversial dam-building plan for the Omaha metropolitan area has been resurrected to reduce the potential for destructive flooding.

The \$186 million project, under review by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, would aim for 10 dams in Douglas, Washington and Sarpy Counties.

Farmland, pasture and some homes would be inundated, with portions of the towns of Washington and Kennard affected.

The payoff would be control of 50 percent or more of the watershed, significantly reducing damage from a 100-year magnitude flood in the metropolitan area. The new lakes created also could spur economic development and would expand recrea-



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Check additional maps to see whether your property would be affected.

tional opportunities.

"There's no question in terms of flood control that this is the best technical answer," said Steve Oltmans, general manager of the NRD and one of the chief architects of the revived plan. "But is it the best politically? That's debatable."

Mindful of the intense opposition that quashed these dams in the 1980s, the NRD is proposing to give landowners a stake in the success of the lakes by allowing them to keep much of the surrounding land.

The crown jewel would be a 1,900-acre lake northwest of Bennington — more than four times

See Dams: Page 2

continued

Dams: New recreational lakes would be created

Continued from Page 1

larger than Cunningham Lake and similar in size to Branched Oak Lake near Lincoln. The lake would stretch four miles from Washington to Kennard.

The lake could be ringed by some public land, but most of the land would be private. The hills above the lake have been mentioned as a possible site for a business-technology campus that would pair with housing.

Depending on how the lake is designed, as many as 32 properties would have to be bought or moved, with 26 of those being in the village of Washington. Seventeen more in Washington and 26 in Kennard would be affected to a lesser extent.

Also on the drawing board are two lakes that could tie into major parks planned for west and northwest Omaha. One would be at 192nd Street and West Dodge Road, where the City of Omaha has acquired 80 acres of parkland. The other is proposed near 168th and Fort Streets.

The park at 192nd and Dodge would be "kind of a west Omaha gathering place — like Memorial Park," said Larry Foster, head of the city's parks department. "Long, sweeping banks and opportunities for concerts and fireworks — a gathering area that west Omahans don't really have."

Construction of a majority of the lakes probably would be financed through public-private partnerships.

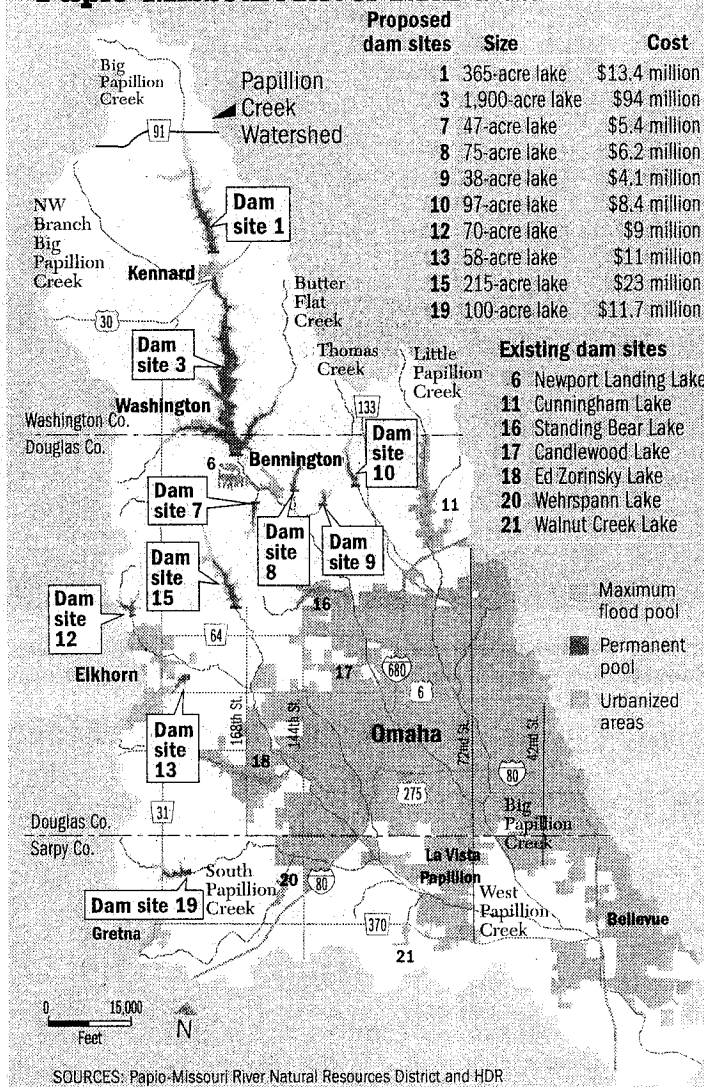
The NRD proposes using public dollars to pay for the dams and, probably, some of the land that would be flooded. In some cases, the NRD might buy 50 percent or more of the acres that would be under water. Developers would share some of the remaining cost of the flooded land and, along with private property owners, would retain much of the land on the hills around the lakes.

Such an approach should ease some of the opposition, said Dick Conneally, the NRD board member who represents Washington County, where most of the land would be flooded.

"If we approach it right, I don't see it getting stopped like it was before," Conneally said. "This should be a win-win situation for people."

Given the scope of the plans, it is unlikely that all the dams will be built, Oltmans said. The large

Papio-Missouri River NRD's dam sites



DARRELL FORBES/THE WORLD-HERALD

Washington County lake is 10 to 15 years away from becoming a reality, if indeed it is created.

For the short term, Oltmans said, three dams seem most likely to be built — the two that would pair with city parks and a small lake in northwest Sarpy County.

Public money for these smaller dams would come from a 1-cent increase in the property tax. The increase would be earmarked for dam construction and would generate about \$3.6 million a year for the NRD. (For the owner of a home valued at \$100,000 for tax purposes, the 1-cent increase would translate into \$10 a year.)

Multiple partners, including other sources of government funding, would need to be found for the large Washington County

lake, Oltmans said.

"This is a big idea for us — it's \$94 million," he said. "In Nebraska, that's a big public project. A lot of things have got to happen. But I do believe it could happen."

The NRD board has given preliminary approval to a one-year increase in the property tax, but it has not voted on the overall dam plan. That vote is expected to occur no earlier than October. In the meantime, the board has asked for additional information on funding sources and financial standards for the public-private partnerships.

If the full plan is adopted, the board still will have to vote on each dam as it moves toward reality.

Because some of the smaller lakes would rely heavily on de-

velopers, Oltmans said, those lakes essentially would become private, with no public access for boating — similar to Newport Landing Lake west of Bennington.

Many of the lakes, however, would have hiking-biking trails and would be open to fishing. As the plans stand now, none of the lakes would have public swimming beaches.

Plans for the dams date to the mid-1960s when devastating floods struck Omaha two years in a row. Seven people died, and 18,000 acres were flooded.

To protect Omaha from a repeat of that flooding, plans were drawn up for 21 dams in the Papillion Creek watershed. Seven were built, but opponents blocked the rest.

Before construction came to a halt, the Omaha area gained what would become some of its most popular recreation areas: Zorinsky, Cunningham, Wehrspann, Standing Bear and Walnut Creek Lakes. Also built were two private lakes, Candlewood and Newport Landing.

Of the 14 dams left on the drawing board, a study by HDR Engineering Inc. has found that two no longer are feasible. Two others essentially have been dropped.

Additional dams are needed, Oltmans said, because development over the past 20 or so years has eaten away at the buffer gained from previous dams and flood improvements.

"We still have a very high flood threat," he said, "and it continually gets worse."

Since the mid-1960s, about 120 square miles of concrete and rooftops have been added, greatly increasing the amount of water that is no longer being absorbed by open land but instead is washing into creeks. Heavy rain can lead to dangerous flooding within hours.

The natural resources district needs to move forward with these plans now, several board members said, because development is gobbling up land and pushing up prices. As it stands now, about 75 percent of the \$186 million is expected to go toward land acquisition. That amount, though, Oltmans said, assumes that the public pays for all the land under the lakes, which won't be necessary if developers participate.

Revival of dam project revives fears

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

7-19-04

Old-timers around the little town of Washington, Neb., recall those "damn dam meetings" with nervous laughter.

Some 20 years ago, they successfully defeated plans for a lake that would have inundated a good portion of their town so that metropolitan Omaha would have better flood protection.

Now, it appears that an even larger dam is back on the drawing board as the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources Dis-



ON OMAHA.COM

See maps of the proposed lakes

trict searches for ways to reduce the potential for flooding in the growing metro area.

"You can't replace home," said Lorene Andersen as she paused from quilting a blanket for her 5-month-old great-grandson. "Home is home. And this is home as long as we can stay here."

Andersen and her husband, Al-

vin, fought the dam last time and remain opposed to it. Their home is one of 42 properties that might have to be bought out or moved.

The Andersens say they're not sure how the town will react this time, a sentiment echoed by others Sunday afternoon.

"You need leadership, and we had some hard workers then," Lorene Andersen recalls.

Merle Campbell pretty much agrees. The town has changed.

"I don't how much the new ones would put up a fight," said Campbell, a nearly 50-year resi-

See Dams: Page 2



JAMES R. BURNETT
THE WORLD-HERALD

Merle Campbell says Washington, Neb., still "feels 100 miles from Omaha."

Project's revival revives fears

Continued from Page 1

dent. He runs an antiques shop in the small school building where he, his children and grandchildren learned to read and write.

"There might be some opposition," he said, "but I don't think there will be as much as last time."

The town, which Campbell said still "feels 100 miles from Omaha," already bears the footprint of the growing metropolitan area. New houses valued in the \$200,000 range have sprung upon the edge.

John Galvan is one of those newcomers. His house, barely a year old, is in the lake's path.

"(The lake) won't happen tomorrow," he said, "so I'm not going to rush into anything."

NRD leaders have said the lake, if it is built, could be 10 to 15 years from reality. The \$94 million project would need to jump a number of hurdles, the big ones being money and land acquisition.

Steve Oltmans, general manager for the NRD, said he understands the hurt the dam could cause some families.

"It really bothers me," Oltmans said. "We've got people who have bought acreages and are raising families, and they're comfortable — and we're saying, 'Hey, we're going to put you under 20 feet of water.' It really eats at me."

But Oltmans said the lake is needed to protect the metro area from the type of flooding that claimed seven lives and covered 18,000 acres in the mid-1960s.

This lake, estimated to be 1,900 acres, would be the most important of 10 that the NRD is considering. Others would be significantly smaller and, as a result, provide lesser flood protection.

