

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: December 3, 2004

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

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

B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**

1. **Marty Thieman** has been promoted to Water Supply Superintendent for the Washington County Rural Water #2, effective November 29, 2004. He will be working out of the Blair Field Office. Marty previous served as the Lead Groundskeeper at Chalco Hills Rec Area. We are in the process of filling that position.

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 November, 2004. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.

D. **CURRENT AND ON-GOING PROJECTS – P-MRNRD LEGAL COUNSEL:** Attached is a copy of the current and on-going projects for District Legal Counsel, Paul Peters, as of November 22, 2004. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

E. **PAPIO CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP MEETING:** The Papio Creek Watershed Partnership has scheduled a series of four Watershed by Design Meetings. The first was held on Wednesday, November 17, 2004. Approximately 120 people attended the meeting. It was a productive session and we received some good comments and questions from the public. Following is the schedule for the remaining meeting:

Green Watershed – January 20, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. at the NRC
Clean Watershed – February 17, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. at the NRC
Safe Watershed – March 17, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. at the NRC

All Directors are encouraged to attend the upcoming meetings.

F. **NEWS CLIPS:**

- ❖ November 11, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Grand entrance – Lake, park planned as anchors.
- ❖ November 16, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Master plan to be created for Papillion Creek watershed.
- ❖ November 17, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – West Omaha lake takes step closer to reality.
- ❖ November 19, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – NRD board unanimous for lake. Many residents voice concern about the cost of the west Omaha flood-control project – and the prospect of others.
- ❖ November 21, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Potential Platte well conflicts are defined.
- ❖ November 27, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Groups decry cuts to conservation programs.
- ❖ November 29, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – NRD is banking on 30-foot-long river.

/pt/SO/GM Reports/2004/December

November 2004

Information & Education Report

Information

- Began work on design of media folder
- Continued work on Trails brochure update
- Elected President of PRSA – NE Chapter
- Began work on Winter 04 SPECTRUM
- Distributed 2004 Annual Report for publication in weekly newspapers
- Updated web site pages
- Updated tax levy comparison fact sheet
- Assisted with Papio Watershed Forum

Education

- Held Interviews for I&E 2005 Intern, Job accepted by UNO student
- Attended NACEE meeting
- Presented Animal Adaptations program to all Benson West 1st graders
- Met with AAS coordinator to plan for Spring Semester
- Attended Nebraska Legacy Meeting at Papio-NRD offices
- Presented Geo-caching program to all King Science and Technology Magnet School 8th Graders (Sent out press release concerning programs)
- Started PLT/WET training for CU pre-service Teachers (12)
- Trained Rural Water Assoc. employee on Facilitating Teacher workshops
- Started WILD/LEP training for CSM pre-service Teachers (28)
- Provided materials for Girl Scout troop conservation outreach
- Arranged for fall AAS artwork to be displayed at office
- Managed 54 volunteer hours

November, 2004

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Updated: November 22, 2004

Current and On-Going Projects P-MRNRD Legal Counsel

★ = Top Priority

F = Future Work – No Assignment

N = New Assignment

O = Others Handling

W = Work in Progress

P = PFP's Portion Completed

- **Big Papio Channel Project - West Center Road to West Dodge Road** (Woodward):
- **Little Papio**: (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio**: (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (W)
 - ★ Purchase Agreements, deeds (90th to Giles) (W)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - Closing with Bundy's (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
 - Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National Property) (P)
 - Cabin ROW Documents, as needed (P)
 - ★ Three Cabin ROW Condemnations (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements as needed (F)
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreement for Pedersen (H)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Bennington Trail Interlocal Agreement (P)
 - Western Douglas County Trails Agreement (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - California Bend – Final settlement with tenant (Wright's) (W)
 - Lower Decatur Bend – Appraisal Review, ROW documents and habitat easements (P)

- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
 - Pigeon/Jones Creek Site Easements – as needed (W)
 - Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (W)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
 - ★ Papio Site S-27 (Fox Ridge Estates) Trail Easements (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:**
 - Dam Site 19 agreement (Petermann) (F)
 - ★ Dam Site 13 Agreement (Petermann) (P)
 - ★ DS 13 Purchase Agreement for Lyman-Richey Corp (N)
 - ★ DS 13 Agreement with Elkhorn and Omaha (N)
 - ★ Review Engineering Contract with HDR (N)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
 - NRD Bonding Authority Legislation (P)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
 - ★ Warranty Deed with G&G Manufacturing (N)
- **Other:**
 - Interlocal Agreement with Bellevue for Missouri Riverfront Development (P) (Becic)
 - NRD/Roncalli/Omaha Agreement – Cole Creek Improvement Project (N) (Bowen)

Lake, park planned as anchors



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

The proposed dam, lake and park would be developed near Elkhorn at Omaha's edge. In this aerial photo looking west, 192nd Street is at the bottom. West Dodge Road is visible in the upper left corner. The dam would be along 192nd, and the lake would spread up the creek bed. The park would be in the farmland area near Dodge at 192nd. Plans include a park, retirement homes, upscale housing and an office complex.

Grand entrance

11-13-04

By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Construction could begin as early as next year on a modest-sized lake that is to anchor what will be suburban west Omaha's signature park.

The lake would be built through a public-private partnership, with upscale housing, retirement homes and offices along the banks. The lake would be along 192nd Street between West Dodge Road and Blondo Street.

The approximately \$7 million, 58-acre lake would be funded through a partnership of the Papio-Missouri River Natu-

ral Resources District, the City of Omaha and Dial Cos.

Taxpayers would foot most of the cost of the lake, which would be the first of as many as 10 new lakes that have been proposed for flood control in the metropolitan area.

An NRD board committee will review the lake plan Tuesday. The full board is scheduled to vote Thursday.

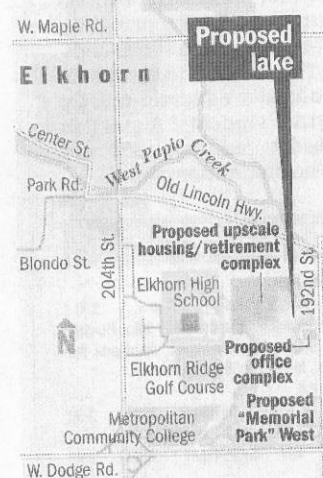
Contingent on NRD approval, the office development and housing proposed by Dial are scheduled to go before the planning boards of Elkhorn and Omaha in December and January.

If all goes according to schedule, the dam will be built next year. The lake, which would be about 1½ times the size of Candlewood Lake, would fill during the following one to three years.

The public would have full access to the lake for fishing and boating. Like other public lakes, this would be a no-wake lake. Eventually, the Cities of Elkhorn and Omaha would build trails around the lake that would link to other trails in the metro area.

Development of the park itself is years away. The City of Omaha owns the land, but has not yet included its develop-

See Lake: Page 2



DAVE CROY/THE WORLD-HERALD

Lake: Development, park planned for city's edge

Continued from Page 1
ment in its long-range budget.

The future park, at 192nd and Dodge on the southeast side of the new lake, has been dubbed the Memorial Park of west Omaha. Like Omaha's Memorial Park at Dodge Street and Happy Hollow Boulevard, the new park will have a sloping look and will include a large civic monument, an outdoor amphitheater and sledding hills. The park is planned as a grand entrance into west Omaha.

"Think of broad, open spaces and tree-lined walks," said Dave Ciacchio, the landscape architect who drew up the design for the park.

The lake also would connect with the Elkhorn campus of Metropolitan Community College, Elkhorn High School and Elkhorn Ridge Golf Course.

On the northwest side of the lake, the Dial Cos. would develop the land for upscale single-family and senior housing, said Chris Held of Dial. Included are 23 lakeside lots for homes that would sell from \$750,000. Homes

farther from the lake would sell for lesser amounts.

Held said the campus for senior citizens would include everything from individual homes to townhouses to an assisted-living complex.

Along 192nd Street, Dial would build an office complex. Lyman-Richey Sand and Gravel Corp. has a plant on that side of the lake site, which it would upgrade.

Steve Oltmans, general manager for the NRD, said that although the cost of the land is high — \$53,871 an acre — he believes the price is fair.

"This is an example of land prices going up," Oltmans said. "The longer we wait, the more expensive it gets."

The land is being purchased from the Zalkin Real Estate Trust. The Zalkin family farmed there for years, said Bob Belgrade, one of the trustees. This fall, corn and soybeans were harvested.

