

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager Report

DATE: August 6, 2007

FROM: John Winkler, General Manager

- A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities for the month of July, 2007, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:** None.
- 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, 2007. 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 16, 2007. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
- E. **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** Verbal report will be given at the meeting.
- F. **PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP REPORT:** Attached is the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Monthly Update for July, 2007. Please review and if you have any questions, contact me. The next Partnership meeting will be held on August 23, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. at the NRC.
- G. **MISSOURI RIVER RELIEF – CLEAN UP THE RIVER:** A Missouri River Clean Up has been scheduled for Saturday, September 22, 2007 from 8:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Volunteers will be meeting at the Marina at the north end of Lewis and Clark Landing on the Omaha Riverfront. Boats will ferry volunteers to pre-scouted sites on the river banks and islands to pick up trash that has washed up on shore. Crews will stockpile trash near the banks where boats can haul it off. You can sign up as a volunteer at www.riverrelief.org or sign up at the boat ramp the day of the event.
- H. **REPORT ON FOREST RUN CHANNEL IMPROVMENTS – CONSTRUCTION COSTS:** Attached is a memo written by staff member Martin Cleveland regarding Forest Run channel improvements. The improvements were completed on July 26th. The total cost of the project was \$79,842.93. The District's total cost was \$62,864.79. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

I. NEWS CLIPS:

- July 3, 2007, Blair Pilot Tribune article – Blair, Calhoun continue growth.
- July 5, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Leading rain down the Garden path. A new kind of garden puts rainwater to use and reduces stream pollutions.
- July 8, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Plan for flooding.
- July 8, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star – Water drain vs. economic gain.
- July 9, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Chute swimming with potential.
- July 10, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Subdivision says it is out of bankruptcy.
- July 11, 2007, Gretna Guide-News article – Work on Forest Run ditch begins.
- July 12, 2007, Grant Tribune-Sentinel article – 10-cent levy and \$6.50 per-irrigated acre needed for URNRD's share of water buyout.
- July 14, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Expensive flood control.
- July 14, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Flood danger wider on new map. Hundreds more properties along West Papillion Creek face costly insurance, lower values and greater curbs on development.
- July 18, 2007, Gretna Guide-News article – Levy smaller in NRD proposed FY 2008 budget.
- July 20, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Gift will add some sparkle to riverfront.
- July 22, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Irrigation Empire: Water could someday be treated like a commodity.
- July 22, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Farming innovations help stretch stressed resource.
- July 22, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Big Mac might downsize – or supersize.
- July 22, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Regulatory path puts Nebraska on course.
- July 24, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – NRD draft budget keeps rate of tax levy steady.
- July 24, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Plan issued to preserve Rainwater Basin.
- July 25, 2007, Douglas County Post Gazette article – Elkhorn Valley Bikeway topic of Valley Council meeting Tuesday.
- July 25, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – City accepts bridge lights donation.
- July 25, 2007, Omaha World Herald, Midlands Voices, written by Jim Thompson – Let's work together on sound flood plan.
- July 27, 2007, News Release from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture – NDA Funds Vegetation Management Proposals
- July 27, 2007, Norfolk Daily News article – Proposed dam up for bids. Lake, recreation area planned near Leigh.
- July 29, 2007, Omaha World Herald editorial – A welcome glimpse. Reopening of chute complements back-to-the-river effort by Omaha.
- July 31, 2007, Douglas County Post Gazette article – Valley City Council addresses safety of Maple intersection, lake development plat, trail plan.
- August 1, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Flood woes area eased in Gretna-area subdivision.

- August 1, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – NRDs differ on requiring well meters.
- August 1, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Plan to shut off about 400 Niobrara irrigation operations announced.
- August 6, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Bill would fund conservation plans.

/pt/Winkler/GM Reports/2007/August

July 2007

Information & Education Report

Information

- ◇ Continued work on design of recreation area signs for Chalco Hills and Prairie View
- ◇ Continued work on Opinion Survey
- ◇ Continued work on SPECTRUM.
- ◇ Coordinated news release on Forest Run project
- ◇ Gave speakers bureau presentation to Bellevue Kiwanis Club
- ◇ Coordinated media contact concerning flood plain remapping
- ◇ Continued update of Trails Brochure
- ◇ Ordered new NRD flood control project signs for Papio Creeks
- ◇ Updated NRD "attractions" info on World-Herald web site

Education

- ☐ Continued working with Henry Doorly Zoo on Programming
- ☐ Coordinated and attended I&E meeting in Scottsbluff
- ☐ Sent out Minutes of Scottsbluff Meeting to all I&E Staff
- ☐ Registered attendees of the LPRCA Airboat Tour
- ☐ Planned for presentation at the 19th Annual Early Childhood Conference
- ☐ Started Planning for LEP workshop in October at Ponca State Park
- ☐ Finalized LEP St. Paul Workshop
- ☐ Sent Papio-Missouri River NRD endorsement letter of "No Child Left Inside" to Representative Terry
- ☐ Continued planning for World O! Water Festival
- ☐ Started working on Fall 2007 Cultivation Newsletter
- ☐ Started compiling GPS curriculum ideas
- ☐ Started writing new curriculum for LEP

July, 2007

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Updated: July 16, 2007

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

- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
 - ★ Land transfer agreement w/Douglas County (N)
- **Big Papio :** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - Bundy ROW preparation (potentially modify ROW/offer) (N)
 - Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National Property) (P)
 - ★ Hansen ROW Condemnation settlement (W)
 - ★ Glasshoff and Horn levee easement (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Floodway Property purchase agreements as needed (F)
 - King Lake purchase agreement (N)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - ★ Mopac Trail (Hwy 50 to Lied Bridge) – NEBCO purchase agreement; Educational Land & Funds condemnation; closings (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - California Bend – Appeal District Court ruling on Wright's tenant (Arp) (W)
 - ★ Mo. River Trail – ROW closings (W)
 - ★ Missouri River Trail – Surfside condemnation (W)

- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
 - Pigeon/Jones Creek Site Easements – as needed (F)
 - ★ Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (Site #11 ROW) (W)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
 - ★ S-31 – Revision of purchase agreements and handle condemnations (W)
 - ★ S-27 and S-32 – Certify ROW to NRCS (N)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites** (Woodward/Petermann):
 - ★ Amend Omaha/Elkhorn Agreement for DS-13 (W)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
 - ★ Logan Creek Waterline Crossing for TCRW (N)
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
- **Other:**
 - Kennard Wastewater Interlocal Agreement (Woodward) (P)

MONTHLY UPDATE

JULY 2007



Progress was made on several Partnership activities during July. At a meeting on July 19, 2007, the Partnership reviewed updates on the Stage IV HDR study, Public Outreach by IMS, and proposals for Real Estate studies from UNO. Full meeting minutes and other materials are updated on the Partnership website.

Stage IV Technical Evaluation

During July, HDR worked with subconsultant, Conservation Design Forum and several of the Partnership communities to develop standard templates for Low Impact Development in the watershed. These templates will be used to analyze the reduction in runoff realized from Low Impact Development. In the end, these reductions will hopefully be combined with flood prevention and water quality benefits from regional detention basins in an overall watershed plan.

Public Outreach and Involvement

IMS revised new fact sheets based on comments from the Partnership. These 8 fact sheets highlight the following watershed issues:

1. The Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership exists to solve critical water quality and flood prevention problems.
2. Our watershed has limited options, time and available land for water quality and flood prevention improvements.
3. Papillion Creek Water Quality must be improved.
4. Partnership communities have worked together for 6 years to develop comprehensive policies for watershed solutions.
5. Partnership policies provide solutions for our communities to meet watershed regulations.
6. Water detention sites help with water quality and flood prevention.
7. Low Impact Development can help protect our watershed.
8. The Partnership is reaching its fourth stage of water quality and flood prevention planning.

A subcommittee of the Partnership plans to meet in early August to finalize revisions to the Public Involvement Plan and draft fact sheets. IMS is

also working with the City of Omaha to update the website in August.

UNO Study Proposals

The Partnership listened to a presentation from Steve Schultz regarding two proposals from the UNO Real Estate Research Center to analyze the benefits having views of either a lake or open "green" space has on private property values. The Partnership agreed that the study of open "green" spaces has merit and should be pursued. However, it was decided to investigate other funding sources due to the fact that the Partnership has limited funding available in the next year.

Example Stormwater Projects to be Implemented using State Funding

Under LB 1226, the State of Nebraska is supplying Partnership communities with funding to help implement beneficial stormwater projects. Within the Papillion Creek Watershed, Partnership members are coordinating funds for the construction of several "lead by example" projects. These projects include a sedimentation basin upstream of Cunningham Lake (known as Pawnee Wetland), low impact development practices at a public school site and other public buildings, as well as a study to access local stream health and vitality.

State Stormwater Legislation

Hearings for the State Legislature to receive input on two stormwater resolutions have been set for September 27th and 28th of this year. The Partnership plans to coordinate informational testimony on these interim studies with other NPDES Permitted Communities throughout the State (i.e. Lincoln, Grand Island, etc.). These resolutions (LR 94 and 113) can be looked up at <http://uniweb.legislature.ne.gov/Apps/BillFinder/finder.php>.

Partnership Funding

The Partnership has finalized a budget of income and expenses for July 2007 thru June 2008. These numbers are incorporated as part of the Papio-Missouri River NRD's budget. In total, the Partnership plans to spend more than \$720,000 in the next year. Please see attached sheet for details.

MISSOURI RIVER RELIEF

Help Us Clean Up the River!

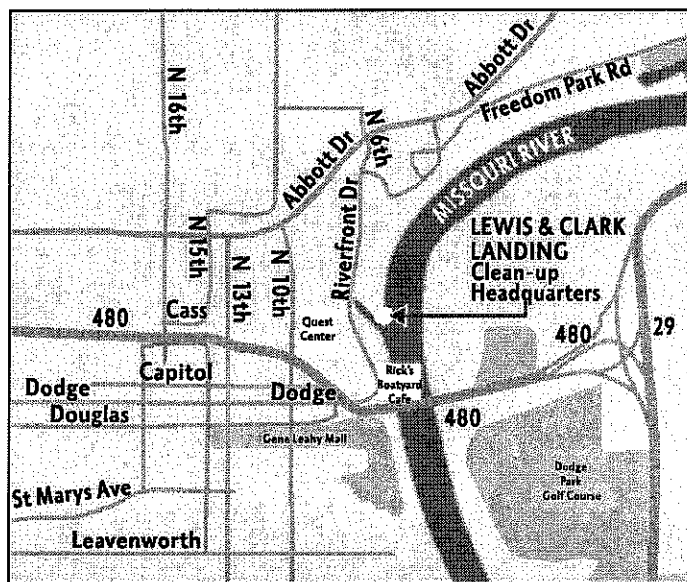
Omaha/Council Bluffs - Saturday, September 22

- **Clean-up time:** 8:30 - 2 p.m., Saturday, September 22
- **Clean-up headquarters:** Meet at the Marina at the north end of Lewis & Clark Landing on the Omaha Riverfront. (detailed directions at www.riverrelief.org)
- **Free parking:** National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, 601 Riverfront Drive
- **What we're doing:** Boats will ferry volunteers to pre-scouted sites on the river banks and islands to pick up trash that has washed up on shore. Crews will stockpile trash near the banks where boats can haul it off, then return for lunch.

All ages welcome.

There's something for everyone to do!

- **What we provide:** T-shirts, work gloves, water, lunch, trash bags, tools, supplies and a boat ride!
- **What to bring:** Wear sturdy mud boots or tennis shoes (no flip-flops), work clothes, bug spray, sunglasses and sunscreen.



Sign up online at

www.riverrelief.org

or at the boat ramp the day of the event.

For more information call:

Missouri River Relief 573.443-0292



US Army Corps
of Engineers®



**BACK
TO THE
RIVER**



MEMORANDUM

TO: The File

FROM: Martin P. Cleveland

SUBJECT: Forest Run Channel Improvements – Construction Costs
(Iva Street to 204th Street)

DATE: August 7, 2007

In July 2007, Papio Missouri River Natural Resources District and Sarpy County Highway Department staff, completed the referenced project located between Iva Street and 204th Street in the Forest Run subdivision near Gretna, NE. Work started on July 3rd and was completed on July 26th. The channel modifications (enlargement of channel cross-sections) were completed at the request of the Forest Run property owners in an effort to reduce localized flooding problems. The project was coordinated through an interlocal agreement between the Forest Run Homeowners Association, the Lyman Hylands Homeowners Association, the City of Gretna, Sarpy County and The NRD. Construction consisted of utility relocations from the channel area, tree removals, excavation of approximately 8,000 cubic yards of soil from the channel, reseeding and installation of 13,600 square yards of erosion control blanket.

A summary of District and County expenditures on the referenced project are as follows: (Administrative costs for project coordination, right-of-way acquisition, etc. are not included).