The plan still requires approval from the NRD board, which won't occur before October. In the meantime, the board has given preliminary approval to a one-year, 1-cent increase in the property tax to help fund some smaller dams. The increase requires a yearly vote but is expected to remain in place for the foreseeable future.

Lorene Andersen understands the need for flood control. But government leaders, she said, should have taken that into account as they allowed development to move forward. Better restrictions on flood plain development, she said, might have meant that she wouldn't have to sacrifice her home for someone else.

"They should have been thinking about that," she said.

That dam project on the table again

NRD revives plan to build several lakes in watershed

By Keith Rydberg
Reporter

Nearly 20 years after a proposal to build several dams in Washington County was defeated, the project is being considered once again by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

The \$186 million project would involve the construction of 10 dams in Washington, Douglas and Sarpy counties as well as any necessary land acquisition. The main purpose of the project would be better flood control in the Papio Creek Watershed, but NRD officials also cited economic development and increased recreational opportunities on lakes that could result from damming the Big Papio Creek.

Local folks aren't so sure.

Harlo Wilcox, chairman of the Washington County Board of Supervisors, said he was "shell-shocked" when he heard about the project and its potential effects.

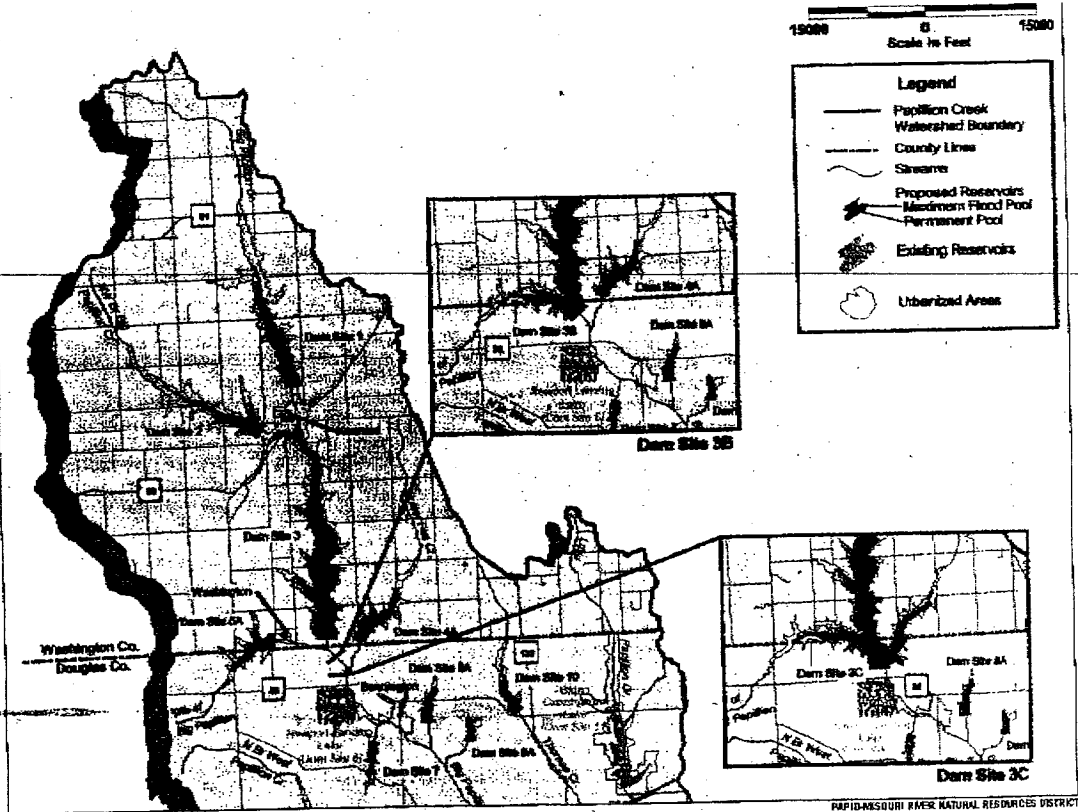
"I had seen some drafts and heard some speculation about the project over the years but, at our meeting last Tuesday, we were told (by NRD representatives) that it was a long way down the road," said Wilcox, a Kennard resident. "It was a bit of a shock to me when I read about it."

Wilcox said the initial reaction from residents has been negative.

"I haven't exactly seen anyone jumping for joy over the news," Wilcox said. "Most of the comments I have heard have been negative."

During its Tuesday, July 27, meeting, the county board is scheduled to meet with Marlin Peterman, the NRD's assistant general manager, to discuss the dam project proposal. The discussion is scheduled for 11 a.m. The county board meets in the lower level of the Washington County Courthouse in Blair.

The project, if approved, would create a 1,900-acre lake that would stretch approximately four miles between the villages of Kennard and Washington. The NRD has not determined exactly how many properties would be affected, but estimates indicate between 32 and 42 properties in or near both villages would have to be purchased or relocated.



These are the proposed dams in and near Washington County. NRD officials have chosen option 3C for the largest reservoir, which would flood much of the village of Washington.

Washington Co. Enterprise
FRIDAY, JULY 23, 2004

DAMS: Series of dams on Papio once again proposed in county

FROM PAGE 1

The unnamed lake would be the result of building a dam, known as Dam 3C, about two miles east of Washington right on the Washington-Douglas county line. This dam would have a drainage area of 97.5 square miles with an estimated construction cost of \$93.8 million.

A second dam, known as Dam 1, would be located west of County Road 27 and seventieths of a mile north of U.S. Highway 30 north of Kennard. This dam would have a drainage area of 23.3 square miles with an estimated construction cost of \$4.97 million.

While no formal action has been taken on the project, the NRD board recently gave its preliminary approval to a one-year, 1-cent increase in property tax. Steve Oltmans, general manager of the district,

said the 1-cent levy is expected to raise \$3.6 million for dam construction with the district board looking to acquire state and federal funding to pay for the remainder of the project.

Oltmans explained the project was originally drafted in 1988 following flooding in the Omaha metropolitan area in 1964 and 1965 that left 18,000 acres of land underwater. During the 1980s, seven of the 21 dams were built, creating five public and two private lakes, before the project was stopped on a technical matter by an organization of individuals from Washington County.

Of the remaining 14 dams on the original plan, two were deemed no longer feasible and the locations of two other dams are no longer available because of urban development in northern Douglas County. Oltmans said ongoing development is

water in the floodplain on a watershed basis, not just on a county basis.

"Land development is moving rapidly in northern Douglas County," he added. "If we don't do this in the next 10 years, there won't be any land to work with in the watershed. We are trying to protect lives and property from the potential of a high flood threat that currently exists in the watershed."

Dick Connealy, who represents Washington County on the NRD board, noted that while the project met with opposition in the 1980s, changes have been made that he hopes will at least lessen some of the controversy. One of the biggest changes Connealy noted is how land would be acquired.

"The old way of dealing with property owners was that we would buy the property and later decide what to do with it," Connealy said. "This time, our goal is to get the lake built and then allow the landowners an opportunity to decide what to do with the land not needed by the district."

"We used to think it was important to control the shoreline around a lake, but now we realize we don't need to do that," he added. "Because of this, the land (near the lake) can be kept by the original property owners and developed into housing or other purposes, likely with increased property values. That is what makes the most sense for us as long as we can get enough land to flood for water control purposes. If the NRD doesn't have to purchase the extra land, the land will not have to go off the tax rolls."

Connealy added that he envisions the lakes will increase land values in Washington County, especially along the

As dam project resurfaces, so does opposition from group of Kennard-area landowners

By Keith Rydberg
Reporter

When a dam construction project was proposed in 1986, a group of landowners calling itself the Papio Valley Preservation Association successfully stopped the project. Earlier this week, a similar group of landowners met to essentially resurrect the group.

Mel Hoier, who was one of the original members of the group, said the association was successful in stopping the project after only seven of the 21 proposed dams were built. Hoier said the process was stopped at that time after a federal judge ruled the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which was in charge of the project, unfairly altered its plans for one of the dams from the original impact statement that was made available to the public.

The association's attempt to stop the plan proved successful, but Hoier noted the victory came only after the group accumulated thousands of dollars in legal fees. Because of that and the possibility of more legal fees

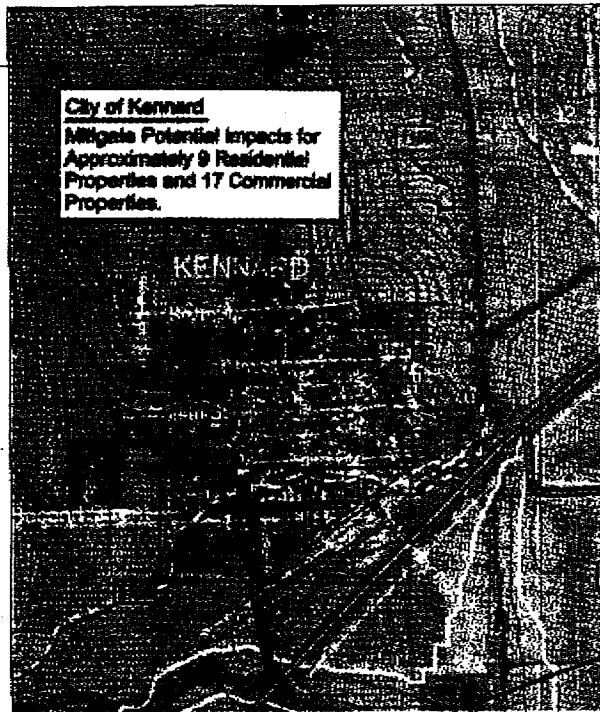
Largest lake would flood much of Washington; see next Tuesday's Pilot-Tribune

this time around, Hoier and several other landowners are hoping to get both moral and financial support in their fight to stop the proposal once again.

"We're hoping to get people fired up and we are also hoping that, when people do get fired up, they will be willing to get their checkbooks out," Hoier said. "It probably sounds horrible to say that, but the fact is that the last time we did this, we spent \$250,000 on legal fees."

Merle, Todd, Tim Andersen and Wayne and Tim Dreessen said they are knocking on doors with maps of the proposed dam sites in hopes that others will join their cause. Todd Andersen said the group already has gathered support from people who were members of the association in the 1980s. Organizers are organizing a series of meetings to gather support for their

SEE LANDOWNERS PAGE 3A



A portion of Kennard would be flooded as part of the NRD's proposal.

LANDOWNERS: Drive to stop dams begins

FROM PAGE 1
cause.