On the north side of the development, Blondo would curve south so that a portion of the Old Lincoln Highway can be preserved.

Held said Dial is looking forward to developing the project.

"There aren't too many places in town where you have these amenities — a lake and park together," he said.

Under the agreement that the NRD will vote on next week, Dial would provide the NRD with \$1 million toward the cost of the land. The NRD would pay Dial \$2.3 million for the fill dirt needed for the dam and for other improvements. A portion of land the City of Omaha already has purchased for the park will be used for the lake.

Dial and the NRD are paying the same price for the land, Oltmans said, with the NRD purchasing 65 acres for the dam and lake from the Zalkin Trust. Dial is buying 87 acres for its residential and office complexes, Held said.

The NRD also plans to purchase about 22 acres from Lyman-Richey.

The lake would provide flood control for about a two-square mile area of the watershed along a small tributary of the West Papillion Creek. Like the other

smaller lakes that are proposed, that is less than 1 percent of the flood protection in the plan.

The real gains in flood control would come from two massive lakes proposed for Washington County — lakes that face stiff resistance from landowners. An NRD vote on the master plan, which was to have come this year, probably won't occur before next year, Oltmans said.

Unlike some of the other dams in the plan, no homes or roads would be flooded to build the west suburban lake. West Dodge Road in this area was designed with the lake in mind.

The NRD would own, operate and maintain the dam, which means the NRD would retain liability for it.

Most of the green space at the lake would be on the southeast side where the city park and NRD property would total about 100 acres, Oltmans said. Along the developed areas, the site would not have nearly the amount of green space that people are used to seeing at most local flood-control reservoirs, he said.

Metro Omaha & the Region

Master plan to be created for Papillion Creek watershed

By JEFFREY ROBB
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The Papillion Creek system running through metro Omaha can be cleaner, safer and greener, a coalition of local governments says.

To make that happen, the partnership is creating a master plan for the Papillion Creek watershed.

Dubbed Watershed By Design,

the effort is an environmental twist on the recent Omaha By Design initiative. The two-year effort, led by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, will start Wednesday with a forum to explain the goals and gather public input.

The partnership is wading into potential controversy by raising such issues as more stringent zoning rules for construction or

new dam sites. But Marlin Petermann, the district's assistant general manager, said the focus will be on water quality and flow.

The partnership — which includes Omaha and Douglas and Sarpy Counties — formed in 2001 to meet federal stormwater regulations. Now it wants to create a management plan for the 402-square-mile watershed.

The partnership lacks unified

support in the watershed.

In Washington County, the County Board pulled out, feeling left out of the district's discussion of building up to 10 new lakes at a cost of \$186 million. Although opposition to new lakes has grown in Washington County, the resources district is looking at dam sites out of concern that development has raised the risk of dangerous floods.

Petermann said dams are among a variety of topics to be examined, with a major focus on incorporating Omaha By Design's ideas.

The overall goal is to create uniform rules throughout the area.

"We're all impacted by each other in this watershed," Petermann said. "We should have a level playing field no matter where you are."

Watershed By Design forum

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Natural Resources Center at Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 8901 S. 154th St.

OTHER MEETING TOPICS

Jan. 20: Green Watershed

Feb. 17: Clean Watershed

March 17: Safe Watershed

West Omaha lake takes step closer to reality

11-17-04
By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Taxpayers are picking up by far the larger share of the tab for a public-private dam and lake at 192nd Street and West Dodge Road.

That steep public share, and the minimal flood control in return, caused some board members of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District to balk Tuesday night at giving preliminary approval to the dam.

In the end, the lure of a signature park combined with a 58-acre public lake persuaded an NRD board committee to

vote 3-2 in favor of recommending the project to the full board.

The full board's vote is set for Thursday. NRD approval is necessary if a public lake is to anchor what is being called the "Memorial Park" of west Omaha.

The NRD expects to spend about \$6 million buying land and building the dam.

Dial Cos., which is partnering with the district, would contribute about \$1 million to the project. The NRD, in return, would pay Dial about \$2.4 million for fill dirt needed for the dam and site improvements.