1. Design and construction related assistance by Lamp Rynearson Associates (paid for by NRD): **\$20,000.**
2. Sarpy County Highway Department expenditures (staff, loader and trucks to haul excavated soil):
 - a. Labor 311.50hrs.; \$ 5,924.14
 - b. Equipment 311.50hrs.; \$10,850.00
 - c. Materials (crushed rock) \$ 204.00
 - d. **Subtotal Cost \$16,978.14**
3. District expenditures:
 - a. Labor 358.50 hrs.; \$9,169.42
 - b. Equipment 301.00 hrs.; \$15,899.67*
 - c. Rental of Small Bulldozer \$1,700.00
 - d. Utility Relocation
(50% of OPPD cost) \$2,106.50
 - e. Erosion Control Blanket installation by
Commercial Seeding Contractors \$11,449.20

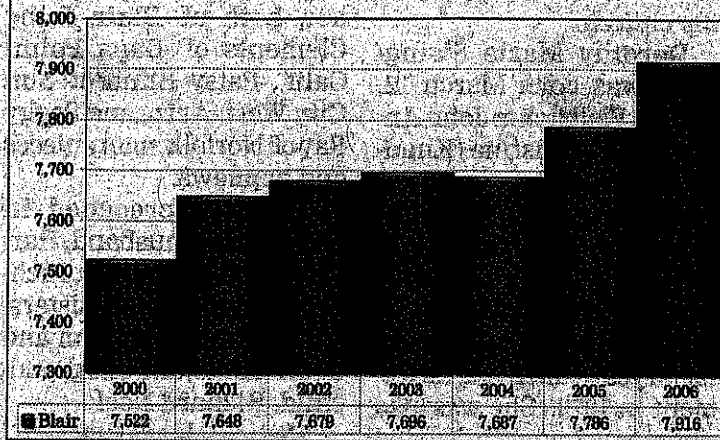
f. Tree Hauling & Disposal	\$ 2,000.00
g. Grass Seed Cost	\$ 540.00
h. Subtotal Cost	\$42,864.79

4. Total Project Cost:	
a. Design by Consultant	\$20,000.00
b. Sarpy County Construction Expenditures	\$16,978.14
c. District Construction Expenditures	\$42,864.79
d. Grand Total	\$79,842.93

Notes: *Based on Rental Rate Blue Book Unit Rates

CC: NRD Board of Directors
 Forest Run Homeowners Association
 Lyman Highlands Homeowners Association
 Tom Lammel, Forest Run Landowner
 Mark Wayne and Tom Lynam, Sarpy County
 Steve Perry, City of Gretna
 John Winkler, Marlin J. Petermann and Paul Woodward, NRD

Blair population growth



Blair's population is likely to top 8,000 people next year.

Blair, Calhoun continue growth

P.J. Tribune 7-3-07

Blair and Fort Calhoun continue to grow rapidly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released last week. As of July 1, 2006, Blair had 7,916 people, and Fort Calhoun had 924.

Over the past six years, Fort Calhoun has been the fastest growing city in Washington County, growing by 7.82 percent since 2000. During the same period, Blair has grown by 5.24 percent, while Arlington has stayed relatively the same with .25 percent growth.

If population growth rates continue, Fort Calhoun is on track to surpass Arlington as Washington County's largest community by 2030. Fort Calhoun's population is growing an average of 1.26 percent per year, while Arlington has only averaged .04 percent.

Blair, on the other hand, has grown an average of .86 percent per year, with increases of 1.29 percent and 1.67 percent the last two years.

Across the nation, Phoenix has become the nation's fifth most populous city. As of July 1, 2006, this desert metropolis had a popula-

tion of 1.5 million.

New York continued to be the nation's most populous city, with 8.2 million residents. This was more than twice the population of Los Angeles, which ranked second at 3.8 million.

The estimates reveal that Phoenix moved into fifth place ahead of Philadelphia, the latest evidence of a decades-long population shift. Nearly a century ago, in 1910, each of the 10 most populous cities was within roughly 500 miles of the Canadian border. The 2006 estimates show that seven of the top 10 — and three of the top five — are in states that border Mexico.

Only three of the top 10 from 1910 remained on the list in 2006: New York, Chicago and Philadelphia. Conversely, three of the current top 10 cities (Phoenix, San Jose, Calif., and San Diego) were not even among the 100 most populous in 1910, while three more (Dallas, Houston and San Antonio) had populations of less than 100,000.

Phoenix had the largest

SEE GROWTH PAGE 3A

GROWTH: Population still shifting

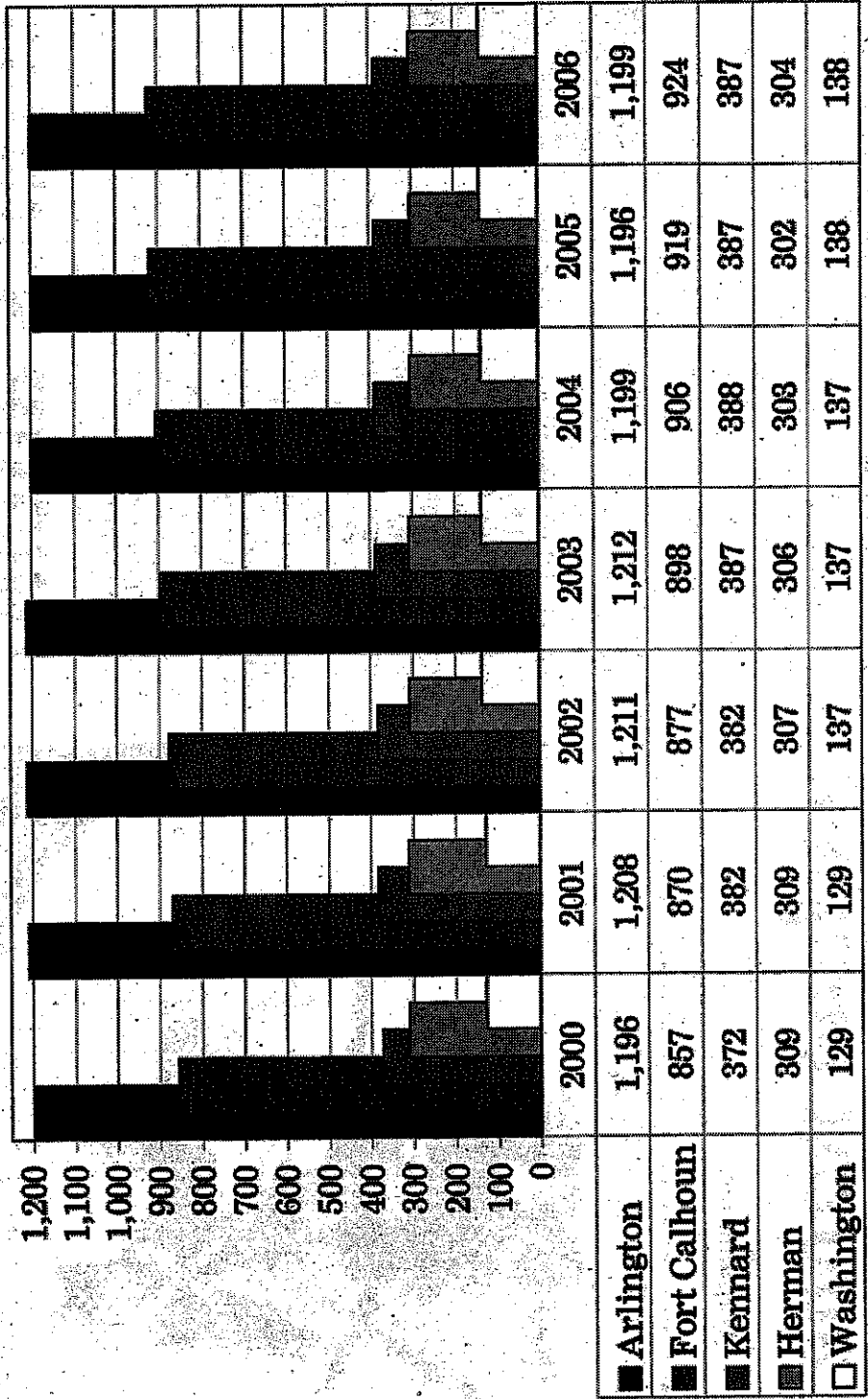
FROM PAGE 1

population increase of any city between 2005 and 2006, adding more than 43,000 residents to reach 1.5 million.

New Orleans had by far the largest population loss among all cities with populations of at least 100,000 people. The city lost slightly more than half of its pre-Hurricane Katrina population. It fell from 452,170 on July 1, 2005, to 223,388 one year later — a loss of 50.6 percent.

To put the size of this loss into perspective, Hialeah, Fla., which experienced the second-highest rate of loss over the period, saw its population decline by 1.6 percent.

Population growth



C134 7/5/87

Leading rain down the Garden path

A new kind of garden puts rainwater to use and reduces stream pollution.

BY RHONDA STANSBERRY
WORLD HERALD STAFF WRITER

Think of a rain garden as a leaky saucer, a sieve with sides, a berm turned upside down.

A rain garden captures water from roofs and sidewalks. The water then percolates into the ground — instead of across the driveway and down the street.

To catch the water, the garden is planted in native perennials that develop deep root systems which help them survive dry times.

The goal is to reduce the volume of water that picks up chemicals and pollutants when it hits the streets, then ends up in sewers and, ultimately, streams.

"We're seeing more and more interest in rain-garden landscaping — letting rain soak in, not oil and grease," said Ed Kouma, an engineer with Lincoln Public Works and Utilities.

Rain gardens have gained a following on the East and West Coasts and, more recently, in the Midwest. Kansas City has become a model for its ambitious plan to create 10,000 rain gardens in five years, in both commercial and residential settings.

Rain gardens are being built in the Midlands, too, although on a smaller scale and at a slower pace until the public becomes more aware of how they work. So far, the gardens are mostly in public spaces.

Kathleen Cue, an associate in horticulture for University of Nebraska Extension in Douglas and Sarpy Counties, attended rain garden seminars in the past year. A list of plants for rain gardens soon will be available at Nebraska extension offices.

Cue and her colleagues are armed with answers to some of the most common questions, such as whether a rain garden holds water like a bog or pond and if it breeds mosquitoes.

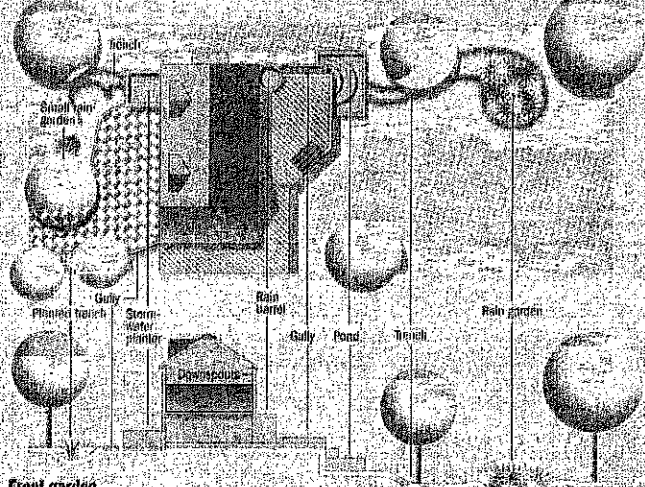
The short answer to both questions is no.

The purpose is not to retain water but to detain water, Cue said. Water filters down through the soil and should be gone in less than 48 hours.

Danette Schmielau works for the Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District. She has led seminars for Nebraska extension staff members and planted rain gardens throughout the Council Bluffs area. Three examples are behind her office.

See Rain: Page 2

A sample rain garden



The basics

Location: Anywhere the rain slopes away from the house. At least 10 feet from the foundation and in range of a downspout.

Soil: Ideally 30 percent sand, 30 percent silt and 40 percent loam.

Size: 100 to 300 square feet. Rule of thumb: A downspout handles water from 7 to 10 percent of a roof surface. So a 2,000 square foot roof needs a 140 square foot rain garden or 10 feet by 14 feet.

Depth: 4 to 8 inches.

Plants: Native plants with deep roots. Plants that need moist soil or be the best of both. Those that need less-lush soil can be in the rim and slope.

Information: USDA's National Resources Conservation Service office in Council Bluffs, 713-326-2480.

See Page 2E for a list of plants that work in rain gardens.

Front garden
Stormwater planter captures water from downspout. Planter swallows into trench that sends water to small rain garden. Excess water from drive is channeled to planted treeline.

Back garden
Rain berm captures water from downspout; overflows into gully along edge of back. Gully leads to pond; over excess, rain how pond spills into trench that leads to rain garden, where water gradually infiltrates soil.

Illustration: "Rain gardens: trapping water dirtlessly in the Garden and Driveway Landscapes." by Roger Thompson and Anne Caswell. THE WORLD HERALD

Continued next page

Rain: Gardens cut pollution of water that ends up in streams

Continued from Page 1

The first is a 12-by-30-foot garden in full sun about 15 feet from the back door. The late June show came from sun-loving natives including monkey flower, vervain, coreopsis, prairie sage, cardinal flower, butterfly milkweed, St. John's wort, false dragonhead and black-eyed Susans.