"It's depressing that we have to fight this project again," Andersen said. "We thought we had fought this off 20 years ago. The NRD is doing this just for Omaha's benefit. Omaha wants these dams to be built and the district's report says as much. The city wants this to go through so they can have an industrial area below the dams."

Tim Dreessen said he and his father own 400 acres of land and rent an additional 600 acres, which is scheduled to be at the bottom of the lake if the project is approved. Dreessen said he is also concerned about the effect the lake would have on his fire district from both a financial and a safety aspect.

"This will mean about a 60 to 70 percent reduction in the budget from our fire district," Dreessen said. "If all the land is underwater, you can't pay taxes on it. Also, the lake will require all of the east-west roads between Washington and Kennard to be closed because they will also be underwater. That means that, if you have a

fire on the other side of the lake, firefighters will have to drive south to the dam, cross the dam and then come back north to get to the fire. All of this will occur just because some people in Omaha need a place to play."

Tim Andersen, Todd Andersen's cousin, added that the dam project is a personal matter for him and his family as well because the lake would flood the farm that has been in his family for generations.

"The NRD is simply going to put us out of business," Andersen said. "Some of the land that I farm has been in our family for 120 years. I have two sons under me who would like to farm and this will affect their future. Over the years, we have bought land and expanded it just to have a unit of land that is feasible to farm. Now the district is going to chop it up into pieces. Then, we will get to pay taxes so the district can take our land. Projects like this really stop you where you are."

Jennifer Andersen, Todd Andersen's wife, said a compromise from the NRD to attempt to purchase only as much land as is needed rather than

entire farms is a small comfort to her. She said although the district may leave a portion of land for her and her husband, the land would not be enough to farm, therefore destroying their way of life.

"Land development is not our way of life," Jennifer Andersen said. "Farming is."

Hoier, who is a former NRD board member, added he is unsure why the dam construction is necessary because steps were taken to remedy some of the

problems with flooding during his years on the board. Hoier said he believes the proposal is being made for recreation purposes only.

"We built dams and cleaned Papio Creek along West Center Road to 84th Street in Omaha," Hoier said. "We spent all this money and we still don't have flood protection in the watershed. What have we been doing all this time if we haven't been working toward flood protection?"

Dams' public-private mix a knotty issue

■ Developers' help in paying for up to 10 more lakes would have benefits, but the use of some of them would be restricted.

7-26-04

By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mike Melvin just bought a fishing boat that he would love to use on the 300-acre private lake near Bennington.

That's not only because the lake has some of the nicest water in the Omaha area, Melvin figures he helped pay for the Newport Landing lake.

Some \$3 million in tax money built the dam there, and with

houses ranging in value from \$450,000 to \$3.5 million, the Land- ing is well on its way to being one of Nebraska's premier lakeside addresses.

"If they use my money," said Melvin, a Bennington-area resi- dent, "I want to use it."

But while Melvin can fish from a public pier at Newport Landing, he can't take his boat on the lake; that's for homeowners only.

With that, Melvin gets to the heart of one of the knotty issues

surrounding a proposal by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District to build up to 10 more dams in the metro area through a mix of public and private dollars.

Without money from develop- ers, the dams that would provide flood protection won't be built, said Steve Oltmans, general man- ager for the NRD. With private dollars, the public will be able to use some, but probably not all, of the lakes.

Rich Jansen, chairman of the Papio-Missouri River NRD board, said he expects the board to approve the dam proposal and the 1-cent increase in the prop- erty tax that accompanies it.

See Dams: Page 2



PHIL JOHNSON/THE WORLD-HERALD

Using a recreation area across from Newport Landing near Bennington are, from left, Roger Garry of Bennington, Richard Watson of Omaha and Watson's daughter, Linda Broecker of Bennington.

Continued

Dams: Public-private mix a knotty issue for plan

Continued from Page 1

Partnering with private developers, he said, will bring "terrific" savings to the taxpayers.

"We're not doing this as a want," Jansen said. "We're doing this as a need."

Doug Kagan, chairman of Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, a taxpayer watchdog group, said his group doesn't object to the collaboration as long as tax money is used solely for flood protection — and not to enhance developers' land. His group is analyzing the NRD plan.

Without private money, local property taxes would have to increase substantially or the district would have to gamble on a partnership with an agency such as the Army Corps of Engineers.

Working with the corps, which is helping to build Lake Wanhoo near Wahoo, would require a multiyear study — with no guarantee the corps could come up with the money or would agree that all the dams are necessary.

The NRD wants to move quickly before land costs escalate even more. Some land in west Omaha is running at \$30,000 to \$40,000 an acre, Oltmans said.

The district estimates today that the 10 dams will cost \$186 million, with about 75 percent of that for land acquisition.

But money is only one reason the NRD wants to partner with the private sector on the dams.

The plan on the table would allow landowners to retain and develop much of the land sur-

"When you sit down and put the pros and cons together on yellow paper, you're never going to have all pros, and you're never going to have all cons."

Steve Oltmans, general manager for the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District

rounding the lakes. By doing this, the NRD hopes to lessen the opposition that derailed a dam-building effort about 20 years ago.

"This will turn their land into something worth a heck of a lot more, even with some of it flooded," NRD board member Dick Connealy said. "The valuation in that area 10 years after these dams are built? You name the number."

Because much of the land surrounding the lakes would remain in private hands, the lakes would have less green space than people see at existing dam sites. Oltmans estimated that the lakes would have a land-to-water ratio of about 1.5 to 1. Zorinsky Lake has a 2-1 ratio, and Cunningham Lake has a 4-1 ratio.

Under the proposal on the table, the public-private partnerships would work this way:

Developers would obtain the options on the land needed for a lake. Once the land package is pulled together, the NRD would share the cost of purchasing the land with the developer.

This partnership would increase the amount of money available for land purchases,

making it easier for developers to pull the package together.

Once the land is purchased, the NRD would gain title, protecting the lake and dam from any financial problems the developer might encounter. The NRD would build and maintain the dam and be liable for it.

The NRD's expertise in dam building and its ability to assume liability were more important than the \$3 million it brought to the table, said Newport Landing developer Bob Horgan. The remaining \$58 million spent developing the lake-side subdivision draws the public share.

Building semiprivate lakes makes it easier for developers to attract homebuyers. Homeowners, like those at Newport Landing who paid an average of \$140,000 for lots, have some assurance that the lake won't be too busy or rowdy and that strangers won't be coming onto their property to fish or swim.

That substantial private investment by homeowners brings with it another public benefit — a noticeable bump in the tax rolls. Horgan estimates that his development will add \$200 million to Douglas Coun-

ty's valuation once all the homes are built.

Horgan also calculates that he has returned about \$4 million to the public by donating nearby land, which is being used for a popular recreation area and the site for Bennington's new high school.

But even the recreation area comes with a trade-off. The fishing lake there doubles as a sediment pond to keep the larger lake clean for Newport Landing residents.

Some of the lakes being planned would be fully open to the public — notably, a 58-acre lake at 192nd Street and West Dodge Road, a 100-acre lake near 168th and Fort Streets and the 1,900-acre lake north of Bennington.

But other, smaller lakes, specifically three near Bennington, are likely to be semiprivate, with no public boating but possibly public fishing and hiking-biking trails.

None of the 10 lakes is expected to have a public swimming beach.

From Oltmans' perspective, there are no easy answers.

"When you sit down and put the pros and cons together on yellow paper, you're never going to have all pros, and you're never going to have all cons," he said. "These public-private partnerships provide more benefits and savings to the taxpayers than negatives. We've learned that with the Horgan development."

Washington residents prepare to fight dams

NRD plan would flood most of town

7-27-04
By Keith Rydberg
Reporter
Blair-Wash Co.
Pkt-Tribune

WASHINGTON — Jack Crumley and Del Nelson remember the 1960s when eight inches of rain in 45 minutes made boating the only method of travel available in many metropolitan Omaha areas.

Both men can look back and joke about the events of 40 years ago, but they are now concerned about the possibility of a man-made flood. The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District is considering adding 10 dams to Douglas, Washington and Sarpy counties.

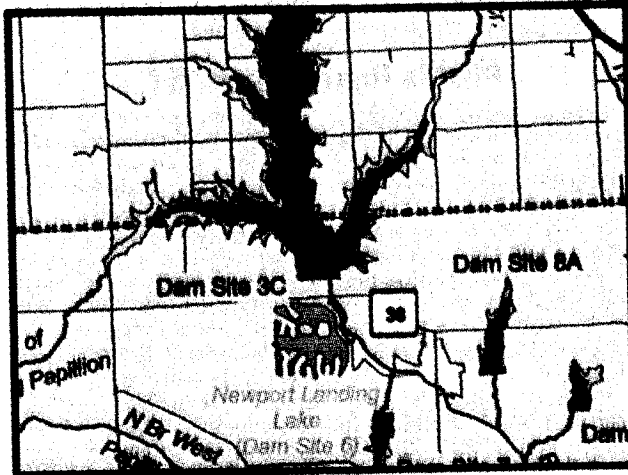
The dam construction would be a continuation of a project originally designed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1967 after the 1964 and 1965 floods caused concerns about continued flooding in the watershed. Seven dams have already been built in the watershed but opposition from citizen groups in the 1980s caused the project to be stopped until its recent review by the NRD.

Residents in and around Kennard and Washington are concerned about the proposal. The dams will result in the creation of a 1,900-acre lake that would stretch approximately four miles between Kennard and Washington. If the dams are built, the lake would require the district to purchase 23 residential properties and three commercial properties in the village of Washington.

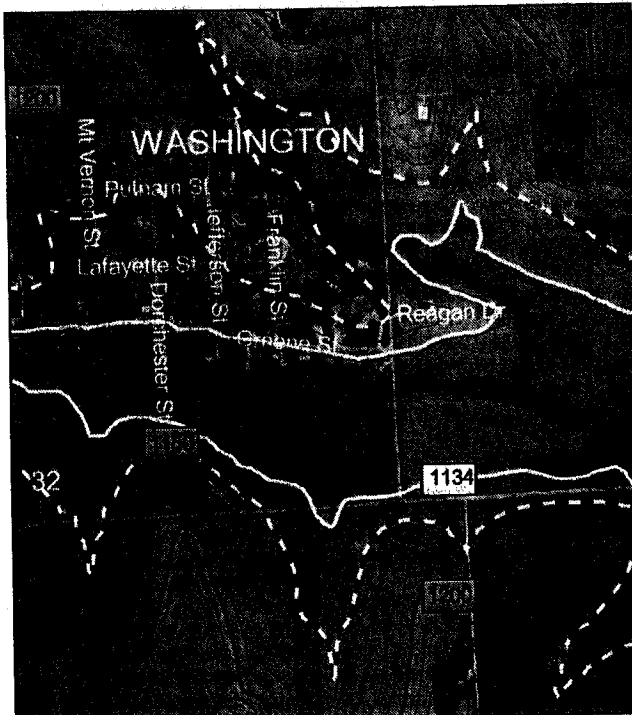
Also, 16 other residential properties and one commercial property would be affected and steps would be taken to protect those properties from potential flooding. In Kennard, the district anticipates 17 commercial properties and nine residential properties would be affected by the planned flooding.