See NRD: Page 2

NRD: Plan for public lake moves forward

Continued from Page 1

The district also is buying land from Lyman-Richey Sand and Gravel Co., and the city is contributing some land. The total cost would be in excess of \$7 million.

Such public-private partnerships are being discussed for more of the 10 proposed flood-control dams in the metro area.

Board member Joe Neary said the project has merits, but he couldn't get past the price tag.

"This project looks like we're subsidizing a developer more than we should," Neary said before voting no.

Bob Welstead of Dial told the board committee that his company is making compromises in

Final approval

When: 8 p.m. Thursday

Where: Papio-Missouri River NRD headquarters, 8901 S. 154th St.

addition to the \$1 million it is paying the district.

Yes, the lake will add value to Dial's development, Welstead said. But it also will flood property that otherwise could have been converted to housing. Furthermore, the lake would be entirely public, so none of the lots would have private shoreline.

Welstead estimated that Dial will invest about \$11 million to \$13 million purchasing and developing the land into upscale housing, offices and a retire-

ment complex.

Both the NRD and Dial are paying \$53,871 per acre to the Belgrade Co.

Board member Rich Jansen, who also voted no, said his previous support for the 1 cent property tax increase that is funding the project was predicated on the idea that the proposed lakes would reduce flooding. This lake, he said, isn't providing enough of a payback.

Voting for the dam were board members Tim Fowler, Rich Tesar and John Conley.

A number of people from Washington County who oppose dams there turned out to voice their concerns about the current dam.

Tesar quizzed Larry Foster of the Omaha Parks Department

about the city's financial commitment. The city hasn't budgeted any money for park construction for the foreseeable future.

Foster said he estimates that the city will spend about \$6 million to \$10 million to develop the park.

Tesar asked if it was possible to accelerate construction of a boat ramp, so that the public could use the lake as soon as it fills. Foster said it is likely the money for something like that could be forthcoming.

If the board approves the dam Thursday and all goes according to schedule, the dam could be built next year and the lake would fill over the next couple of years.

NRD board unanimous for lake

■ Many residents voice concerns about the cost of the west Omaha flood-control project — and the prospect of others.

11-19-84

By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Construction of a 58-acre lake to anchor the "Memorial Park" of west Omaha received the green light Thursday — despite an overflow crowd of people opposed to the dam-building initiative.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District board voted 8-0 to approve a partnership with Omaha-based Dial Cos. to build the dam.

About 120 people attended the meeting, voicing concerns about the cost of the land — \$53,871 per acre — the partnership with the

private developer and the possibility that the City of Omaha wouldn't take care of the planned park.

But the undercurrent of concern was what would happen down the road, when it was time for the district to turn its sights on Washington County, where two massive flood control lakes are proposed.

Those lakes would flood dozens of properties.

If the NRD is willing to spend more than \$50,000 an acre in Douglas County, what's to stop it

in Washington County, where land might sell for \$5,000 an acre, asked Todd Andersen.

"These (dams) aren't cost-effective," he said. "I want to stop every one of them."

The next two dams that the district hopes to build are for a 215-acre lake at 168th and Fort Streets in Douglas County and a 100-acre lake near Nebraska Highway 31 and Giles Road in Sarpy County. In total, the district hopes to build up to 10 dams.

Thursday's vote stood in con-

trast to Tuesday, when the issue narrowly passed in committee on a 3-2 vote. Changing their minds were Joe Neary and Rich Jansen.

Board members remained split, though, over whether they saw the lake as genuine flood control.

"This project is basically a recreation project," Neary said. "If the city had not bought its property and was not going to do a park, I don't think the project could stand up to all of the

See NRD, Page 2

NRD: Lake would be filled in one to three years

Continued from Page 1
money."

NRD board member John Conley took exception to Neary's comment.

"This is a flood control project," he said. "An expensive one, but it needs to be done."

The dam will control runoff from about 1 percent of the entire watershed. On the other hand, it would account for about

14 percent of the flood control that has been proposed in its section of the watershed.

The NRD's cost for the lake and dam is expected to be about \$6.2 million, with \$2.3 million of that being paid to Dial to build the dam. The NRD will own and retain liability for the dam.

Dial expects to spend about \$11 million to \$13 million developing its property into upscale

houses, senior living and offices. Included in that is a \$1 million payment to the NRD.