Other gardens are in the works. In Pottawattamie County, residents can apply for a grant of up to \$500 per garden, with a limit of two per landowner, from a program called Train Your Rain. Another program is for landowners in the Little Pony Creek Watershed in the southern part of the county. Landowners can receive up to \$2,600 each.

Kouma said a federal grant will allow Lincoln to fund 20 rain gardens in the Holmes Lake Watershed, which is composed of several subdivisions and 5,700 properties. Homeowners will work with landscapers to build 100- to 300-square-foot gardens this fall.

"They will help diminish the pollutants going into the street and drains," he said.

The measure should help to keep Holmes Lake clean. The 110-acre flood storage reservoir was built in 1962 by the Army Corps of Engineers. It was on the edge of town then, but now it's in town, surrounded by a park and the Holmes Park Golf Course, on 70th Street in southeast Lincoln.

Sampling of native plants for rain gardens

Blue flag iris, 2-3 feet tall, moist soil, grasslike leaves
Boneset, (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), 3-4 feet, moist
Bottlebrush grass, 3 feet, wetter areas, some shade, grass
Bottlebrush sedge, 1-2 feet, moist, grasslike leaves
Brown fox sedge, 1-3 feet, moderately moist, grasslike leaves
Canada Anemone, 1-2 feet, moderately moist, grasslike leaves
Cardinal flower, 2-3 feet, moderately moist to moist, flowers add another foot
Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*), 1-3 feet, moderately moist, yellow, dill-like flower
Great blue lobelia, 2-4 feet, moist to moderately moist
Great St. John's wort, 4-6 feet, moderately moist
Iron weed, 4-6 feet, moderately moist
Joe-Pye weed, 4-6 feet, moist
Marsh blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), 3-4 feet, moist, flower may flop
Marsh St. John's wort, 1-2 feet, moist
Meadow blazing star, 3-5 feet, moderately moist
Monkey flower, 1-3 feet, moist
Prairie blazing star, 2-5 feet, moist
Queen of the Prairie, 3-5 feet, moist
Savanna Joe-Pye weed, 4-6 feet, moist, some shade
Swamp milkweed, 3-5 feet, moist to moderately dry
Turtlehead, 3-4 feet, wet site
Wild blue phlox, 1/2-2 feet, needs a bit of shade

W-H
7-8-57
Plan for flooding

The recent flooding in Kansas should be a stark reminder to our elected officials. Failure to build the flood-control projects needed in our area means that our neighbors continue to be at risk of having the same devastation in the Omaha area.

No doubt when flooding occurs here, politicians will point fingers and blame others. However, the failure of our elected leaders to address these flood threats with new dams could cause the loss of hundreds, if not thousands, of homes and businesses.

This is why we elect these officials. We want them to protect us from dangers such as flooding. Why can't these government leaders put the needs of many ahead of a few vocal opponents who have no concern about the safety of their neighbors?

Edmund Leslie, Waterloo, Neb.

Water drain vs. economic gain

BY JOE DUGGAN / Lincoln Journal Star

Sunday, Jul 08, 2007 - 12:26:55 am CDT

MADRID — The crane boom rotates slowly over a cluster of metal cylinders on the northeast edge of town.

It's helping build an economic boom, the likes of which Madrid residents had figured they might never see.

In a week or two, the Mid America Bio Energy plant will begin converting corn into ethanol. The plant will bring decent-paying jobs, boost the tax base and provide a local market for the area's dominant crop.

But ethanol production needs water as much as it needs corn. And in southwest Nebraska, where irrigation has been measured to the inch for nearly 30 years, water is on everyone's mind.

Here's some of the math they're thinking about.

The Madrid plant will produce 44 million gallons of ethanol a year. Plant officials have been allocated as much as 515 million gallons of water annually, although they expect to use less.

Just to the east, heavy equipment kicks up dust, doing site preparation for a second phase. The second plant will distill more than twice as much ethanol as the first, but because of improved efficiency, its annual water allocation is 517 million gallons.

The two plants have the permits to draw as much as 1 billion gallons of water annually from the ground below Madrid. By comparison, the 265 residents who live in the village use about 10 million gallons each year.

Now consider that Nebraska's 16 operating ethanol plants make just less than 1 billion gallons of the fuel. Industry representatives say plants use about three gallons of water to produce each gallon of ethanol, which means Nebraska plants will use at least 3 billion gallons of water annually.

But not for long.

By next year, an additional nine plants now under construction will be pumping out more ethanol and pumping up more water.

So, does all this water math equal addition or subtraction in Nebraska? As with any question involving ethanol, it depends upon whom you ask.

Some environmentalists say excessive water use is another natural resource cost that fades the green out of corn ethanol. They argue some parts of Nebraska should be off limits to ethanol plants and they question why regulators would allow additional high-volume groundwater pumping where water tables have declined for decades.

"That's insanity to me," said Laura Krebsbach, a community organizing consultant in Lincoln who used to work for the Nebraska chapter of the Sierra Club.

Ethanol supporters counter that plants use less than half the water they did 20 years ago and that technology continues to improve efficiency. In addition, some plant developers obtain independent hydrological studies to be sure the underground water supplies can meet their demand without hurting nearby municipal, domestic and irrigation wells. Also, older plants treat and discharge some of the water into nearby streams, essentially returning it to the environment.

Finally, in places like Madrid, plant operators buy and cap irrigation wells to offset the water they use.

The industry has learned it needs to continually lessen water consumption because without water, it can't exist, said Todd Sneller, administrator of the Nebraska Ethanol Board.

"Two years ago, water was nine on the list of 10 things considered when it came to siting a plant," he said. "Today, water quality is number two."

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In Missouri, concerns over water supplies have prompted people living near proposed plants to sue ethanol developers.

It's hard to imagine court battles in Nebraska because the state has plenty of groundwater. At least that's always been the assumption, thanks to the Ogallala Aquifer.

North America's largest aquifer stretches from Texas to South Dakota and contains enough water to overflow Lake Huron. Or, put another way, it has more than 3 billion acre feet of water — enough to cover all 50 states 6 inches deep, according to statistics from Texas State University.

And Nebraska has the biggest portion of all that water — about two-thirds — because if the Ogallala Aquifer is like a huge underground lake, it's not a uniformly deep lake. The shallowest regions are in Texas.

Agriculture, the economic foundation of the entire region, relies heavily on the aquifer. Irrigation uses about 9½ out of every 10 gallons brought to the surface. Nebraska agricultural producers use about 1.6 trillion gallons of groundwater annually to raise corn.

So, the 3 billion gallons of water needed by Nebraska's ethanol plants equals 0.2 percent of the state's irrigation usage, said Ken Cassman, director of the Nebraska Center for Energy Sciences Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"In the big picture of things, my point is we have plenty of water," Cassman said. "(Ethanol's demand) is very small when you look at the amount of water resources we have available and the amount of water we use on corn."

But the aquifer isn't like a big cup of water that everyone with a straw can draw out equally. Differences in underground sands, gravel and rocks cause the aquifer to vary across the state. In some places, the water is easily accessible and removable; in others, it's more difficult to get out.

And while the aquifer is massive, in some parts of Nebraska, it's falling.

About 92,000 high-capacity wells, defined as pumping more than 50 gallons per minute, draw water from the aquifer in Nebraska. When those wells remove water faster than rainfall and snowmelt can replace it, the water table falls.

An extensive network of monitoring wells tracks declines throughout the aquifer. Improvements in irrigation efficiency, moratoriums on new wells and reductions on pumping have reduced the declines in recent decades, but they're still occurring, especially along the western border of the aquifer.

While the plants themselves use water, those who monitor the aquifer are more concerned by a boost in irrigated corn acres to meet demand caused by ethanol production. Mark Burbach, an assistant geoscience professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who directs the statewide groundwater monitoring program for the School of Natural Resources, shares such concerns.

"There are a lot of questions," he said. "I wouldn't say the sky is falling — we're not in a crisis. But it's a limited resource and where is the tipping point?"

"It's a very complex question to answer."

When it comes to watching the water used by ethanol production and other industries, no single agency does it all.

The Department of Environmental Quality enforces regulations involving water pollution, which comes into play when plants treat and discharge their wastewater into streams.

DEQ spokesman Rich Webster said he knew of only one water discharge violation involving an ethanol plant in

Nebraska.

It occurred in 2001 when Chief Ethanol Fuels of Hastings discharged wastewater that was too warm into the Blue River. The Environmental Protection Agency determined that the plant falsified documents and plant officials paid \$100,000 in fines, plus a \$100,000 donation to the National Audubon Society for its Platte River crane sanctuary near Gibbon, Webster said.

The main players when it comes to monitoring underground water supplies in Nebraska are Natural Resources Districts. The locally governed agencies, assigned to the 23 major stream basins in the state, regulate groundwater.

Because groundwater conditions vary across the 23 districts, so do requirements for those who drill wells. One regulation applies to all but two of the districts — wells that pump more than 50 gallons per minute must have a permit.

A good place to see how water regulation works is in the Upper Republican NRD in southwestern Nebraska.

Perkins, Chase and Dundy counties are stacked on top of each other along the Colorado border. Center pivot irrigation systems, like giant metal sprinklers, spray water from the Ogallala Aquifer on the ground, keeping circles of corn, wheat and other crops growing on the semiarid landscape.

This is one place in Nebraska where the water table is declining.

In 1978, in an effort to slow groundwater declines, the Upper Republican NRD started regulating irrigation by restricting the amount irrigators could apply to crops.

Over the years, the annual allocation dropped from about 20 inches per acre to 13½ inches, said Jasper Fanning, manager of the NRD. Farmers irrigate nearly 450,000 acres within the three-county district.

The district since has imposed moratoriums on new wells.

Complicating water management in the region is the fact that the NRD falls within the Republican River Compact, which allocates the water supply of the Republican River Basin among the states of Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas.

Under threat of litigation, Nebraska must make sure it sends enough water down the Republican River into Kansas. In dry years, Nebraska must reduce its consumptive use of water to fulfill its obligations under the compact.

All of which begs the question: If water is such a hot commodity, how can the state allow construction of plants that will use millions of gallons per year?

It's a question being asked by everyone from environmentalists to farmers.

"It helps the economy, I'm not against it," said Lowell Cornelius, a 75-year-old farmer from Madrid with irrigation wells near the plant. "I just hope it works for everybody. I hope we all have enough water."

A practice called offsetting is supposed to allow room for new water users like ethanol plants in water-tight areas.

Here's how offsetting is supposed to work in Madrid:

The land Mid America Bio Energy bought for its plant was formerly irrigated by two wells that pumped between 800 and 1,250 gallons per minute. The company capped those wells and replaced them with one that pumps about 980 gallons per minute.

But unlike irrigation wells, which run during a three- or four-month growing season, the plant's well will run year-round and around the clock.

While the plant has the capacity to pump up to 515 gallons of water per year, Fanning expects it will use significantly less. He's expecting something along the lines of three gallons of water for each gallon of ethanol, which would put the plant's consumption at about 132 million gallons.

The NRD also will maintain and inspect a meter on the plant's well, just as it does with all high-capacity wells in the district.

Offsetting water use doesn't have to be gallon-for-gallon. Under rules of the Republican River Compact, industrial water users must offset half the water they pump.

In the case of the Madrid plant, "they have essentially offset the full amount that will count against us in the compact," Fanning said.

The company will also offset water when it adds the 100-million gallon ethanol plant. And offsetting will be required if proposed 100-million gallon plants get built at Imperial and Wauneta.

As a rule of thumb, water managers say a 100-million gallon ethanol plant will use the equivalent of nine center-pivot irrigation systems.

Still, other water users in the Upper Republican NRD aren't concerned.

Bruce Young, who has farmed near Madrid for 25 years, said he sold land to the plant and has invested in it financially. He believes the offsetting regulations will protect his wells and those of other irrigators.

For rural residents whose livelihoods depend in agriculture, using water to make ethanol is a legitimate and wise decision, Young said.

"I honestly think all the other things that will come out of this are so much more beneficial than the water itself," he said. "It's just a plus all the way around."

Some other NRDs, even those where groundwater levels aren't falling, are requiring ethanol plant developers to carefully consider water before they break ground.

The Upper Blue NRD based in York is a good example.

The NRD doesn't face the challenges of a declining water table, but it was the first in the state to require ethanol plant developers to conduct detailed hydrological studies before building, said Rod DeBuhr, water department manager for the NRD. The studies show whether the plant's groundwater demand can be met without adversely affecting existing nearby wells.

Three new plants in various stages of construction — at Fairmont, Sutton and Aurora — were approved under the new regulations, DeBuhr said. In all three cases, the NRD required plant developers to answer follow-up questions about hydrology before granting pumping permits.

Plans to build a plant near Seward were abandoned after it was determined the groundwater supply in the area may be insufficient to support ethanol production, DeBuhr said.