Opposition groups have been started in both communities to fight the new dam proposals.

In Washington, a group of citizens met in the village's park last week to discuss the best way to inform the public and to get more people involved with the project. Several citizens plan to print fliers and knock on doors in the village to make sure everyone is aware of the NRD's



Above, the dam just south of the Washington-Douglas county line would create a 1,900-acre lake and flood much of Washington. Below, the white line represents the shoreline of the proposed reservoir and the dotted line represents the high-water mark.



proposal.

Margie Crumley said she believes the district's proposed plans for Washington and Kennard is the result of poor planning on the part of Omaha residents.

"The district should not have built in the floodplain the first time around," Crumley said. "It makes me very angry that the residents of Omaha just seem to get to do what they want to do and then they expect someone else to bail them out. Also, recreation seems to be as important as flood control in this. The district wants some place for water recreation, but can't the district build the dam someplace other than where it is now

proposed so the dam will not wipe out a couple of towns?"

Nelson helped with opposition of the dam project in the 1980s. He said the dam project was originally proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a way to control flooding in the watershed, but nothing was ever done to curtail development in the watershed, mainly by Omaha residents.

Nelson added the heavy rain-storm in Omaha last week was somewhat ironic in its timing because it showed that flooding can occur regardless of how many dams are in an area.

Loren Cohrs also remembers

SEE WASHINGTON PAGE 3A

Continued



KEITH RYDBERG/PILOT-TRIBUNE

Several Washington residents have gotten together to coordinate efforts to fight a dam project that would create a lake between the village and Kennard. While the efforts are still in the planning stage, the main goal of the group is to inform people about how the project will affect their village.

WASHINGTON: Locals oppose dam plan

FROM PAGE 1

the opposition effort in the 1980s. He said the project will affect him as both a residential property owner and as the owner of Knudsen Oil and Feed in Washington. As the district's proposal currently stands, Cohrs would lose two houses and four business areas if the dams were built.

Cohrs said Knudsen Oil and Feed serves the entire Papio Valley and the northern part of Kennard, much of which would be underwater if the lake is made.

"Between Wayne Dreesen (interviewed in the July 23 *Enterprise*) and I, we probably stand to lose more than anybody else," Cohrs said. "It's definitely going to be tough."

John Galvan and his wife, Brenda moved into a residential area near Washington eight months ago. They chose Washington because of its small-town atmosphere and proximity to Omaha. John said he believes the project was hastily planned and could have been drafted better in order to alleviate some of the effects on the two villages.

"I don't know why the project has to be so big," Galvan said. "I just don't think the district gave this project a lot of thought when they picked the areas they selected. Logically, you would think the district would pick a spot that wouldn't interfere with anybody's livelihood. I am sure they could think it out so the plan would be better than this. That way, it would save

our livelihood and yet still address recreation and other things. Everybody I have talked to is in opposition to this. I have not talked to anyone who is in favor of this, whether they live here or not."

Galvan also said he and the other residents of the village have never been told the status of the project. While the project is still officially in the proposal stage, Galvan said the uncertainty makes him and others unsure what they should do regarding the properties they own.

"Depending on what the district does with this particular initiative, I'm stuck. If I was to lose my job, I would be stuck because I couldn't sell my house. The problem we all have is we don't know when this is really going to happen. It could be today, it could be five years from now. That is what really irks me."

LeMara Eicke, who is a lifetime resident of Washington, said the timeframe issue concerns her as well. She said news of the proposal was "like a kick in the stomach" for her. Eicke added she thinks the project is being done less out of concern for flood control and more for recreation and economic development, a thought that was shared by all of the Washington residents at the meeting.

"The district is very much interested in working with private developers and, let's face it, developers love having land around a lake," Eicke said. "That is what the district is

looking at and that is essentially what the district has alluded to (in the executive summary). They need the private developers involved in this because then, the project won't cost the district as much money."

The concerned citizens are hoping to get people to attend the Washington Village Board meeting August 3 to finalize formal opposition plans. The citizens are also planning to attend the NRD board meeting August 12 to show their opposition to the proposal.

While there was a sense of anxiety and uncertainty at the meeting, Nelson reminded the citizens of the success of the opposition group that was formed in the 1980s.

"My personal feeling is the district didn't get the project done 30 years ago, and I don't think they will get the project done now," Nelson said.

Property and livelihood to be taken in NRD's Papio Creek dam project

To the editor:

I read with interest and dismay the July 16 *Omaha World-Herald* article, "Yes to Dam Fund," and the July 18 *Omaha World-Herald* article, "Metro Area Dam Plan Refloated." As noble as the NRD sounds by trying to protect those people who are being flooded because of heavy rains downstream, the NRD neglects to mention the many people upstream who are being told their property and livelihoods are to be taken in order to build the dams, like it or not.

People building in the flood zone are doing so at their own risk. Why should Washington County have to give up agricultural land and homes to build the dams to accommodate Omaha? I believe that it is NOT for the noble purpose of saving lives from potential flooding that the NRD leads you to believe but more to accommodate people in west Omaha who want a lakefront house, a place to put their boat and greenspace for hiking and biking trails and parks. They plan on funding this project by yet ANOTHER tax increase.

When the NRD originally set

out its plan for flood protection in 1968 by building dams upstream, Washington County fought a good fight and won the right to keep the dams out. Douglas County was to redirect people and businesses away from building on the flood plain. Have they forgotten this agreement?

Apparently Dick Connealy, our Washington County NRD representative, has not talked to Washington County residents about the potential impacts the dam would have, such as the loss of homes, buildings and agricultural land. This dam site project for Omaha is not a "win-win" situation as Connealy suggests.

Does the NRD think that now, after 20 years, we will gladly give up our homes and land for their benefit? I hope the residents of Washington County will let Mr. (Steve) Oltmans, general manager of the NRD, and Mr. Connealy know this is NOT what we want in our county. Washington County residents need to be aware of the plans forced upon them by the NRD.

Karen Andersen

Kennard

OMAHA DAILY HERALD FOUNDED 1865
 OMAHA DAILY WORLD FOUNDED BY GILBERT M. HITCHCOCK 1885
 OMAHA WORLD-HERALD FIRST PUBLISHED JULY 15, 1889

Omaha World-Herald

JOHN GOTTSCHALK, *Publisher*
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Serving a greater good

Reports that dam projects around metropolitan Omaha are back on track have unsettled some residents. Many of the property owners in areas affected by the flood control work had hoped the idea was dead.

Unfortunately, this is an instance where a few people must put up with a serious disruption for the good of the larger society.

The predecessor of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District built seven dams about three decades ago in the Papillion Creek watershed, which drains parts of Omaha and Douglas County east of Elkhorn. Those dams, with popular recreation sites such as Cunningham Lake, have helped contain and channel floodwaters that would otherwise have damaged neighborhoods and commercial areas in central and western Omaha and endangered lives.

The original 1968 plan had called for more dams, but money, politics and homeowner resistance short-circuited any more construction. Existing protections have generally kept floodwaters under control. But that is changing.

As urban development accelerates, the need for more flood control grows, too. As more roofs, parking lots and streets cover the soil, rainfall runs off rather than soaking in. More water flows downstream; flood control resources that have worked fairly well for decades are approaching inadequacy. Barring additional work, disaster is coming.

Thus, the NRD's proposal for up to 10 dams in Douglas, Washington and Sarpy Counties, to be built over the

**Disruption,
inconvenience
of public projects
regrettable
but necessary.**

next 10 to 15 years. Some of the smaller facilities would involve a partnership between the NRD and a private developer, which can entail the necessary

drawback of reduced public access.

In return for financial participation in the dam, the developer is permitted to build housing on the resulting lake. As a result, a portion of the lakeshore may be reserved for residents of the development. It is the responsibility of the NRD to see that all interests are protected — that there is enough incentive to entice developers to cooperate, but also that there is adequate public access to the lakes created in part with public money.

One of the larger proposed dams, close to Washington in Washington County, has been especially contentious. Some of the same residents who fought it 20 years ago are again involved, and it's easy to sympathize with them. These are people who have worked hard, bought homes, contributed to the community and want to be left in peace. But now, the NRD is telling them they must sacrifice that peace to benefit others.

If the plan is approved — and it is greatly needed — some of them would lose part of their property. Some homes may be moved. Some families would have to find new homes.

This is the way of progress. If officials weren't able to relocate even reluctant landowners, public services such as streets and courthouses and dams could not be built. Many people are sorry for the inconvenience and regret the trouble and disruption. But it's necessary for the greater good.

County pulls out of Papio Watershed study

Board says dam project kept secret

By Keith Rydberg
Reporter
Enterprise
7-30-04

The Washington County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a motion this week not to join the Papio Creek Watershed Partnership after board members expressed concern about how they learned of a proposed dam project in Washington County.

The motion, which was made by District 1 Supervisor Wes Petznick, specifically stated the supervisors were not joining the partnership after they were not informed about the dam project at the board's July 13 meeting. At that meeting, the supervisors met with Steve Oltmans, general

manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, and Marlin Peterman, assistant general manager of the district, who asked the county to join the Papio Creek Watershed partnership. The board voted 4-2 at that meeting to give the district \$10,000 to join the partnership although the district had requested \$15,000. Petznick and fellow supervisor Ernest Abariotes voted against the proposal at the July 13 meeting.

Circumstances in the two weeks following that meeting led to Tuesday's vote to pull out of the agreement. County board chairman Harlo Wilcox expressed anger over learning about the dam project through a newspaper article rather than hearing about it from Oltmans or Peterman.