“It’s not only for our own benefit,” he said. “It doesn’t make a lot of sense to build a 150-million gallon ethanol facility on a site where there isn’t enough water to run it.”

Other NRDs may regulate industries less, but ethanol plants aren’t flocking to those districts, said Dean Edson, director of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, which represents all 23 NRDs in Nebraska.

In Edson’s view, the NRDs are doing “what we think is required to safeguard the water supply.” He said he is aware of no claims made by a property owner whose well has been affected by an ethanol plant.

And he made this point: Nebraska, by law, sets a priority system for water users. Domestic users (drinking water) come first, followed by agriculture. Industrial users, which includes ethanol plants, are last in line.

“That’s the bottom of the totem pole,” he said. “That’s a safeguard, too.”

No one, not even those with misgivings about corn ethanol, say biofuel plants shouldn’t be developed in a sustainable way.

What makes some people nervous is the speed with which the industry is expanding in Nebraska.

Dennis Keeney provides an outsider’s perspective. The professor emeritus of agronomy at Iowa State University in Ames co-wrote one of the only published analyses of water and ethanol production last year for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in Minneapolis.

He found that Minnesota is the only state that maintains public records on the amount of water pumped by specific ethanol plants. His analysis showed plants used between 3.5 and 6 gallons of water for every gallon of ethanol produced, an amount higher than the 3-to-1 ratio claimed by the ethanol industry.

“I think Nebraska is probably going to have to be a little more water conscious than other states because you’ve got an awfully lot of plants coming in,” he said.

The Nebraska Ethanol Board lists 16 plants in production, 11 under construction and no fewer than 30 under consideration. Not even the most enthusiastic drum major for ethanol says all 30 will be built, but Nebraska seems likely to soon pass Illinois as the second-leading ethanol producer in the country.

Under the current pace of growth, ethanol is poised to become the largest single industry in Nebraska.

What’s attracting it to the state is access to rail transportation, proximity to cattle feeding operations (which fatten cattle with distiller’s grain) and, of course, ample corn supplies.

But growing even more corn to meet the industry’s demand worries those already worried about groundwater supplies.

“Are we going to have more marginal land going into row cropping and raising corn? Of course we are,” said Laura Krebsbach. “And that has a huge impact on water quality.”

Others who might be considered less skeptical of the industry still share similar concerns.

When it comes to water “you don’t want to sacrifice long-term sustainability for short-term gain,” said Don Wilhite, director of the National Drought Mitigation Center at UNL.

Long-term sustainability represents a moving target that’s even harder to hit when climate change is factored in. Most scientific modeling shows Nebraska getting drier in the future because of higher temperatures and less precipitation.

“Is drought going to become a new normal in terms of frequency in the future?” Wilhite asked. “We don’t know. ... We need to do a lot more work on this, I don’t think we just ought to assume we have all this water and we ought to use it without much regard for the sustainability of the resource.”

Ken Cassman, director of the energy research center at UNL who argues the state has plenty of water for ethanol, said questions and concerns about the best way to use public resources are legitimate. And challenging.

But Cassman embraces the idea that science, technology and free markets can meet those challenges.

For example, he said, ethanol plants will become more efficient at using water because the heavily capitalized industry can attract the best engineers.

Cassman also said irrigators must become more efficient with water. He pointed to low-pressure pivot and drip irrigation systems as examples of how current technology uses a great deal less water than flood and furrow irrigation.

Researchers also are working on ways to grow higher yields of corn with less land and water. Their work has shown promise in these areas, Cassman said.

“To really expand the industry at the rate we’re expanding and address all of the environmental concerns that people have, it is a significant challenge,” he said. “But it’s not one that we should shy away from.”

Most would agree he’s right, because for all Nebraskans, there’s too much at stake.

Reach Joe Duggan at 473-7239 or jduggan@journalstar.com.

Chute swimming with potential

By JON NYATAWA

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

COUNCIL BLUFFS — Fish and wildlife have already started congregating around a recently restored river chute designed to create a diverse, stable water habitat along the east bank of the Missouri River.

Water was added to the chute, a kind of stream that branches off the river, about two weeks ago, completing a federally funded project that cost about \$5 million, said Angi Bruce,

7-9-07
The restored mile-long stream off the Missouri River will create 20 to 25 acres of wetlands.

southwest district supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The slow-moving water at a depth of five feet should create between 20 and 25 acres of wetlands, the perfect environment for species that lived near the

river in the 1930s, before it was channelized.

"We're re-creating a habitat that was once found in this area," Bruce said. "As soon as they opened up that plug and the water came in, fish were spotted (in the chute)."

It's hoped that the chute in northwest Council Bluffs will provide favorable habitat for the endangered pallid sturgeon.

Bruce said the area is open to the public for fishing, walking and wildlife viewing. Wood chips should be placed on trails

See Chute: Page 2

Chute: Project cost \$5 million

Continued from Page 1
soon.

Dirt and trees were removed from the area during the past few months, creating the mile-long chute that's 200 feet wide from bank to bank during high water flows.

The chute could dry up during winter months.

The chute is separate from the ongoing \$22 million Missouri River pedestrian bridge project just south of the chute's outlet. But bridge and chute will connect eventually. Bruce said the city's future plans in-

clude a 100-acre park at the base of the bridge.

"Once the pedestrian bridge is open, you'll get a great view of the habitat," she said.

Until then, patrons can park at Playland Park and walk north on the paved trails to visit the restored area. The newly created island between the river and chute can be accessed by boat.

The chute starts just north of 35th Street, across the river from Omaha's Freedom Park. It spills back into the river just west of Avenue G.

Subdivision says it is out of bankruptcy

By Rick Ruggles

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

An exclusive yet financially troubled subdivision near Bennington has restructured its debt and is out of bankruptcy, the homeowners association president said Monday night.

Newport Landing did not develop as quickly as expected, Bill Fleming told the Bennington City Council, and thus ran into financial difficulty. The sanitary and improvement district representing Newport Landing filed for bankruptcy in 2005.

The subdivision surrounding a 300-acre private lake west of Bennington has emerged from that stigma with a new debt plan. "It's all settled, completed," Fleming said of the bankruptcy.

Although the council said little in response, local farmer Wayne Dreessen began questioning Fleming about the pumping of water from Papillion Creek to maintain the private lake's water level.

After a couple of questions, Bennington Mayor C.C. "Skip" Wolff said Fleming's presentation, though on the council agenda, was not part of a public hearing and terminated Dreessen's queries. Fleming said after the meeting that he spoke to the council to dispel false notions, which he did not describe.

"With the bankruptcy, there were all kinds of rumors," he said.

Newport Landing has critics, in large part because of the

lake. The Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District paid about \$3 million for the dam on the lake, prompting criticism of the use of taxpayer money for a private lake.

Marlin Petermann, assistant general manager of the NRD, said Monday that the developer of Newport Landing, Horgan Development Co., contributed 240 acres of land for public use in the process of creating the subdivision. That includes land for a nearby recreation area and for the new Bennington High School.

Petermann confirmed that the sanitary and improvement district pumps water from the creek into the lake to maintain the water level. The NRD is not involved in that, and the SID pumps the water at its own expense, he said.

Newport Landing's average home value is \$750,000, Fleming said, but he added that the subdivision has some multimillion-dollar homes.

One home, encased in green-tinted glass, looks like a small resort. Many houses have their own docks on the lake, and some have small sand beaches.

The subdivision is still far from fully developed. Of about 270 usable lots, Fleming said, Horgan Development still owns about 50 and a builder owns about 25. Numerous other lots are owned by people who have not yet built on them.

About 100 other lots are occupied, under construction or soon will be under construction, he said.

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Work on Forest Run ditch begins



photo by Darlene Hollwager/Gretna Guide and News

Last week, the NRD started tearing up trees and beginning the widening of the creek that runs through Forest Run subdivision. In an effort to alleviate the flooding problems incurred by some homeowners living along the creek.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD has begun construction on flood prevention improvements for the Forest Run Subdivision near Gretna, NE.

Forest Run residents have asked the District to address flooding within the subdivision. NRD construction crews will deepen a channel to better contain stormwater runoff through the subdivision that has

increased as development continues upstream. This is a cooperative project of the District, Sarpy County, City of Gretna and the Forest Run / Lyman Highlands Homeowners Associations.

The Forest Run Subdivision in Sarpy County has experienced numerous flood events due to inadequate drainage within the subdivision and continuing

urbanization of the West Branch Papillion Creek Watershed. Additional upstream flood control efforts, perhaps a reservoir, are considered the long-term solution to area flooding.

Work began last week on the stream channel, with heavy equipment moving into the area this week to form the new channel.



10-cent levy and \$6.50 per-irrigated acre needed for URNRD's share of water buyout

Jasper Fanning, Upper Republican NRD manager, told the board last week it appears the district will need to collect the entire 10-cent levy and a \$6.25 per-irrigated acre fee to pay for the district's share of the surface water buyouts this year.

The levy and per-acre occupation fee represented key components of LB 701, the major water bill passed

by the Legislature this year to address compact compliance issues with Kansas.

The 10-cent levy will be applied to all property with the three-county NRD district.

The per-acre fee will be assessed against certified irrigated acres.

During discussion on the per-acre fee at last week's NRD meeting, Tom Terryberry stated he didn't feel the

fee should be charged on acres enrolled in CREP, the conservation reserve enhancement program.

CREP retired irrigated acres in areas near rivers and streams for a period of 10-15 years.

Several patrons with ground enrolled in CREP noted they have no way to offset the per-acre fee.

However, the levy is applied to everyone and they felt that was part

of their responsibility as a property owner.

The patrons pointed out they were doing their part in the compliance effort by enrolling in CREP and reducing consumptive use.

Charging the per-acre fee would discourage participation in any such programs in the future, they noted.

Expensive flood control

In response to Edmund Leslie's July 8 letter ("Plan for flooding"), perhaps he should be aware of a few facts presented by HDR Inc. during a June 21 meeting at Bennington High School.

The final cost of just two reservoirs would be \$155.7 million, plus the loss of \$314,000 a year in property taxes to the Bennington school district as well as costs to Washington County for road improvements.

Who would pay the \$155.7 million? Taxpayers, through county, state and federal taxes and development fees.

Even so, according to the figures HDR presented, the plan would not protect \$3.3 million worth of homes and businesses. For those 851 downstream structures at risk, some would get protected, some wouldn't and some would get only a little wet.

I live west of a flood-control structure called Bennington Lake. It's a private development that has to have water pumped into it to allow Jet Skiing residents to enjoy private access.

I just can't afford to have another recreation project under the guise of flood control. Information on the HDR plan is available on the Internet at www.papioreservoirs1and3c.org.

Jeanne Miller, Bennington, Neb.

Flood danger wider on new map

■ Hundreds more properties along West Papillion Creek face costly insurance, lower values and greater curbs on development.

7-14-07

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Hundreds of additional properties along the West Papillion Creek are at risk of flooding, according to the first major update of an Omaha-area flood map in decades.

The properties include homes, businesses, office buildings and industrial facilities.

The immediate effect of these redrawn maps could be a significant increase in the number of Douglas County and Sarpy County landowners who must buy federal flood insurance. Anyone with a loan on property within a 100-year floodplain must buy the insurance.

About 900 properties will need the insurance as a result of these

maps, according to an estimate by Paul Woodward, water resources engineer at the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

The long-term effects, said real estate attorney Jerry Slusky, will be a drop in value for hundreds of millions of dollars in property and more hurdles using the property.

The maps were commissioned by the NRD and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. They are based on a worst-case, 100-year flood, something that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given

year.

As draft maps, they are subject to change, but only on the basis of being disproved factually.

The new maps are likely to bolster support for a controversial proposal by local governments to build up to 29 dams in the Omaha metro area. Five of the proposed dams would reduce the threat along the West Papio. The new flood maps also could fuel debate over how much taxpayers should spend protecting those in floodplains.

Slusky, who has property in the affected area, said real estate
See Maps: Page 2

Maps: More landowners may need flood insurance

Continued from Page 1

values along the West Papillion could drop from 5 to 20 percent once the federal flood maps take effect, which is expected to be next year.

Slusky represents about 30 businesses that have joined to address problems the new maps pose in the 144th Street-West Papio Creek area. In that area alone, Slusky pegged the value of affected property at about \$200 million.

Other areas newly considered at risk of flooding include portions of Millard, small sections of Papillion and some homes and businesses between 144th and 168th Streets, from Giles Road to Harrison Street, said Slusky and Woodward.

"The bottom line is that there is a tremendous amount of damage to the valuation of properties," said Slusky.

Anyone wanting to make improvements on their properties, he said, may find it tougher to get loans. Those hoping to sell their buildings may find that buyers have a tougher time getting financing. Lenders probably will charge higher interest rates, may shorten repayment periods or not lend money at all, he said.

ON OMAHA.COM
Links to maps and more information.

The worsened flood conditions reflected in these new maps is the result of increased runoff from development, more accurate data than was available decades ago and the effect of bridges across the creek, Woodward said.

The entire length of the West Papio levee, which runs from about 90th Street east to where the creek joins the Big Papillion Creek, is now considered inadequate during major flooding, he said.

"It still provides a lot of flood protection for smaller storms, but it could be obsolete during a major flood," he said.

In some cases, he said, an analysis by HDR Inc. indicates that a 100-year storm would overtop the levee. In other cases, the analysis indicates that the levees have room to spare, but not enough to guarantee that they can withstand the force of the water.

Most of the land at risk if the levees fail is park and farm ground, Woodward said.

So the issue for Papillion, one of the metro area's fastest-growing communities, is that some farmland that might have been used for growth no longer can be developed because it is now considered in the floodway. On the other hand, the land could become an option for public green space.

Additionally, the HDR analysis indicates that four bridges that cross the creek — at 84th, 72nd, 66th and 42nd Streets — risk being overtopped, Woodward said. The worst is 66th Street, he said.

Sarpy County and Douglas County have posted drafts of the maps online, and local governments this month are notifying more than 2,100 property owners that they may be affected by the changes.

A number of these properties already were in the 100-year floodplain, Woodward said. About 45 percent are being drawn into that floodplain for the first time.

The draft maps are under review by FEMA, and during the next year there will be time for public comment and appeals.

Taxpayers may be asked by local governments to help reduce

the flood risk by building dams, raising the levees or elevating bridges. Woodward said it's likely that all approaches will be necessary, along with conservation measures that reduce storm runoff.

The maps already are galvanizing support for dam construction.

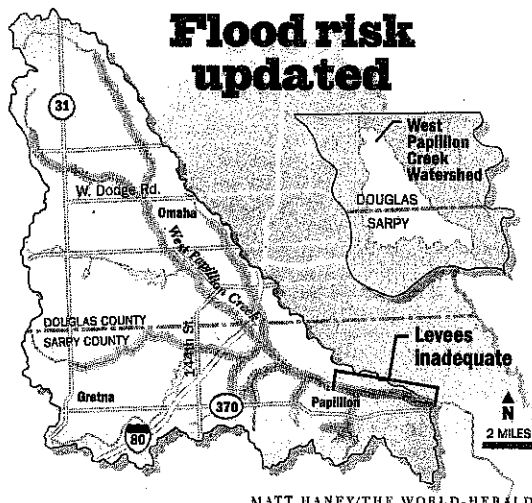
Slusky said his group of property owners and tenants first considered contesting the accuracy of the maps. The remapping was done for the government by HDR at a cost of \$450,000 and took three years.

After hiring Olsson Associates to analyze the work by HDR, Slusky and his group concluded that a challenge in their area probably would be unsuccessful.

Now, Slusky said, "the answer seems to be in the dams."

He said the business group plans to lobby the NRD to see that dams along the West Papio are made a priority.

Douglas County resident Shawn Melotz, a critic of the dam initiative, said local governments bear some responsibility for the problem because they have allowed and continue to allow construction in the floodplain.



MATT HANEY/THE WORLD-HERALD

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Levy smaller in NRD proposed FY 2008 budget

Following an informal public input session at its July 12th meeting, the Papio-Missouri River NRD Board of Directors voted to propose a FY 2008 budget that calls for a property tax levy of .035290, down from a .038444 levy in 2007 and a .039094 in 2006.

"We are requesting less property tax, utilizing our carryover and anticipating an increase in property valuations this year. Because of these factors we anticipate that the levy will shrink even further when the final property valuations are in," said NRD General Manager, John Winkler. "Perhaps as low as .032000".

The .035290 levy would mean that the owner of property valued at \$100,000 would pay a total of \$35.29 in property taxes to support NRD projects and programs this year compared to \$38.44 last year. \$16.16 million property tax dollars would be received compared to 16.6 million in FY 2007. The total general operating budget is proposed at \$45.09 million compared to \$37.33 million last year. The remainder of revenue in the general operating budget would be received through State of Nebraska and Federal funding for projects, and special assessments.

A formal public hearing and adoption of the budget will take place at the Board's August 9th meeting. The Papio-Missouri River NRD area includes all of Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties plus the eastern 60% of Burt and Thurston Counties.

Officers Elected

All officers of the Papio-Missouri River NRD Board of Directors have been re-elected by the board to serve another one-year term. Jim Thompson, of Omaha, was re-elected chairperson. Thompson holds a Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration from the University of Minnesota. He was elected to the Board in 2002.

Rick Kolowski, of Omaha, was re-elected by the board to serve another term as vice-chair. Kolowski is principal of Millard West High School and was elected to the board in 2004.

Re-elected as secretary is Richard Tesar, a Waterloo resident and owner of Rich Tesar Outdoors, a professional guiding service.

Re-elected treasurer is John Conley, retired manager of engineering for Metropolitan Utilities District. David Klug was elected as Asst. Treasurer.

Rich Tesar was also selected to serve another term as the board's representative on the Nebraska Association of Resources District's Board. Tim Fowler was chosen as assistant representative to the NARD.

Gift will add some sparkle to riverfront

■ Gallup Corp. has pledged \$300,000 to illuminate each cable and the towers on the new pedestrian bridge.

By C. DAVID KOTOK

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

7-20-07

Beams of light will shoot up the cables suspending the new Missouri River pedestrian bridge, helping the project punctuate the city skyline.

The \$300,000 for the lighting will help turn the bridge into the "icon" that Mayor Mike Fahey promised residents of the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, a city official said.

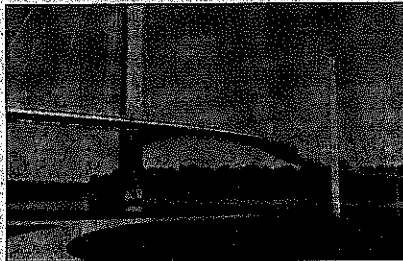
Thanks to a contribution from the Gallup Corp., Fahey won't be violating his other promise: not to spend additional tax dollars on the bridge linking Omaha's new riverfront with Council Bluffs Playland Park.

A review of the contractor's original plans for highlighting the bridge left city officials underwhelmed, said Omaha Parks Director Steve Scarpello.

"It just wasn't the signature we wanted," Scarpello said.

The original plan concentrated lights on the two towers with the hopes that the light would catch the cables.

See Bridge: Page 2



HNTB CORP.

Construction of the \$22 million Missouri River pedestrian bridge, shown in this artist's drawing, is on schedule. Completion is set for fall 2008.

Bridge: Lights are intended to showcase each cable

Continued from Page 1

The nighttime appearance will now showcase each silvery strand of cable that attaches the bridge decking to the towers.

The \$300,000 pledge from Gallup provides \$50,000 to concentrate light on the bridge's 204-foot towers. It will also finance about \$250,000 to light the cables with 96 additional 250-watt fixtures.

The \$22 million span has drawn criticism from some area residents who have described it as a nonessential pork-barrel project funded primarily by federal taxpayers.

Fahey and Council Bluffs Mayor Tom Hanafan have defended the bridge as a defining feature of the skyline that will link the two communities and the two states.

The two towers — one on the Nebraska bank and one rising out of the river on the Iowa side — are nearing completion, Scarpello said. Construction remains on schedule, he said, with an opening expected in fall 2008.

Gallup's contribution is being made to Back to the River, a non-profit organization that is raising money for additional features at

the landing areas. The Omaha City Council will be asked Tuesday to accept the contribution and to authorize the additional spending for lighting.

The Fahey administration is hoping to raise more than \$2 million through Back to the River to pay for a plaza, grand staircase and children's playground at the circular Nebraska landing of the bridge.

Published Sunday | July 22, 2007

Irrigation Empire: Water could someday be treated like a commodity

BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Access to water is shrinking across Nebraska. As accessibility tightens, the growing value of the state's greatest natural resource will trigger economic changes that stretch from Alliance to Omaha.



A July sunset casts a golden glow on the North Platte River east of Bridgeport in western Nebraska, where regulators will reduce groundwater pumping to help restore water to the river and sustain water tables. But no one knows how long the process will take.<

Farmers pump more underground water for crops in Nebraska than anywhere else in the country, tapping America's biggest freshwater sea. Pressured by neighboring states and by a lingering drought, the state plans to bill farmers and other taxpayers millions of dollars to help rectify problems of overuse.

But as fresh water becomes increasingly scarce across the globe, how well is the state positioned for the future?

Interviews with two dozen scientists and environmentalists, regulators and policymakers, farmers and academics indicate Nebraska can take advantage of its water wealth - if it overcomes hefty challenges, including a lingering denial that water is finite.

Among their predictions: In 50 years, Nebraska will have fewer irrigated acres but thirstier soil.

They see the growth of water markets, in which water is sold to the highest bidder.

They see agriculture and other industries becoming less dependent on water.

And they see increased interest in taxing water, just as other states tax oil and coal.

Nebraska "will and should" tax water, said Kyle Hoagland, director of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Water Center.

"Water has been virtually free," he said. "People should be willing to pay something for it."

Particularly farmers, he said, who use 95 percent of the groundwater pumped in the state.

Nebraska took its first steps this year toward taxing water. Under Legislative Bill 701, natural resources districts in the Republican River basin can levy special occupation taxes on irrigated land.

Significantly more money will be needed to fund statewide research, upgrade small-town water systems or retire irrigated land, and tax revenue could help fund such needs.

Across the West, taxing water is uncommon and is stiffly resisted by agricultural interests, who are highly organized and dominate the political debate.

California rejected a water tax last year. Arizona charges an annual groundwater withdrawal fee in trouble areas. Colorado repealed a law charging water users an annual fee based on pumped water because it was hard to implement.

Nebraska farm interests called this year's tax painful but concluded it would help avoid the potentially disastrous impact of shutting down irrigation.

A water tax becomes more appealing as the resource becomes more valuable, said Kermit Brashear of Omaha, former speaker of the Legislature.

"If you have coal, you find a way to tax coal. If you have oil, you find a way to tax oil," he said.

"You'll do it with water, too," Brashear said. "It's just a question of when a tax kicks in."

Robert Glennon, a University of Arizona water-law authority whose book "Water Follies" examines America's use of groundwater, said taxes increase the value of water as they increase its price.

"We don't treat water as a scarce resource," he said. "We take it for granted."

But water is indeed scarce in places across the Plains.

Plans to export Nebraska water to Colorado bubble up periodically, when Front Range community growth collides with limited water.

By midcentury, the sprawling Denver metropolitan area is projected to grow 40 miles north, across the Wyoming border to Cheyenne. The Wyoming capital is just 35 miles west of the Nebraska border.

Omaha's Metropolitan Utilities District perked up a few years ago when a Colorado entrepreneur proposed buying water from Nebraska Sand Hills landowners and shipping it to Denver by rail.

The idea fizzled.

"But it got our attention," said Tom Wurtz, MUD president.

Sand Hills water, carried by the Loup and Dismal Rivers until they merge with the Platte River, helps supply MUD well fields in the Platte Valley west of Omaha.

Out-of-state transfers face tough drawbacks.

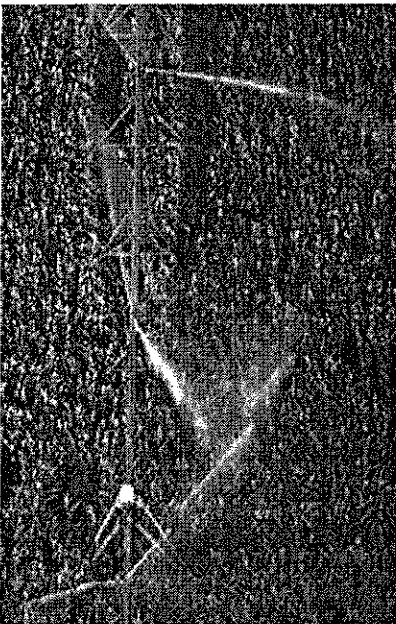
"As we see greater and greater competition for water in Nebraska," said Michael Jess, the UNL Water Center's assistant director, "we'll see greater resistance to allowing water exports."

Pumping water uphill from Nebraska to Colorado would make such exports too expensive, said Mark Squillace, director of the Natural Resources Law Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

States are protective of water originating in their territory.

"While states like to fight over water with almost patriotic fervor," Squillace said, "they also recognize that it's better to tone down the rhetoric. . . . We're all better off by working together and cooperating."

Some stresses are homegrown.



A center-pivot sprinkler irrigates corn near York, Neb. Farmers are planting more acres to corn to meet demands for ethanol, which poses a challenge for state water policymakers.

Nebraska is already the nation's No. 3 corn producer and is poised to be the No. 2 ethanol-producing state by year's end.

Ethanol demands led Nebraska farmers to plant more acres to corn this spring than any time since 1936.

But ethanol's boom - and its corn echo - is challenging Nebraska water policymakers.

"As long as ethanol makes money, there will be stress on the water supplies," said Ann Bleed, the state's natural resources director.

Some communities will need to shift their economies away from heavy reliance on irrigation.