"I just want to let the record show that I was very, very unhappy and very disappointed that I didn't know upfront about this," Wilcox said. "I still feel at this time that I should have

"I just want to let the record show that I was very, very unhappy and very disappointed that I didn't know upfront about this,"

—Harlo Wilcox, Washington County Board chairman

known beforehand about this. I understand mistakes can be made, but I still feel I should have known about it before I picked up the *Omaha World-Herald* and read about it."

Peterman said the July 13 meeting was to discuss the watershed partnership and the dam project was not specifically mentioned at the meeting because it was, and still is, in the preliminary stage. The NRD board is planning to vote on the draft report later this year and work on a plan of action is scheduled to begin if the report is approved.

Even without delays, Peterman said it would be years before work begins on the Washington County dams.

"We don't think we have a report here; we have a draft of information," Peterman said.

County Attorney Ed Talbot said he believed the board still should have been told about the possibility of the dam project, regardless of its status, and added the supervisors are now the ones who have to go in front of anxious county residents about the dam project.

"Wouldn't it be your understanding the dams are part and parcel of the watershed?" Talbot asked. "Shouldn't this have been one of the issues brought before the county board? It seems to me that one of the issues that should have been brought before the county board regarding this agreement was the impact to Washington County of the addition of the proposed dams in Washington County. You already had the plan in place. One

"Wouldn't it be your understanding the dams are part and parcel of the watershed? Shouldn't this have been one of the issues brought before the county board?"

—Ed Talbot, Washington County attorney

to two weeks after our meeting, it is brought out to the effect that these dams are proposed in Washington County. You mentioned earlier we had all the knowledge to enter into this contract. I don't think that is true. How does this put these people (the supervisors) in a position with their constituents?"

Talbot added he also was concerned about the county's obligation

SEE COUNTY PAGE 3A

Continued

COUNTY: Board pulls out of NRD study

FROM PAGE 1

gations as a member of the partnership. Although the contract states any member of the partnership has 60 days in which to withdraw after joining the partnership, the partnership member would still be financially responsible for paying the full amount specified in the agreement.

"What I'm saying is you may be able to get out of the partnership within 60 days, but don't put away your pocketbook," Talbot said.

Prior to the vote, Peterman introduced Laurie Carrette Zook, water resources section manager for HDR, the engineering firm hired by the district for the project. In a presentation to the audience, Carrette Zook said some of the design considerations and criteria considered in the project included flood storage, the impact of pool elevations, the Union Pacific railroad subgrade and the potential impacts to U.S. Highway 30 and the villages of Washington and Kennard.

Carrette Zook also said the NRD and HDR considered eight different alternatives. The alternative that was selected was chosen because Dam Site 3C, located two miles east of Washington near the Washington-Douglas county line, would be the most effective at providing flood control for the area.

Carrette Zook said the potential benefit of constructing the 10 dams would be the containment of nearly 65 percent of the watershed's drainage area at the confluence of the Big Papio Creek and the Little Papio Creek. Also, flood storage construction would mean more than 50 percent of the drainage would be contained at Capehart Road near Bellevue.

Karen Andersen of Kennard said she and other landowners stand to lose their land through the project as a result of development in the watershed that should never have been allowed.

"It is quite obvious that the recent flooding in Omaha is not coming from Washington County," Andersen said. "I don't understand why we have to give up our farms to cover people who are where they should not be."

When other citizens made similar comments, Peterman said everyone will be treated equally in the proposal with no preference made to Omaha.

"Nobody ever said anyone is

more important than anyone else in this," Peterman said. "This is the most dangerous watershed in the state of Nebraska. The NRD and the city (of Omaha) have done more to keep people out of the watershed than you might imagine. We are saying this is a very hazardous watershed from the standpoint of flash flooding. It is not getting better; it is getting worse. What the NRD is saying is that we have a responsibility to serve our people and prevent flooding. We have a flood threat that is out there and we are looking to see if there is anything we can do about it."

Wilcox met with applause when he said the majority of

Washington County citizens were against the proposal.

"I don't think there is a person in this room that is in favor of this project," Wilcox said. "You can talk about this being a win-win situation all you want, but I have looked at both sides of this and, if I am sitting out there owning that land, it is not a win-win situation."

After the vote was taken, Peterman said recent developments have given the county board and residents the wrong perception of the NRD.

"There seems to be a perception that we have deceived you," Peterman said. "I'm sorry if I have left that message although I don't think that was the case."

Work on trail link is almost complete

7-6-04
By FIA CURLEY

WORLD-HERALD STAFFWRITER

Athletes and outdoors enthusiasts soon will be able to push themselves just a little farther.

A construction project linking the West Papio Trail in Papillion to the Keystone Trail at 36th Street south of Cornhusker Road is 95 percent complete.

Work to connect the two trails, which began last fall, required about a three-mile extension of the West Papio to the Keystone.

The cost? Just under \$1 million, with \$500,000 being covered by the federal government and

On Page 2

A stretch of the Big Papio Trail needs fixing.

the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District picking up the remainder.

When the three-mile West Papio project is finished this summer, users will be able to follow a trail from Papillion to the Missouri River at Haworth Park in Bellevue. Bicyclists will be able to travel between the Keystone Trail at 88th and Fort Streets to the Papio Bay Aquatic Center.

One main goal for the link is convenience, said Gerry Bowen, natural resource planner for the NRD.

Although numbers aren't kept on trail use, Bowen said the popularity of trails has increased, and people want to see more added.

Omaha native Eric Odinas said he has used the Keystone Trail for six to seven years, riding his bike about 10 miles three times a week. He supports linking the Keystone and the West Papio.

"From using it, I'd say it's a good idea because on this, I just go back and forth," Odinas said, adding that he often sees competitive bike riders, families and joggers.

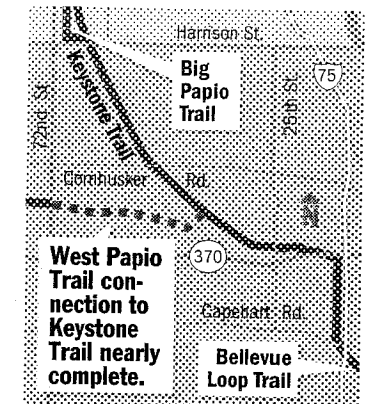
"I think this trail is the best thing this town ever did," Odinas said. "You stay in good shape and get your blood flowing."

The Redd family bikes together once or twice a week on the Keystone Trail.

"It's really a serene experience, especially in the morning when no one's out," Roxanne Redd said. "It helps save on gas and the pollution problem."

Her husband, Scott Redd, said he would like to see bike lanes along the streets. "You just have to be lucky and hope that (the trail) is along where you want to go," he said.

Johann Onnen, a board member of the Omaha Pedalers Bicycle Club, said he and his friends describe the linking of trails as a "build-it-and-they-will-come" scenario.



DAVE CROY/THE WORLD-HERALD

Trails: Work on link almost done

Continued from Page 1

club Club, said he and his friends describe the linking of trails as a "build-it-and-they-will-come" scenario.

The 52-year-old said he already has seen riders using the new three-mile section of the trail.

"It's awesome — long overdue," Onnen said. "It's great because you can have two bicyclers meet a runner and no one has to get out of the way."

Club members are quickly spreading the word, he said. Onnen, who rides twice a week for up to 50 miles, uses the trails to stay conditioned.

"The biggest thing: It's going to be convenient for those people who live near the bike path," Onnen said. "It gives them an alternate way to get to Papillion. It would be fabulous if people could do 100 miles without going on a major road."

See Trails: Page 2

Dam-site dispute is back on surface

NRD plan disliked in Washington Co.

'We got blindsided'

8-4-04
By JEFFREY ROBB

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Hard feelings over the idea of two new dam sites in Washington County are starting to set in, reaching up to the county's elected leaders.

Residents are expressing opposition to the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's fledgling plan.

Last week, the Washington County Board pulled out of an NRD-led group overseeing water issues on the Papillion Creek system because board members felt blindsided by the new talk of building flood-control dams.

The board voted 4-2 in July to join the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership without full knowledge that the NRD was studying the prospect of more dam sites.

At that meeting, the board specifically asked NRD representatives about dams. Two board members said they came away with the impression that talk about dams was a long way off, perhaps 10 to 15 years.

Less than a week later, The World-Herald published a report that the NRD was looking at 10 new dams at a cost of \$186 million.

If the NRD's ideas were to proceed, the towns of Kennard and Washington would be affected by two dams, including a \$94 million, 1,900-acre lake spanning the Washington-Douglas county line.

The Washington County Board voted unanimously last week to pull out of the partnership during an emotional meeting at which about 30 residents voiced opposition.

"We do feel we got blindsided," Board Chairman Duane Wilcox of Kennard said.

NRD officials say the large lake is 10 to 15 years from being built, if it gets built at all.

After fighting off earlier dam site plans decades ago, Wilcox said, "very, very unhappy" residents are organizing to fight again.

"When you're talking about . . . their livelihood and their homes, they're not interested," Wilcox said.

Steve Oltmans, the NRD's general manager, said he understands that a lot of landowners were disturbed because "they thought this issue was over 20 years ago."

But because his own board hadn't approved the plan, Oltmans said, he didn't have authority to talk to Washington County officials about the plan.

Oltmans said the NRD had intended to make them aware of the plans later.

Last week, the NRD's assistant general manager appeared before the County Board and apologized. A consultant from HDR Inc. showed the board plans for the dams.

After the meeting, opponent Wayne Dreesen acknowledged

See NRD: Page 2

NRD: Proposed dam sites are still in early planning stages

Continued from Page 1

that the board's decision to pull out of the Watershed Partnership might be an insignificant move in the long run.

"We've got a long, long ways to go" to stop the dams, he said. "But I don't think it will be quite as easy" for the NRD to build them.

If Washington County isn't working with the NRD on the plans, Oltmans said, efforts to build the dams would be hurt.

Oltmans said he hopes people see that the NRD's approach to building dams is different than it was before. Landowners around the dams, for instance, would get to keep much of the surrounding land, which could become popular development ground.

"Urbanization is going to grow into Washington County no matter what," Oltmans said.

World-Herald staff writer Nancy Gaarder contributed to this report.

Plan to save Big Mac may sink others

BY DAVID HENDEE
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OMAHA WORLD-HERALD
7-2-C4

One scenario for saving drought-stricken Lake McConaughy in western Nebraska would doom four small downstream reservoirs next year as irrigation canals go dry, according to plans under consideration.

One idea is to shut down canals carrying water from McConaughy to farmers in south-central Nebraska. It also would hit hard Lake Maloney, Jeffrey Reservoir, Johnson Lake and Elwood Reservoir.

The four reservoirs — used to channel McConaughy water downstream — seep badly and would dry up if not recharged by canals.

Another option is to continue to feed those irrigation canals, but that could leave McConaughy dry next summer if the drought continues.

"No one scenario has been decided," Tim Anderson, a spokesman for the irrigation district that owns and operates Lake McConaughy, said Thursday. "These are just what-ifs and an early warning about things to be thinking about in the future."

Anderson and Mike Drain, a
See Water: Page 2

Water: Strategies to be discussed to help Big Mac

Continued from Page 1

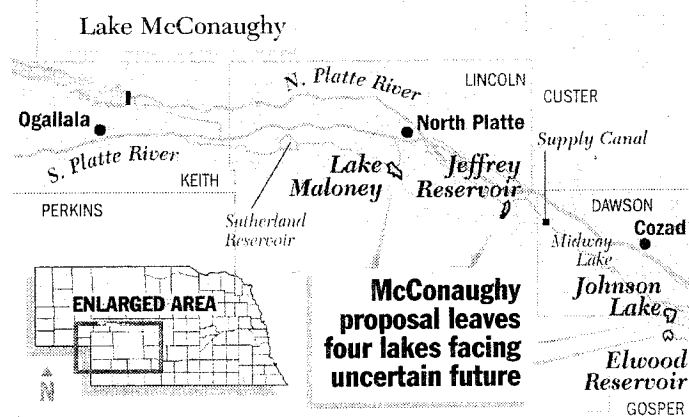
hydrologist for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, met Wednesday in Lincoln with State Game and Parks Commission administrators to outline possible strategies. The commission manages the lake's campgrounds and its prized walleye and striped bass fishery.

Details of Central's ideas to prevent Lake McConaughy from disappearing into its historic riverbed are expected to be discussed Tuesday at the district's monthly board meeting in Holdrege.

"Everyone's hoping that if Central doesn't take any irrigation water that Lake McConaughy will stabilize," said Kirk Nelson, assistant director of the commission. "It's speculative now to say what will happen."

The four downstream reservoirs are popular recreation areas. Johnson Lake and Jeffrey Reservoir, built as regulating reservoirs for downstream hydroelectric plants, are the largest lakes on Central's supply canal from Lake McConaughy.

About 900 cabins and houses line Johnson Lake's 11-mile shoreline. It logs about 500,000 visits each year. There are about



DAVE CROY/THE WORLD-HERALD

135 cabins and houses at Jeffrey Reservoir.

Lake McConaughy is Nebraska's largest reservoir. It is falling toward a historic low level this summer as water released into irrigation canals continues to outpace annual inflows from the North Platte River. Little water is flowing into the reservoir as a fifth year of drought hangs over the West.

Water impounded behind Kingsley Dam near Ogallala is owned by Central and its irrigators; Nebraska Public Power District and its irrigators; and the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which maintains an environmental account for downstream habitat.

Nelson said the three-way ownership adds to the uncertainty about McConaughy's future because NPPD and the Fish and Wildlife Service may decide to use their share of the water next year despite Central's possible decision to try to recharge the reservoir.

The prolonged drought is so severe that climatologists say it will take years of above-average snowfall in the North Platte

River basin of Colorado and Wyoming to replenish McConaughy and upstream reservoirs.

"What we need is a series of rains — east of the Wyoming state line — like they had at Chadron," Nelson said. A thunderstorm Wednesday outside the McConaughy watershed dumped about 4 inches of rain in northwestern Nebraska.

Built for irrigation in the 1930s, Lake McConaughy developed into one of Nebraska's top recreation destinations and boasts both year-round and vacation homes. Its fishery and white-sand beaches typically attract thousands of summer tourists, especially from nearby Colorado.

The reservoir is about 21 miles long when full. It now is at 32 percent of capacity. The reservoir is 13 feet lower than it was at this time last year, leaving many boat docks and ramps far from the water.

Don Gabelhouse, the commission's fisheries chief, said he fears that the low water level will cause a massive fish kill that will weaken the reservoir's eventual recovery.

"This is more than a drought issue," he said. "Recreation is an economic player. It is business for Nebraska."

Fixing trail stretch to cost \$150,000 to \$200,000

7-6-04
By RICK RUGGLES

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A 4,000-foot stretch of the Big Papio Trail in west Omaha must be replaced at a cost of \$150,000 to \$200,000 because of cracking, an administrator involved said.

Steve Oltmans, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, said he hopes to negotiate a payment agreement with the contractor and the engineering firm on the project.

"I think it's basically a quality-control thing," Oltmans said.

NRD officials said it was the first time a trail has had serious cracking problems.

Terracon, a consulting firm hired by the NRD to study reasons for the cracking, turned over its report late last week.

A representative with Hawkins Construction, the contractor, couldn't be reached. Ron Less, president and chief executive officer of Kirkham Michael Consulting Engineers, said late Fri-

day he hadn't read the report. Kirkham Michael was the engineering firm on the project.

Oltmans said that both firms have done considerable work for the district and that this is the first time a trail has had serious cracking problems.

The trail was built in 2002 and 2003, and cracks began to form shortly after its completion. The portion in question runs from West Center Road north to West Dodge Road.

The report cites several elements that might have contributed to the problem:

Soil — The soil on which the concrete trail was placed was too dry and didn't compact well enough.

Testing — The number or placement of soil tests wasn't adequate.

Machinery — Heavy machinery, such as a concrete or maintenance truck, could have stressed the trail.

The entire project ran from Towl Park, near 90th Street and West Center Road, to 120th and Blondo Streets. Cracking wasn't a problem on much of the project.

A gift to the future

A high-ranking official from the U.S. Department of Agriculture came to Nebraska recently to recognize and encourage Nebraska landowners who have designated parts of their land for a special conservation reserve.

The visit of Undersecretary Mark Rey attracted relatively little attention in the broader scheme of things. But it was important for what it symbolized and the good it promoted.

Rey and other conservation officials visited the farm of Robert and Verneel Noerrlinger on the Missouri River near Union, Neb. The purpose of the occasion was to highlight a new federal program in which \$26 million will be spent to restore 18,200 acres of wetlands along the river from Ponca to Rulo. It fits, he said, into a Bush administration goal of protecting 3 million acres of environmentally sensitive wetlands over the next five years.

The special conservation reserve is set up when a landowner grants an easement to the government under which certain activities, such as farming or residential construction, are forbidden. The landowner keeps control of the land for other purposes, such as recreation. The easements are granted for 10 or 30 years.

Ultimately, officials said, they envision a 1-mile-wide strip of wetlands along the Missouri. This would provide flood control, recreation, wildlife enhancement and better water quality.

It also would go a long way toward preserving the natural beauty of the land — a benefit that too often is overlooked, even in cities, when developers rush to plant high-rise condominiums along the riverbank.

**Easements
can prevent
the deterioration
of Nebraska's
natural beauty.**

The pursuit of such a goal should help to moderate the disappointment of people who believe the future of the Missouri has been jeopardized by a

recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling reaffirming the authority of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to manage the river.

USDA is working closely with the corps, Rey said, in trying to improve the river and provide more habitat for wild birds and animals.

Too often, "manmade habitat" draws sneers from environmental purists, as though a piping plover hatched beside a sandpit is less worthy of adulation than one that nests on a naturally created sandbar.

The events at Union remind us to look deeper when told that the government's role in environmental protection fizzled the day George W. Bush took office.

These developments also remind us to thank conservation-minded landowners like the Noerrlingers, who see the land not only as something to be used and enjoyed but also as a trust to be passed along to future generations.

No one knows what impact will result if precipitation in the West remains at the level of the past few years.

But one thing seems predictable: more pressure to convert Nebraska's wild and beautiful places, especially the waterfront property that remains, into residential or commercial property.

So let's use Undersecretary Rey's recent visit as the occasion to honor those landowners who show a commitment to preservation and to encourage others to consider a similar path of stewardship.

Missouri River flow ruling appealed

WASHINGTON (AP) — Environmentalists on Friday appealed a recent federal court ruling allowing the Missouri River to operate without changes they say are needed to save endangered fish and birds.

U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson in Minnesota ruled in favor of the Army Corps of Engineers last month, and the agency has proceeded with its new plan to keep summer water levels high enough for barge shipping.

Conservationists and the fishing and recreation industry in Montana and the Dakotas oppose that approach; they want a more seasonal spring rise and lower summer flows that would

mimic how the river flowed naturally for centuries.

Downstream farming and shipping interests argue that changing to an ebb-and-flow would end barge shipping and cause flooding.

Magnuson's ruling came nearly a year after a different federal judge ordered the changes and, when corps leaders refused to act, cited them for contempt.

"The law hasn't changed — the Bush administration has rewritten the scientific and administrative basis for the earlier rulings," said Brian O'Neill, a Minneapolis attorney for the conservation groups.

"We respectfully disagree with the judge that this scientific gerrymandering passes legal muster."

The groups on Friday appealed to the St. Louis-based 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, asking the court to uphold an order more than three years ago from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that the corps raise spring waters and release less water in the summer to encourage nesting and spawning and protect habitat.

The 8th Circuit is the regional appeals court for the Minnesota district court.

Service biologists backed off under the Bush administration,

issuing a subsequent ruling that the corps can keep water high for barges if it also builds new habitat for the sturgeon.

The conservation groups also asked Magnuson on Friday to review the corps' efforts to create that habitat because the wildlife service certified that the new habitat was suitable over the objections of field scientists.

The corps' new management plan replaces one that had gone unchanged for longer than 40 years and was written long before the pallid sturgeon and two shorebirds, the interior least tern and piping plover, were placed on the endangered and threatened species lists.

Robert S. Metzler, 94, was big Millard booster

7-10-04
By BETSIE FREEMAN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

When Robert S. Metzler died last week, the Millard area lost a prime booster.

Metzler served 18 years on the Millard School Board, 15 of them as president. He was a charter member of the Millard Lions Club and served on the Millard Volunteer Fire Department for 10 years.

In recent years, the 94-year-old Tekamah, Neb., native had suffered from Alzheimer's disease and heart problems. He died July 2 at an Omaha hospital. Private family services were planned.

After graduating from Tekamah High School in 1927, Metzler became a butcher for Safeway Stores. In 1943, he took a job as a food-service worker for crews building the Alaska-Canadian Highway.

He had a choice between that and serving in World War II, said his daughter, Susan Young of Omaha.

"Because he'd been a butcher, he thought he could do more good there," she said.