A recent report sought by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other organizations concluded the state should embrace water use for fishing, boating and other recreational activities that appeal to people attracted to areas with rich outdoor assets.

The mix generates jobs and community stability, said Oregon economist Ernie Niemi, the report's author.

Nebraska water officials conduct an annual inventory of each river basin to determine if there is enough water to allow new uses. If not, a basin is designated "fully appropriated" and placed under irrigation restrictions.

The supply is fully appropriated or worse in much of central and western Nebraska, and the line is moving eastward.

One weapon - already in use - to deal with limited supplies is a water transfer.

"It's a political shock in western Nebraska," said David Aiken, a UNL agricultural economist, "but if you're a growing community and need more water, the easiest way is to pay somebody for their pivot water."

Central Platte Natural Resources District recently added its own twist to the era of tighter water stocks. It created the state's first water bank in an effort to restore water to the Platte River.

The Grand Island-based NRD will pay willing landowners to retire land from irrigation permanently. The district manages a region in which underground water and surface water intermingle so much it is one resource.

The water bank will need thousands of acres for the NRD to avoid stricter regulation and pumping limits on district farmers.

The most politically charged idea came from the troubled Republican River basin.

The WaterClaim irrigation advocacy organization proposed transferring water from the Platte River and the Sand Hills to replenish the Republican basin.

The concept intrigued regulators and others but withered when some agricultural groups opposed it.

Such transfers are expected eventually.

"The question will be: Where is the water more valuable?" Bleed said.

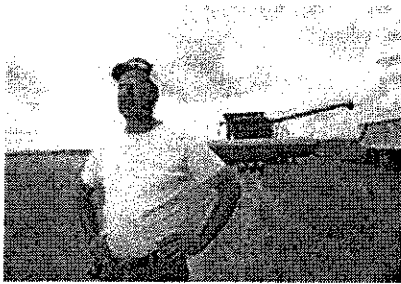
Published Sunday | July 22, 2007

Farming innovations help stretch stressed resource

BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

BRIDGEPORT, Neb. - Kirk Laux is old enough, at 47, to remember when Pumpkin Creek flowed enough to provide water to his parents' farm crops.



Bridgeport farmer Kirk Laux worried that Pumpkin Creek's 14-inch-per-acre ration on groundwater pumping would limit crop production and reduce his income. He adopted water-saving farming practices and concentrated his limited water on land with efficient center-pivot irrigation systems.

He recalls summers with seemingly weekly rains. His four children - in their teens and 20s - don't.

"All they know," he said, "is drought and water shortage."

Those water stresses won't stop agriculture from remaining one of Nebraska's dominant industries. But they already have brought innovations to farming, and more are on the horizon.

Laux is among a fast-growing number of Nebraska farmers changing how and what they farm to stretch an increasingly limited amount of water.

"My job is to conserve water and make a living," he said. "So I'm trying to maximize production of each acre by concentrating all my available water on the most efficient irrigation system."

Laux, who farms with his father, Bill, switched four years ago to no-till farming, which leaves crop residue on the ground to slow erosion and gradually add organic matter that helps hold water and nutrients.

About a third of Nebraska cropland is untilled, compared with less than 5 percent in 1989.

Because regulators let landowners develop too much irrigation, Laux said, some marginally productive acres will need to revert to nonirrigated land.

"The thing is, in the next 50 years, we'll learn and discover ways to be more efficient with water," he said.

Seed companies and university researchers are developing drought-tolerant crops. Corn research is focusing on protecting the plant during pollination, when it is most sensitive to drought. But corn will always need water.

"You need a certain amount of water to get a decent crop," said Mark Lagrimini, head of the agronomy department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "You can't expect to get 250 bushels per acre on 5 inches of water. It's never going to happen."

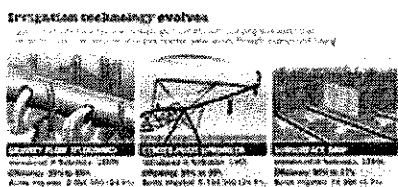
Irrigation reduction will be gradual, said Dean Yonts, a UNL irrigation engineer at Scottsbluff.

"Producers adjust their operations to fit what they have. They do it all the time," Yonts said.

Farmers, for example, say they need 24 inches of water to grow corn.

"But when they finally realize that what they want is not what they have," he said, "then we start making progress."

They turn to crops that use less water, work the land less often to cut soil-evaporation losses or learn they can produce a good crop with about 80 percent of the water they once used.



Click to enlarge.

A relatively new irrigation method being tested in the Plains is subsurface drip irrigation. Water is applied directly to the crop root zone using buried polyethylene tubing.

Yonts said the method could become the most efficient available, but its market potential is unclear - it costs about \$1,200 per acre to install the tubing, or 2½ times as much as erecting a new pivot.

Laux is certain of another change.

"There'll be a lot more dryland (nonirrigated) farming here in Pumpkin Creek," he said.

Published Sunday | July 22, 2007

Big Mac might downsize - or supersize

BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Lake McConaughy at midcentury will still be Big Mac - Nebraska's largest reservoir - but could float between mighty and meek.

And Nebraska's rivers and streams will carry more water.

But it's unknown how long it will take to fully restore them and who will use the water.

"A full reservoir might help fisheries, but it doesn't help irrigation," said Ann Bleed, the state's natural resources director. "Nebraskans have to decide how important it is for them to have reservoirs for recreation, as opposed to strictly power and irrigation."

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, which owns and operates Lake McConaughy, expects more years in which the reservoir flirts with historic low levels. Some years may be so grim that no irrigation water is released.

But demand for water will fuel calls to increase the capacity of Big Mac, said Don Kraus, Central's general manager.

"We'll see wet years again, and maybe we'll have the opportunity to put more water in the lake so we're better prepared for the dry years," he said.

The reservoir was last full in September 1999, stretching 22 miles behind Kingsley Dam on the North Platte River. Shrunk by drought and groundwater irrigation, the lake fell to a record low level in 2004. Today it is at about one-third capacity.

The future McConaughy is expected to contain about 200,000 acre-feet less water on any given day, on average, than in the last half-century. An acre-foot covers an acre 12 inches deep.

Central speculates that, eventually, recreation interests will buy farmers' irrigation rights to keep water in the lake.

Cities downstream as far as Omaha might buy a share in the lake to ensure that water released from the dam stays in the Platte to recharge downstream groundwater aquifers.

In coming decades, water will return to the Platte and Republican Rivers, as required under interstate and federal agreements.

To make that happen, irrigation will be more restricted and fewer acres irrigated.

It will be a long process. A recovery program to restore Arizona's San Pedro River to its 1940s condition, before groundwater pumping began, could take more than a century.

Nebraska farmers will still use groundwater to irrigate.

"But they can't have so much that in 50 years we're not going to have any water in the streams," said Richard Harnsberger of Lincoln, a retired water law professor at the University of Nebraska.

"People want water in streams."

Published Sunday | July 22, 2007

Regulatory path puts Nebraska on course

BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nebraska is fencing off unhindered access to water just as surely as barbed wire closed the open range to frontier cattlemen in the 1880s.

If that illustration doesn't get the message across, says James Goeke of North Platte, try one from a later century:

Easy and sometimes wasteful access to water is in the rearview mirror.

"We have an opportunity to be smug about how much water we have in Nebraska," said Goeke, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln hydrogeologist and an authority on the High Plains Aquifer.

But when Nebraska recently clamped down on groundwater irrigation, it simply put the state in stride with the 16 other Western states.

Nebraska doesn't have a reputation in the West as a leader in managing groundwater.

It has been a follower, pulled by other states to modernize its water management. For decades, Nebraska allowed the unregulated development of groundwater irrigation. This policy contributed in places to depleted

stream flow, hindered recreation and stressed wildlife.

The state put a progressive polish on its image in 2004 with a law integrating management of groundwater and surface water.

Drought-driven regulatory advances gratify Ann Bleed, director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, because she knows the appeal of backsliding.

She worries about how irrigators will respond to years when normal rains and mountain snowmelt runoff increase the temptation to loosen restrictions that are designed to sustain aquifer levels and keep water in streams.

"We have the laws in place - although they may need some tweaking - to make this work," Bleed said.

Western states are doing much better at integrating management of surface water and groundwater, said Mark Squillace, director of the Natural Resources Law Center at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

"It's started in Nebraska," he said, "and probably needs to happen more than it already has."

Mark Burbach, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln environmental scientist who maps groundwater levels, said Nebraska won't face widespread water crises like those in Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona or other Western states.

"Even under worst-case scenarios, we won't reach the level of Kansas and its depleted aquifers," Burbach said, with one big condition: Nebraska must stay on its new path.

Nebraska still has 99 percent of its share of the High Plains Aquifer, largely under the Sand Hills - fragile grasslands not conducive to large-scale production of irrigation-intensive commercial grain.

Issues of sustaining the aquifer, quality of life and conservation will remain in focus in Nebraska because of water-sharing agreements with Colorado, Wyoming and Kansas in the Platte and Republican River basins - plus the 2004 law.

It has been slow in coming, Burbach said, but Nebraska scientists, politicians and policymakers are becoming more educated about the state's complex system of groundwater and surface water.

Fifty years from now, he said, severe water table declines will be limited to the same areas as today.

Most of the state was blessed with deep reserves of prehistoric fresh water, hidden under the prairie terrain.

"We were dealt a good hand," Burbach said.

NRD draft budget keeps rate of tax levy steady

7-24-07

BY ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS
Lincoln Journal Star

A \$16.6 million draft budget approved recently by the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District Board won't require more tax dollars.

"We've kept the tax levy rate the same," said Glenn Johnson, the district's general manager.

The NRD covers most of Lancaster and Cass and parts of Otoe, Seward, Butler and Saunders counties. The public agency deals mostly with flooding, soil conservation and water quality and quantity issues in those areas.

If given final approval by the board, the 2008 budget will require a tax levy rate of 4.16 cents per \$100 of actual valuation.

Johnson said the rate is the same as last year, thanks to a 2.5 percent

NRD budget hearing

A public hearing on a draft budget of \$16.6 million will be at 7 p.m. Aug. 15 at the Lower Platte South NRD office, 3125 Portia St., Lincoln. The board is scheduled to vote on a final budget at 7 p.m. Aug. 22.

increase in property valuations.

The \$16.6 million draft budget is almost the same dollar total as last year's budget. Board members initially started with a \$21 million budget but whittled away that amount through four drafts. The final draft was approved July 18. Here are some highlights:

■ **Antelope Valley Project** — The district is working on a contract to

See NRD, Page 3B

NRD

Continued from Page 1B

finish the last two years of the flood-control portion of the project. About \$4 million is included in the 2008 budget and about \$3 million will come from the district, according to spokesman Mike Mascoc.

■ **Stevens Creek Watershed** — The last of 10 small flood-control dams is being completed near 103rd and O streets. The dam and lake will be part of a planned development called Waterford Estates. The district has budgeted about \$217,000 for the project.

■ **Water studies** — Efforts are under way to increase the monitoring of nitrate pollution near

Davey, Elmwood, Hickman, Pleasant Dale, Sprague, Union and Otoe Rural Water District No. 3. More detailed assessments also will be done. About \$373,500 has been budgeted for studies.

■ **Trails** — The district is completing its segment of the Homestead Trail to Cortland; building a section of the Salt Creek Trail from 14th Street to Military Avenue; and working on an extension of the MoPac East Trail from Wabash to the Lied Platte River Bridge near South Bend. Money for continued operations and other trail projects in Ashland and Weeping Water also are included. The district is allocating about \$1.5 million for trails, and \$170,526 of that will come from district funds.

Reach Algis J. Laukaitis at 473-7243 or alaukaitis@journalstar.com.

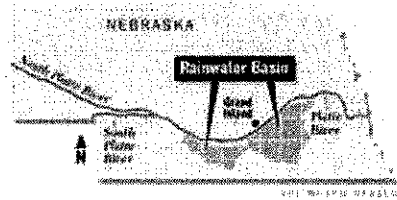
Published Tuesday | July 24, 2007

Plan issued to preserve Rainwater Basin

BY NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Gene Mack knows that many people don't normally associate cattle grazing and tree cutting with wildlife habitat management.



[Click to enlarge.](#)

Pheasant hunters, for example, can have a hard time seeing value in wetlands that have been grazed short by cattle, he said.

But cattle grazing and tree removal are among tools Mack and others at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service say

Continued

are essential to the long-term management of Nebraska's Rainwater Basin.

Those tools and others are included in a newly proposed management plan for the 24,000 acres that the service manages in the Rainwater Basin in south-central Nebraska.

The basin is one of the state's premier waterfowl areas. The proposal is open for public comment until Aug. 18, and an informational meeting is scheduled for July 31 in Hastings.

Take a closer look

Open house: Noon to 8 p.m. July 31, Quality Hotel, 2205 Osborne Drive E., Hastings, Neb. A brief presentation on the plan will be held at 7 p.m.

"What I hope people take away from this is that there is good biology behind what we're doing out here," said Mack, Fish and Wildlife Service project leader.