For more than 20 years, Metzler worked for the Toledo Scale Co., eventually becoming a retail sales manager. He retired in 1975.

He also served as a district director for the Papio Natural Resources District. *

He enjoyed fishing, hunting, gardening and woodworking.

"He wasn't content to sit much," Young said. "He liked to be doing something."

He married the former Lucille Tallon of Millard in 1936. Lucille Metzler died in 1999.

Other survivors include a sister, Mary Bailey, and a brother, Roy Metzler, both of Blair, Neb., two grandsons and three great-grandchildren.

Greenwire

TRACKING POLICY, POLITICS AND THE PRESS

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Monday, July 12, 2004

MISSOURI RIVER

Enviros appeal ruling on flow disputes

Environmentalists asked a federal appeals court last week to reverse a ruling that relieved the Army Corps of Engineers of the obligation to make any changes in the operations of its six Missouri River dams this summer.

On July 9, a coalition of environmental groups asked the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to force the Army Corps to impose seasonal tidal fluctuations to support bird and fish habitat.

The Missouri River's natural state is very wide and shallow. Low summertime flows are necessary for birds such as the endangered least tern and piping plovers to nest on sandbars. States have been at odds for years over river flows. Upstream states -- North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana -- want more water for their reservoirs in the summer. Downstream states including Missouri and Nebraska want more water for barges and other uses.

Last month, Judge Paul Magnuson of the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota said the Army Corps would adopt a new flow regime to protect endangered fish by 2006. In the meantime, the judge said, the federal government does not have to make any changes this year.

Environmentalists said Magnuson's ruling contradicted a separate federal decision holding the Army Corps in contempt for disregarding an order to reduce water levels. In a July 2003 injunction, Judge Gladys Kessler ruled in favor of environmentalists who sued to alter the Missouri River to more closely mimic its natural flows before it was dammed. Kessler found that the corps failed to implement a federally binding Fish and Wildlife Service plan calling for reduced summer flows on parts of the river (*Greenwire*, July 23, 2003).

"The law hasn't changed -- the Bush administration has rewritten the scientific and administrative basis for the earlier rulings," said environmental attorney Brian O'Neill (*AP/Billings Gazette*, July 10). -- DIL

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Sarpy moving forward with wastewater study

By Mitch Beaumont 7-15-04
Times Managing Editor

With its focus ultimately on the year 2050, last week Sarpy County took the next step necessary to determining how it can provide the best wastewater services to areas not included in current city systems.

The Sarpy County Board awarded the bid for a wastewater study, which could take up to a year to complete, to HDR of Omaha, which in turn has teamed with Hill-Farrell Associates of Bellevue and GIS Workshop of Lincoln.

By 2050, Sarpy County's population is estimated to reach 300,000, said County Administrator Mark Wayne.

Sarpy County develops a large amount of acreage housing developments, Wayne said, because there isn't adequate water and sewer coverage in unincorporated parts of the county.

An acreage can use a well field for its water supply, and thus doesn't need a pipeline.

Acreages, though, take up a lot more area than conventional subdivisions, he said, and it would be impossible to build that many homes, "because we would eat up all the ground, and that's not very effective," he said. "It's all about utilizing our resources."

The wastewater study, which could cost upwards of \$400,000 to \$500,000, will examine the Platte River Basin in Sarpy County, about a 130-square-mile area, Wayne said. The basin, he said, includes the area of the county that drains into the Platte River instead of the Papio Creek.

The study would help the county determine how to best develop a wastewater system that could be built ahead of development but soon enough so there are users for the system.

For that reason, Wayne said, full build of a new wastewater system in Sarpy County is 30 to 40 years down the road.

"So it's not like it will be here overnight," he said. "You've got to have flow and you've got to have the population before you build a pipeline. The worst thing to do is to put in a pipe without users. We could build a trunk line through the whole county, but it would cost millions and there'd be nobody to pay for that."

While it will certainly be a while before construction crews begin building a new sewer and water system in Sarpy County, Wayne said it is imperative that it stay ahead of the growth curve, hence the need to conduct the study soon.

"Some people could probably say, 'do it 10 years from now' but the idea is to be ahead of the development," he said.

The bid awarded by the County Board last week did not include a dollar, Wayne said, and in the coming weeks the county and HDR will finalize a plan of action for the study, a timeline and a cost estimate.

Sarpy County has been negotiating an inter-local and cost share agreement with seven local jurisdictions, Wayne said, but the money committed thus far may not be enough.

"We asked for \$400,000, but we're short of that," he said. "It might cost a whole lot more than that, I just don't know."

According to the draft interlocal agreement, Sarpy County and the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency will contribute \$100,000 to the study, Papillion will chip in \$60,000, Bellevue \$50,000, Omaha \$15,000, Springfield \$10,000 and Gretna \$5,000.

Annual water consumption in Nebraska

Domestic and
commercial use
2.8%

Industrial and
mining
0.7%

Thermoelectric
power
0.5%

Irrigation
and
livestock
95.9%

SOURCE: Water-Use Trends
1960-90; U.S. Geological Survey

DEAN WEINLAUB/THE WORLD-HERALD

New water law making waves

7-18-04

BY DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Water flowing from kitchen faucet? Check.

Lawn sprinkler soaking the garden? Check.

Center-pivot irrigating the cornfield? Check.

Stock tanks brimming in the cattle pasture? Check.

Nebraska's sweeping new water law has been on the books for two days and even if you live in the drought-dry corners of the state, you probably wouldn't know that anything changed.

But change is coming, and several western Nebraska cities fear nasty water wars between towns and agriculture-dominated natural resources districts.

"It's fair to say that communities along the Platte River west of Cozad, the Republican

**Coming changes in
water allocation
have some fearing
water wars
between towns and
irrigators.**

River and Lodgepole Creek are very concerned about how allocations of groundwater will impact their ability to provide for the public health and safety and to grow their communities," said John Heil, an Omaha attorney representing several western cities on water issues.

A workshop focusing on how the new law, Legislative Bill 962, may affect municipal and industrial use of groundwater will be held Wednesday in North Platte. More than 300 people are expected to attend.

Sidney City Manager Gary
See LB 962: Page 2

Continued

LB 962: New water law may affect municipal use

Continued from Page 1

Person, who has feuded over water with his local South Platte Natural Resources District in the Lodgepole Creek valley, said towns such as his have dramatically cut water usage in recent years with drought lingering over the West.

Nebraska's biggest water consumers, however, are not homes and businesses but farms and ranches.

Irrigation and livestock users take about 96 percent of the water consumed in the state each year. Domestic and commercial users consume less than 3 percent, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

John Cook, the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources attorney who is considered an author of the legislation, said the new law is complex and will have significant impacts in some parts of the state.

It is wrong, however, for cities to assume the worst, Cook said.

The new law is designed to make the state and its 23 natural

resources districts more proactive in anticipating and preventing water conflicts between folks who tap rivers and streams and those who pump from the ground.

In regions where conflicts exist, the law establishes principles and timelines for resolving the disputes.

Sidney's Person said communities such as his are the driving force behind economic growth in rural Nebraska and need water to continue growing.

"It's tough enough to do economic development in rural Nebraska, but if you hamstring us, or put handcuffs on us, and not allow growth without an excessive price, then everybody walks away," he said.

McCook City Manager John Bingham shares that concern.

"If NRDs determine that allocations for our industrial water users are subject to review every 12 months, for example, then what happens if McCook and a place east of Grand Island — where it still rains regularly — are on the short list for a corporation looking for a new site?"

Bingham said. "They probably head down the road."

Bingham said his concern is that municipal water systems will be treated "as if they're just another irrigator" by NRD boards with a skewed perspective of city issues.

For example, the Middle Republican Natural Resources District in the McCook area is proposing a "per capita allocation" for the city on water pumped from the ground.

Bingham took the proposed per-person water allocation from the NRD, computed the acreage within the city boundaries and concluded that if the entire acreage were planted in corn, McCook would receive twice the water allocation than what was proposed.

McCook, a city of 8,000, is the major job base in southwest Nebraska.

Person, the Sidney city manager, said the McCook example illustrates how municipalities and economic development are misunderstood by NRDs — and why he and others are passionate about changing the attitudes

of policymakers working under the new law.

"I'm an old country kid and I understand raising corn and cattle, but, by golly, we need some common sense on how we approach these issues," Person said.

"There shouldn't even be an argument when it comes to water for people. As Sidney goes, so goes the entire southern Panhandle."

Heil said the North Platte meeting will offer officials from the cities, NRDs and state government a chance to begin to better understand the impact of the new law.

"The best thing that could happen is for the drought to end, but that's not going to happen," Heil said.

"City managers are dealing with the survival of their communities and one missed opportunity is huge for them. Once NRDs get the big picture that cities are not their enemies and are not taking all the water, reasonable minds can work it out. But uncertainty is here for the foreseeable future."

State's new water law worries some city users

7-22-04
By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. — Representatives of communities in drought-stricken areas of Nebraska drew a line in the sand Wednesday — but no water sprang from the ground.

"The economic vitality of the western two-thirds of the state may be stunted if it doesn't have water to serve expanding communities," Sidney City Attorney Jordan Ball said at a meeting called to discuss the state's new water law, which took effect last week.

The complex law will have a significant impact in parts of the state. It is designed to make the state and its 23 natural resources districts more proactive in anticipating and preventing water conflicts between those who tap rivers and streams and those who pump water from the ground.

Some community leaders in southwestern Nebraska and the Panhandle worry about how potential allocations of groundwater by agriculture-dominated NRD boards might affect their ability to serve the public. They also are concerned about the impact on economic development goals while a historic drought continues in the West.

"Sidney, McCook, Scottsbluff, Gering, North Platte and many other communities are growing," Ball said. "Any community that isn't growing has an intention of growing."

Ball, who has represented Sidney in recent water disputes with the South Platte Natural Resources District, said overdevelopment of center-pivot irrigation in Nebraska created some of the water-shortage problems now facing many

farmers and townspeople in the western half of the state.

The potential under the new law that NRD boards could require cities to buy water allocations from owners of agricultural land makes no sense, given that communities consume less than 3 percent of the state's water, Ball said.

"Shouldn't center-pivot irrigators, who have profited from and created the overuse problem, be required to solve the problem?" he asked.

An audience of about 110 people at Mid-Plains Community College was largely made up of community leaders and irrigators. McCook City Manager John Bingham, who helped organize the meeting, said Nebraska cities need to join NRDs in resolving water issues.