The plan also discusses a chronic underlying problem in the basin: the historical diversion of surface water so land can be used for agriculture.

Rainwater and snowmelt that would naturally filter into the basin's wetlands are being diverted via ditches and pits.

To replace that water, wildlife managers have relied on wells. However, the plan says the ability to continue pumping groundwater for wildlife is threatened by increasing energy costs, antiquated equipment and growing restrictions on water use.

The plan proposes that Fish and Wildlife Service staff work with the public to gain support for protecting surface runoff and seek a comprehensive analysis of water rights and resources.

"We don't know if we can even protect surface runoff," Mack said. "Since we're the lowest part of the watershed, everybody above us can capture that water before it can get to the wetlands."

Mack said he doesn't believe the plan will require a hard sell, in large part because public use of these lands is well-accepted. The plan itself includes no government mandates for local landowners.

Most public comment about water, he said, has come from hunters encouraging the government to pump even more onto the wetlands.

The success of the proposed plan, he said, rests on more active partnerships with others, including Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, an organization of government and private landowners.

Mack said that if all goes as planned, the basin, which welcomes millions of birds annually, will become more welcoming to human traffic. More and better signs, he said, will guide visitors. An interpretive trail is under construction. A visitors center is in the planning stages.

Other highlights of the plan:

- Increased use of cattle grazing, which Mack described as "one of the best tools" for controlling such invasive species as reed canary grass, river bulrush and cattails.

Using cattle to weed out those plants gives native plants a better chance to take root.

- Prescribed fires. Each year, thousands of tree seedlings can take root in wildlife areas. Fire is a more effective and less costly way of eliminating trees and allowing native plants to flourish.
- Additional staff. The most likely, Mack said, is a ranger who will watch for hunting violations, vandalism and vehicle trespassing.
- Additional land. To the extent possible, the basin would continue to grow. The plan proposes eventually nearly doubling in size, from the current 24,000 acres to about 46,000.
- Hunting. The government would work with its partners to increase the number of accessible blinds and to provide up-to-date information to hunters.

Elkhorn Valley Bikeway topic of Valley Council meeting Tuesday

by Mary Lou Rodgers

A public information meeting will be held Tuesday night, July 24, on the Elkhorn Valley Bikeway, formerly called the Western Douglas County Trail.

Dan Dolezal, a design engineer for Ehrhart Griffin & Associates, reviewed the plans for the Waterloo Board of Trustees at their July 9 meeting, and this Tuesday, John Winkler, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, will give a presentation to the Valley City Council at a special meeting at 7 p.m.

The bikeway will connect the Elkhorn trail system to the Waterloo trail system and continue on to Valley, ending at Twin Rivers YMCA.

At Waterloo's July 9 meeting, Board Chairman Stan Benke told Dolezal the Village has some concerns about the connection in Waterloo. One portion of Waterloo's trail system is in very close proximity to homes, he noted. Benke suggested an alternative route might be along Dryers Road to old Maple Road. Dolezal said that could be discussed at a future information meeting.

The Valley City Council will also review the audit of the 2006-07 budget at the special meeting at City Hall.

Post-Gazette
7-25-07

2B WEDNESDAY, JULY 25, 2006

Briefly

W-H 7-25-07

METRO AREA

City accepts bridge lights donation

Let there be light.

The Omaha City Council Tuesday unanimously accepted a \$300,000 donation from the Gallup Corp. to fund decorative lighting for the new Missouri River pedestrian bridge.

Included in the money is \$50,000 to concentrate light on both of the 204-foot bridge towers. It also will finance about \$250,000 to light the bridge's cables with 96 additional 250-watt fixtures.

Originally, only the two towers were to be illuminated, but now all the cables of the \$22 million suspension bridge will be spotlighted with light at night as well.

Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey has said the pedestrian bridge will be an "icon" for the city.

The \$22 million construction cost will be covered by funds from the federal government, the states of Iowa and Nebraska, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and private donations.

—Karen Sloan

Midlands Voices

Let's work together on sound flood plan

BY JIM THOMPSON

The writer is chairman of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Again, there is flooding to the south. I would suspect many people in our area looked above and asked, "Where is our allocation?" Or perhaps they looked at their yellowed lawns and silently thought how nice it is to just leave the mower alone.

Could the floods that have occurred in Texas or Kansas have the same intensity if that rain had fallen in our area? Or what about earlier in the year, when the East Coast was inundated — could that rain have put our counties and cities in a sand-bagging mode?

Someday, we could find out. We had better be ready.

The natural resources districts in Nebraska have the responsibility to work toward flood control. Clearly, this is done to protect life and property to the greatest extent possible. At least 13 people have died and disaster areas have been declared due to the recent flooding in Texas and Kansas. The reports on property damage have many, many zeros following the digits.

The task of controlling water and the prevention of flooding is certainly one that involves a lot of individuals, businesses and government entities. And money. And a good plan.

With the hilly topography that lies within Washington, Douglas and Sarpy Counties, we need a good plan. And with the change from rural living to urban development, we need a good plan. And we cannot wait until that ugly meeting where the Federal Emergency Management Agency, other government officials, insurance adjusters, etc., sit around a table and discuss what could have been done.

One effective tool that already has been employed is the partnership of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District with the "urbanizers" of the area, commonly known as developers.

A recent Nebraska Supreme Court ruling may prove to be a huge victory for taxpayers. The court ruled that the Papio-Missouri River NRD has the proper authority to construct flood prevention measures through mutually beneficial

partnerships with the development community.

In some cases, these projects may be multipurpose reservoirs that offer flood protection, public recreation, water-quality benefits and green space. Tax dollars would be saved by the collaborations through which developers would rightfully share the cost of measures to control downstream flooding. This is a part of good planning.

Another part is the active involvement of the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership (with information available at www.papiopartnership.org). This coalition represents 11 of our local government bodies. The purpose is to seek cost-effective, workable solutions to flood prevention and water-quality issues. The outcome of this partnership and upcoming public involvement efforts will assist in providing components of a good plan.

And elected officials must make decisions based on what is best for our area. Revised draft flood-plan maps will be presented by FEMA in the near future. Do not be surprised if our urbanization has created a wandering line of discontent. But a good plan can help to prevent a catastrophe.

Because the effects of water have far-reaching and cross-boundary status, it is important that all affected officials be properly informed of the issues and have the ability to react to their areas of jurisdiction.

Consequently, I am planning a meeting of all of us for a roundtable discussion on this issue in order to try to get a better grasp on the subject. I believe there are 94 elected officials on the list so far.

Data are forthcoming on the hydrology of the Papillion Creek watershed. Stormwater plans, zoning issues, sewer separation, etc., are additional factors in this important community effort.

Because of the total impact of flooding, I believe it is important that as many decision-makers as possible gather around the table — before it floats away.

**NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release**



July 27, 2007
www.agr.ne.gov

Contact: Christin Kamm
(402) 471-6856

NDA FUNDS VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) has awarded \$2 million in grant funds for four projects to address riparian vegetation overgrowth in the Republican and Platte river basins. Two projects address invasive vegetation in the Republican River Basin and two are directed to the North Platte River Basin.

Agriculture Director Greg Ibach said the four projects represent an important step toward improving the health of riparian areas and streamflow.

“These projects will address overgrowth such as saltcedar, phragmites and Russian olive,” Ibach said. “Removing these moisture-robbing invasives will improve streamflow, habitat and even recreation opportunities. All projects will promote the use of best management practices to maintain the improvements once the work is complete.”

The four grant proposals, sponsors, and amounts awarded are:

- High Plains Invasive Species Project, sponsored by the High Plains Weed Management Association based out of Scottsbluff, will receive \$65,000. The High Plains project will educate landowners on invasive control strategies, survey riparian wetlands for invasive populations and initiate control measures, in cooperation with landowners, in selected areas.
- Eastern Republican Riparian Improvement Project, sponsored by the Twin Valley Weed Management Area based out of Red Cloud, will receive \$772,500. The Eastern Republican project will be used to initiate an integrated riparian land management program, in cooperation

- MORE -

with landowners, that uses chemical, biological, and mechanical methods of vegetation management. Funds also will be used to educate and assist landowners in the ongoing management of invasives on riparian land.

- Western Republican Riparian Improvement Project, sponsored by the Southwest Weed Management Area based out of Cambridge, will receive \$814,617 and will complement the work being done on the eastern part of the Republican River. The Western Republican project will include some mapping and surveying of invasive species, outreach to landowners on the need for invasive control measures and the importance of maintaining improvements, and initiation of control measures, in cooperation with landowners.
- Lake McConaughy Saltcedar Control “Surround and Drown” Plan, sponsored by the West Central Weed Management Area based out of Gothenburg, will receive \$347,883. The Lake McConaughy project aims to control a significant saltcedar infestation that has inundated the lakebed as the lake receded due to drought. The project would treat targeted invasives, using chemical, mechanical and biological controls, in a designated area of the perimeter to prevent further spread of the vegetation. The invasives below the treated area would be contained until the lake refills, killing the remaining vegetation.

The Riparian Vegetation Management Grant Program was created in LB 701, the comprehensive water legislation signed into law earlier this year by Governor Dave Heineman. The legislation authorizes \$2 million annually for two years for the grant program.

Ibach said NDA is working with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on the grant awards so grant awardees are aware of wildlife and habitat concerns within project areas. Game and Parks is charged in LB 701 with assisting grant recipients with implementing their projects.

“We all want to see these projects meet the objective outlined in LB 701. That is to improve conveyance of streamflow in natural streams,” Ibach said. “We also want the projects to be done in a way that is consistent with our obligations to Nebraska landowners, farmers and ranchers, our natural resources and wildlife. By working cooperatively, we can achieve that goal.”

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DAILY NEWS

EVENING

DAILY

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Proposed dam up for bids

Lake, recreation area
planned near Leigh

By GREG WEES

gwees@norfolkdailynews.com

Bids will be sought to begin construction of the Leigh Dam project following action Thursday night by the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District.

Board members also approved an agreement with the Nebraska Department of Roads to raise Highway 91, which will pass over the north end of the new lake.

The NRD will be responsible for building a pedestrian underpass under the highway and administering the road project. The state will contribute up to \$176,000 toward the cost of the asphalt surfacing work.

The district is trying to obtain a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because wetlands in the area will be altered by the lake.

In addition, the board approved a work order to relocate Loup Power District lines in the project area and to build a temporary power line south of Highway 91. The NRD will pay the \$155,000 cost of the work.

An earthen dam will be built across Maple Creek just west of the Colfax County Fairgrounds outside Leigh. The \$6.5 million project also involves a 145-acre lake and recreation area.

A grant from the Nebraska Resources Development Fund will pay for 55 percent of the project with the rest coming mainly from the NRD.

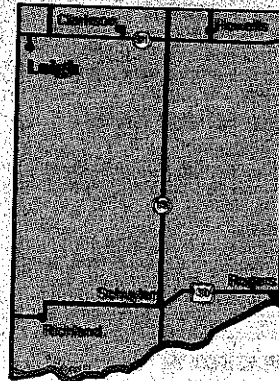
In other action at its Thursday meeting, the board set a public hearing for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 23, on a proposed budget that will require \$129,327 more in property taxes for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The tax rate would remain about the same as the current rate of 3.54 cents per \$100 of actual valuation. However, property values in the district's 15 counties are projected to rise 5 percent, yielding more revenue for the fiscal 2008 budget.

Property tax revenue would increase from \$2.59 million to \$2.72 million.

The proposed budget totals \$10.2 million, up from the current year's budget of \$6.5 million. The largest planned expenditure in the new budget is \$3 million to begin construction of the Leigh Dam.

The board also voted to contribute \$49,850 as half the cost of a flood-control study by the corps of engineers of Middle Logan Creek at Randolph.



A welcome glimpse

W-H
7-29-07

Perhaps one of the most charming features about "Back to the River," the Omaha-area effort to renew the connection between the Missouri and the metropolitan area, is the opportunity to bring nature back into urban life.

One important aspect of this part of the river renewal program is the opening of a long-clogged river chute within sight of the new pedestrian bridge going up between Omaha and Council Bluffs. Chutes served as quiet bywaters where fish bred, and wetlands encouraged the proliferation of the myriad of plant, animal, amphibian and insect life that flourishes in the shallows.

Few backwaters survived the channelization of the Missouri, done to control flooding and facilitate barge travel. But in recent years, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, among other

Reopening of chute complements back-to-river effort by Omaha.

organizations, has worked to open the habitats not only to wild creatures but also to hikers, picnickers and other casual visitors. Boyer Chute, north of Omaha near Fort Calhoun, is one example of a successful restoration.

The newest chute, on the eastern side of the river, is a mile long and about 200 feet wide at high water. It runs from just north of 35th Street to west of Avenue G in Council Bluffs.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources, among others, worked to clear the chute area of large trees and bushes and opened it to allow water to flow from upriver to downriver. The chute has trails, which will be covered with woodchips, for sightseers and other visitors.

Now, city and suburban dwellers can catch a glimpse of nature in the heart of the Omaha area — an appealing prospect indeed.

Valley City Council addresses safety of Maple intersection, lake development plat, trail plan

by Mary Lou Rodgers 7-31-07

Two and a half months after a car accident occurred at 264th and Maple Street, Lonnie Peterson of Valley is slowly recovering from severe injuries to his right side and his back. His neck was broken, along with his shoulder, collarbone and ribs on his right side when his vehicle was struck by a car that failed to stop at the stop sign on Maple Street.

Since then, the safety of the intersection has been a topic at more than one Valley City Council meeting, with a number of citizens asking that changes be made. Maple Street has stop signs at 264th Street, but Peterson's family and others said more is needed.

Mayor Mary Caffey said the City of Valley has attached flashing red lights on the tops of the stop signs to make them more visible, and at the August City Council meeting, the Council will consider putting in a four-way stop and lowering the speed limit from 55 mph to 45 mph.



Stop signs on Maple at 264th now have red lights attached. Lower speed limits and a 4-way stop are being considered.

There was a full chamber of people at a hearing held at the July 10 meeting.

"There were quite a few comments," Mayor Caffey said. "We think this is in line with what people wanted. City Engineer Jim Olmsted did a traffic study, and it's in line with his recommendations."

Annexation

All of 270th Street on the east end of Valley will soon be part of the city, as the result of action taken

by the Council on July 10. The Council held the first reading on annexing the Shell Rock property. The City has already annexed the Mallard Lake property, which brought 270th Street into the city limits. There is still a cornfield in the area that is not part of the city.

New development

On the west end of Valley, plans for the Gaviidae subdivision are moving forward. The 37-lot residential area will be built around two older lakes



Homes in the Gaviidae subdivision will be built on small acreages around two older lakes between Valley Street and Meigs Street in Valley.

between Valley and Meigs streets.

Ed Krenk from Lamp Rynearson and Associates engineers said the 37 lots ranges in size from about half an acre to three or four acres on approximately 100 acres of property. There will be no public access to the lakes, but two outlots at the east end, adjacent to the city park, will connect to the park and be open to the public.

"It's a very unique piece of property," Krenk said about the development. "It's very mature. We will try to leave it as natural as possible."

The developer, PBK LLC in Minnesota, is in the process of obtaining financing and forming a sanitary improvement district. Construction is expected to start later this year.

The Council approved the final plat for Gaviidae on July 10.

Trail plan

The Council scheduled a special

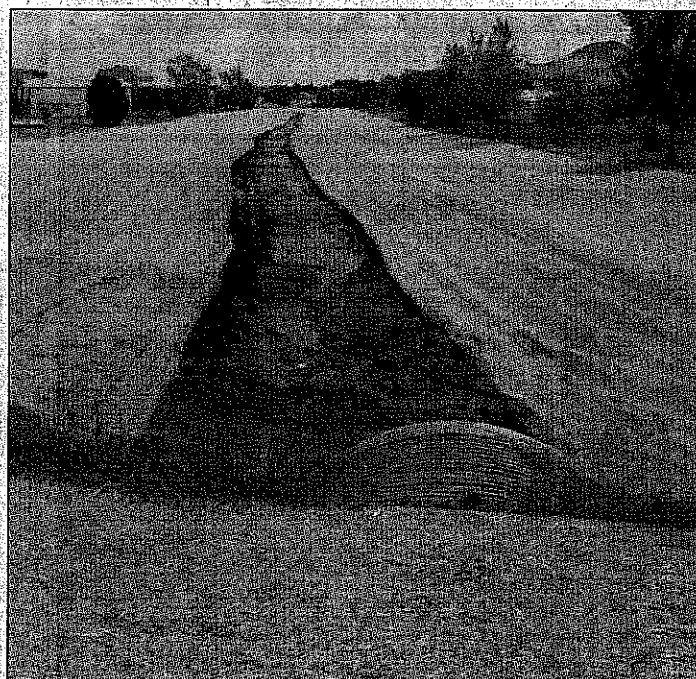
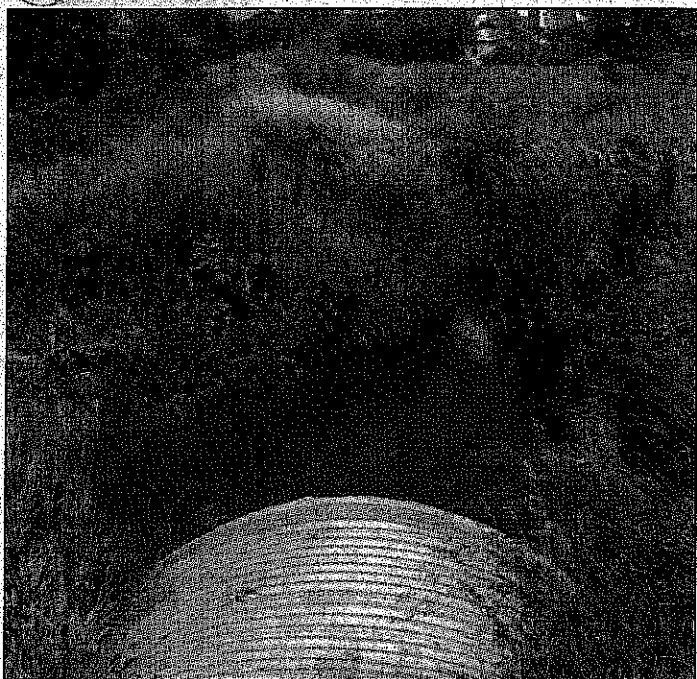
meeting for July 24 to get information on the Western Douglas County Trail, which will link Elkhorn, Waterloo and Valley in preparation for a public information meeting later this month. The Council also planned to review the 2005-06 audit at that time.

John Winkler, general manager of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, which is heading up the project, came to Valley last Tuesday to update the Council on Valley's portion of the trail. Dan Dolezal from the engineering firm, Ehrhart Griffin Associates showed the Council drawings of the trail and answered questions about a number of changes that have been made since the original design. A public information meeting on the Western Douglas County trail will be held at Twin Rivers YMCA in Valley at 7 p.m. Tuesday, August 21.

The next regular meeting of the Valley City Council will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday, August 7, at city hall.

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PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

A new drainage ditch, right, has eased flooding concerns of people living in the Forest Run subdivision near Gretna. At left is the original creek that was enlarged by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Flood woes eased in Gretna-area subdivision

By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Rainfall no longer brings as much dread to residents of the flood-prone Forest Run subdivision near Gretna.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District has completed a drainage ditch through the neighborhood, and the district's work is earning kudos from neighbors.

"People in general seem very

pleased," said Robert Davis, past president of the Forest Run Homeowners Association and one of the property owners affected by flooding. "The level of anxiety is greatly reduced."

The drainage ditch, actually an existing creek that the NRD made deeper and wider, carries runoff from much of Gretna through the subdivision. As Gretna has grown, flooding worsened, residents say, increasing their worries about the

safety of their children and homes.

The ditch will handle runoff from modest rains, but flooding still can be expected with heavy rains, said Paul Woodward, a water resources engineer with the NRD.

The work was a cooperative project of the NRD, Sarpy County, City of Gretna and the Forest Run/Lyman Highlands Homeowners Associations. Neighbors will be responsible

for maintaining the drainage ditch, Davis said.

An upstream dam that would do more to alleviate the problem is included in the district's proposal for building 29 metro-area dams. The district is evaluating the dams and other alternatives for reducing flood risk, Woodward said.

The NRD set aside \$145,000 for the Forest Run project, which includes staff time. Final costs are still being tallied.

NRDs differ on requiring well meters

■ Some at a legislative hearing say they are an unnecessary expense, while others say they should be on "every irrigation well."

W-H 8-1-07
BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. — Water meters on irrigation wells are clearly a good management tool for farmers, but not everyone embraces the idea of requiring them statewide.

Nebraska farmers, who own nearly 100,000 active irrigation wells, pump more underground water for crops than farmers in any other state.

No one knows, however, how many of those wells are metered to record the amount of water pumped.

Meters are required in only specific regions of the state, generally where water demand ex-

ceeds supply or where mandated by interstate agreements.

Several resources managers testified Tuesday at an interim study hearing held by the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee. The hearing took place at North Platte Community College.

State Sen. LeRoy Loudon of Ellsworth, the committee chairman, launched the study. He wondered whether requiring meters would help avoid trouble later in areas not currently stricken by water shortages.

He got different answers.

No, let local regulators control pumping based on local conditions, said John Turnbull, general manager of the Upper Big

Blue Natural Resources District at York.

Yes, the data provided by meters are essential in determining water usage and overall planning, said Mike Clements, general manager of the Lower Republican NRD at Alma.

"Flow meters can and should be installed on every irrigation well in this state," Clements said in a letter to the committee. "How can you plan for where you need to go when you do not know where you have been?"

Turnbull's district in east-central Nebraska requires meters only on new or replacement wells. But a plan is in place to mandate meters on all irrigation wells in the district if groundwater levels fall to a certain trigger point.

Metering irrigation wells is politically sensitive, Turnbull said. The district has 12,000 irrigation wells covering 15 percent

of the state's total irrigated acres.

Farmers who feared that meters would lead to a tax on the amount of water pumped have pressured the Upper Big Blue NRD board in the past not to discuss or require meters.

Four years ago, the board made it clear that meters would be part of the district's water-management plan.

Ron Bishop, general manager of the Central Platte NRD at Grand Island, urged the committee not to require meters.

NRDs already have authority to require meters where necessary, he said.

Meters are a costly, unnecessary expense in some areas and wouldn't answer questions that need answering, he said.

Not all the water pumped is consumed by corn and other crops. Sometimes more than half the water filtrates back into the aquifer, Bishop said.

Plan to shut off about 400 Niobrara irrigation operations announced

By ART HOVEY / Lincoln Journal Star

Wednesday, Aug 01, 2007 - 06:54:13 pm CDT

A confrontation over use of Niobrara River water reached a pivotal stage Wednesday as the director of the state Department of Natural Resources announced plans to shut off about 400 irrigation operations upstream from Spencer Dam.

Ann Bleed said she was responding to a request from Nebraska Public Power District, which owns the small hydro-electric dam near Lynch. The process of notifying irrigators would begin yet Wednesday afternoon, she said.

Bleed said about 400 people "will be asked to shut off any diversions until further notice. And we will be sending people up to make sure they do."

Officials of Columbus-based NPPD had said Tuesday they were taking action because low water levels in the river were affecting how much power they could generate.

An NPPD attorney said the power district was within its rights in asking upstream irrigators with junior water rights to begin paying for their water to compensate NPPD customers for lost power revenue.

In a related development Tuesday, an Omaha owner of irrigated land along the river in Holt County sought a restraining order and other action from Lancaster County District Judge Jeffre Cheuvront that would keep water flowing toward his crops.

W. Patrick Betterman, Omaha attorney for Richard R. Miles, said in the court filing:

"Specifically, if the flow of irrigation water to Plaintiff's crop is interrupted, and if there is insufficient rainfall in the area, Plaintiff's crop will suffer severe damage from the anticipated heat in August and September, 2007."

The judge scheduled a hearing for Monday at 9 a.m. in Lincoln.

Betterman said Wednesday there would be no court action on the restraining order until the hearing.

Bleed said she took her action at the request of NPPD, which had asked for a state response by Wednesday. She said possible irrigation shutdown would apply to those with junior water rights and no record of payment, at the rate of 70 cents per acre foot, to the power district.

Not all irrigators would be told to quit pumping. Shutoff action would continue only "until we've got enough water to satisfy the NPPD water right."

In a related development Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Lyle Strom dismissed a challenge to the state's management of the river filed in federal court by eight irrigators in May.

In a prepared statement, Attorney General Jon Bruning applauded that result.

"This ruling upholds a surface water law that has been on the books and enforced by the state since 1895," Bruning said. "There are better ways to settle our water disputes than with lawsuits and lawyers."

NEBRASKA

Bill would fund conservation plans ^{W-11} 8-6-07

WASHINGTON — Nebraska would receive more than \$28 million to control flooding, protect drinking water and battle invasive shrubs under a major water bill President Bush is expected to receive soon.

The House has passed the Water Resources Development Act. The Senate is expected to approve the measure.

Nebraska's senators, Ben Nelson and Chuck Hagel, said the bill will provide:

- \$14 million for drinking water infrastructure. Part of the money will go to a new Metropolitan Utilities District well field and water treatment plant on the west side of the Platte River.

- \$12 million for Lower Platte River watershed restoration, aimed at reducing flood damage and improving water quality.

- \$2.5 million to study how best to curb losses to habitat and promote recovery of endangered species in the Missouri River.

The measure also will help eradicate invasive species such as Russian olive and salt cedar along the Republican River watershed in Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado.

It also authorizes flood drainage improvements in the Sand Creek watershed in Wahoo and Antelope Creek in Lincoln.

— Jake Thompson