"This is a good start," Bingham said. "Some people feel that LB 962 (the water law) might disenfranchise municipal water users from the process, yet we've probably done that to ourselves."

Nothing has precluded people living in cities from seeking election to NRD boards, he said.

"But I don't think the election process is going to move fast enough to correct that problem because of the important decisions that are going to be made," he said. "We need to start talking with our NRDs more effectively than we ever had before."

Rod Horn, general manager of the Sidney-based South Platte NRD, said it is important for cities to have cooperative relationships with the districts.

"Instead of a negative-driven effort, we need to try to look at it in a more positive light, try to work together," Horn said.

W-H 7-23-04

Water links are real

I am writing in response to a Pulse letter July 21 that incorrectly accuses the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources of being deceptive.

There is overwhelming evidence in numerous studies that groundwater pumping can affect river flows. To suggest such a statement was deceptive is inappropriate and serves to discredit the reputable institutions and agencies behind those studies, including the University of Nebraska, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and other nationally known scientists and engineers.

These and other agencies also have gone to great lengths to meticulously expand the scientific base for their decisions. The COHYST study, initiated to increase our understanding of the relationship between surface water and groundwater flows along the Platte River, is a good example. It is being conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Nebraska.

The Department of Natural Resources has gone to great lengths to be open and honest throughout this very difficult and complicated discussion. The issues are real, and a cooperative spirit must prevail in order to achieve a resolution.

Roger Patterson, Lincoln
Director, Nebraska DNR

NEWS

from the county seat

Dakota City, Dakota County seat, continues to be a pioneer in northeast Nebraska



display area at Cimmarina Boats. Joining us as new business partners are Shannon's Tranquility for Health and Beauty and American Warriors' Arts.

The leadership of Papio Missouri River Natural Resources District in creating economies for governmental and quasi-governmental agencies has resulted in the design of an office building, in excess of 7,000 square feet, to be built next to our City Hall.

By Charles Carson
Mayor, Dakota City

It is with a great deal of pride that we share with you the progress of Dakota County's county seat community. We are confident the continued growth of Dakota City is embedded in our commitment to excellence in public service, to our partnerships with the corporate and business community, and in the "small town values" of our community, located only 10 minutes from major cultural, educational and entertainment opportunities.

Our corporate and business development reflects the economic viability of partnerships at many levels. We are very excited about the tens of millions of dollars Tyson foods will be investing in their flagstaff plant renovation, the expansion of Broyhill's product line into the sports turf care market, and the upgrading of the

Our tax rate this year is one that contributes to the fact that while the cost of living has increased over 26 percent in the last ten years, our tax rates has decreased by 10 percent!

Charles Carson
Mayor, Dakota City



access for our corporate and business partners.

The availability of safe, affordable, and appropriate housing for our residents continues to be a focus. We have recently completed a needs survey for assisted living and are in the process of exploring options with potential developers. In addition, we are hoping to again offer a no down payment program for eligible families who will help us expand Dakota City.

Hand in hand with our colleagues in South Sioux City, we have received a grant for approximately \$480,000 to design and build a 2.6 mile, eight foot wide, concrete bike/walk trail from Dakota City to the Al Bengtson Trail in South Sioux City, which connects to other trails in other states. Today, our city signage area, our Lewis and Clark wayside, and Cottonwood Cove

Park are being renovated through grant monies made available through the National Park Service Cost Challenge Program and from the Peter Kiewit Foundation.

Finally, public safety is obviously a concern for all. The commitment and professionalism of our public safety staff is reflected in the fact that this year our volunteer fire department hosted the Nebraska Volunteer Fire Departments' state convention, providing training to units across Nebraska. For a number of persons, that training will significantly enhance the quality of response when lives may literally be dependant upon timing and knowledge.

We invite all readers to visit with us at Dakota City. We'd love to have Dakota City be "home" on the Missouri.

Providing The Comfort of everyday

A-Kup

Proud To Serve The
Dakota County Area

Project will ensure Blair's water supply

BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Work is under way to improve the water supply to residents of Blair and southeast Washington County by building a new water tower and rural water system and instituting an emergency backup plan.

Construction of the water tower and distribution system will be overseen by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

The Metropolitan Utilities District and Blair have agreed that MUD will provide water to Blair in an emergency should Blair lose its own water plant.

"It's a pretty good thing that we will be able to help them out," said Tom Wurtz, president of MUD.

This is the first such emergency backup contract between MUD and a neighboring community, Wurtz said.

Blair and MUD will be connected essentially via two rural water systems run by the Papio-Missouri River NRD. One of those systems already exists, and the other is the system soon to be under construction. A three-mile pipe between these two NRD water systems will have to be built to fully connect Blair with MUD.

The new water system will serve southeast Washington County and will be supplied with water from the new tower. Dick Sklenar, NRD project manager, said a bid to build the water tower is expected to be approved at the district's Aug. 12 board meeting. The apparent low bidder, at \$1.38 million, is Landmark Structures of Dallas.

The tower also will serve the community of Blair. Blair will pay 80 percent of the cost and the NRD will pay 20 percent, Sklenar said, with Blair assuming ownership of the tower.

In November, Sklenar said, the NRD expects to let contracts for the pipelines that will serve the new water system. Called the Washington County Rural Water System No. 2, the system is expected to serve 265 properties and be on line by November 2005. Rural residents currently obtain water from domestic wells.

Also on Aug. 12, the NRD board will hold a hearing on the service boundaries for the new water system.



Photo by Tony Miceli

Dennis Rewolinski bikes along the Keystone Trail near Twin Creek Plaza on Friday.

Two trails close to connecting

By **JASON KEESE**
Leader managing editor

Officials with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District said last week that work is 98 percent complete on a project that will connect the Keystone Trail with the West Papio Trail near Twin Creek Plaza in Bellevue.

When completed, the two trails will meet near 36th Street and Nebraska Highway 370, behind the Culver's restaurant at Twin Creek. Keystone Trail users will now be able hop on the West Papio Trail and travel as far west as 96th and Lincoln streets in Papillion. Previously, the West Papio Trail began and ended in Papillion, going only as far east as 72nd Street.

NRD General Manager Steve Oltmans said work on the new trail is complete for all intents and purposes. The project's contractor is putting on the finishing touches and should be done by Sept. 1, he said.

"But people have already been using it," Oltmans said. "It's kind of hard to stop them when it looks done."

The project added about three miles onto the West Papio Trail, at a cost of \$1 million. The federal government picked up about half the cost, with the NRD covering the rest.

The Keystone Trail eventually turns into the Bellevue Loop Trail, which extends all the way to Haworth Park, on the banks of the Missouri River.

Gerry Bowen, natural resource planner for NRD, said work should begin in two to three years on a project that will extend the West Papio Trail from downtown Papillion to 108th Street and Giles Road. After that, the NRD also hopes to connect the West Papio Trail at 96th and Lincoln with the trail that loops around the Walnut Creek Recreation Area.

City, county approach merger votes

8-4-04
By C. DAVID KOTOK

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The City Council will get its first chance next Tuesday to show if it is serious about merging city and county functions or prefers things just the way they are.

A week later, it will be the Douglas County Board's turn to weigh in.

Neither governing body tipped its hand at Tuesday meetings. The only question asked during a council hearing was when the County Board would vote.

Mayor Mike Fahey and his aides have acted as though it's a no-brainer to combine the two parks departments and two purchasing agencies. Fahey calls these agencies "the low hanging fruit" that's ripe for the picking and blending.

The biggest catch is that some on the County Board and the City Council wonder if the city is being taken for \$300,000 in the exchange.

The proposals shift the purchasing operation to the county over the next five years as the parks come under the control of the city. The personnel costs are similar, but the equipment and other costs are greater to maintain the parks.

The city takeover of the parks only makes sense, City Parks Director Larry Foster said.

The city has 200 parks stretching from the Missouri River to 192nd Street. Douglas County maintains two parks — Heartland of America downtown and Hefflinger Park at 112th Street and West Maple Road.

"We're better geared up to take up the duties of the parks," Foster said. "We won't have people arbitrarily stopping at 10th Street" where the city's Gene Leahy Mall gives way to the Heartland park.

Hefflinger also is just a stone's throw away from the city's Tranquillity Park, said Jennifer Mahlendorf, an aide to Fahey.

Mahlendorf and Foster said there should be savings from combining the parks departments. As other agencies are merged in the future, Mahlendorf said, any differences in the financial obligations should even out.

"The bottom line is, we are making government more efficient," Mahlendorf said.

U.S. official praises Nebraska's conservation program

8-5-04

BY LARRY PORTER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

STANTON, Neb. — Nebraska biologists who are manipulating Conservation Reserve Program fields to attract more wildlife are enhancing its status as a premier conservation program.

"No other conservation program delivers so much for so little," said Mike Linsenbiger, deputy administrator for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency, which oversees the nation's CRP program. "This is the best conservation program out there, no doubt."

The program began in 1985, and its primary goal was to con-

trol erosion, said Malcolm "Mac" Henning, national CRP program manager for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, another USDA agency.

"Through the years it was found that we could really use CRP to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Wildlife habitat was one of the last to come on as a co-equal goal. It's probably one of the better things we can look to. It is getting back a lot of wildlife that was lost for a number of years do to the fencerow-to-fencerow farming practices."

Nebraska has 1.2 million acres currently enrolled in CRP. Nationally, the average contract cost \$49.76 an acre in 1985. The

average payment is a shade less — about \$49 — today.

"With inflation and everything else," Linsenbiger said, "this program is being administered for basically the same price as the initial contracts back in 1985. And there are so many benefits. The average erosion reduction is about 13 tons per acre. We get enhanced wildlife benefits and protection of ground and surface water quality."

The program leads to huge savings in the area of providing drinking water, Linsenbiger added. New York City's water supply is protected by riparian buffers and filter strips adjacent to the streams that feed its major reservoirs.

"New York estimated that it

would cost \$1 to \$2 billion to build a filtration treatment plant," Linsenbiger said. "In addition, it would cost \$100 million a year to operate — to pay for the chemicals and treat the water.

"It cost us about \$200,000 a year in rental agreements and about \$100,000 to install all of the grass, trees and other vegetation. So for a little more than \$2.5 million over a 10- or 15-year period, we protect the water supply of New York City."

CRP also is used to protect the water supplies of Columbus, Ohio; Raleigh-Durham, N.C.; 54 small reservoirs in Missouri and ground water for a number of small towns that use it for their drinking water, Linsenbiger said.