"There is no markup in this," Bob Welstead of Dial told the crowd Thursday. "No kind of funny business. We're side by side with the NRD, each paying the same price for the land."

Dial still needs approval from the cities of Elkhorn and Omaha. If all goes according to schedule, the dam is to be built next

year, and the lake should fill in one to three years.

Larry Foster of the Omaha Parks Department said it will be about seven to 10 years before the park is built. However, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, he said, will build a boat access as soon as the lake is ready.

The lake will be along 192nd Street between West Dodge Road and Blondo Street.

Potential Platte well conflicts

are defined

By DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

KEARNEY, Neb. — They're only lines on paper, but they might as well be lines drawn in the sand.

A preliminary map was unveiled Friday that determines where groundwater wells could significantly deplete the flow of the Platte River and its tributaries in central and western Nebraska.

The map is certain to be controversial among thousands of irrigation farmers and others because it identifies areas of likely conflict in the debate about the relationship between underground water and surface water flowing in streams and rivers.

"If you want to put a new well out there, the water's got to come from somewhere," said Richard Luckey, a Denver-based U.S. Geological Survey hydrologist whose office helped create the map.

Luckey presented his report at a meeting of the Governor's Platte River Citizens Advisory Council in Kearney.

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources requested the stream depletion map in July. It is expected to be finalized next summer.

The study is indirectly part of the 1997 Platte River Cooperative Agreement to improve and conserve habitat of the whooping crane, piping plover, least tern and pallid sturgeon — all threatened and endangered species.

See *Platte*: Page 2

MAIN NEWS

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

Platte: Stream depletion map charts wells' impact

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The governors of Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado and the secretary of the interior signed the agreement. One of its goals is protecting river flows in the central Platte.

The map defines an area west of U.S. Highway 183 near Elm Creek, where any well pumping groundwater over a period of 40 years would have a serious impact on the Platte or its tributaries.

Its immediate impact on dozens of area municipalities is expected to be minimal because towns and cities use only about 1 percent of the region's groundwater, said Tim Anderson, council chairman and spokesman for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

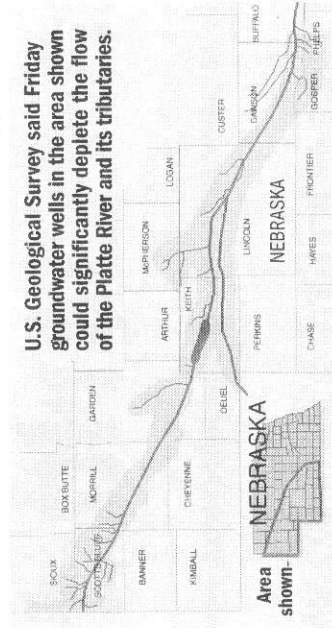
There could be a future impact, however, as communities grow and need more water, Anderson said.

The study has been criticized by irrigators who believe it is technically flawed and could give bureaucrats control of wells.

The issue of Platte flows in central Nebraska for wildlife habitat is aggravated by the deep drought that has gripped the West for five years. Snowmelt runoff from the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and Wyoming is the major source of water in the Platte Basin.

"We're trying to divide water that no one has any confidence will be there" in future years, said Randy Stinette, a council member from Inland.

In his presentation, Luckey



DEAN WEINLAUB/THE WORLD-HERALD

About the Platte River study

What: The Platte River Cooperative Hydrology Study, to understand the hydrologic and geologic conditions in the Platte Basin upstream of Columbus, Neb.

Where: Includes all or parts of 42 Nebraska counties and covers about 28,800 square miles.

How: Develops and uses computer databases to quantify existing water use and flow data in the Platte Basin. Databases are used to develop regional computer models to better understand the movement of groundwater and the interrelationships between groundwater and surface water. Models can be used to predict what might happen to groundwater levels and flows in the river if irrigation development increases, decreases or continues at its present level. Models can help predict how water supply or conservation projects would affect groundwater levels and river flows.

Why: An outgrowth of the 1997 Platte River Cooperative Agreement to develop a basinwide, long-term program to improve habitat for threatened and endangered species.

Goals: Assist Nebraska in meeting its obligations under the cooperative agreement with Colorado and Wyoming and the U.S. Interior Department. Assist Natural Resources Districts within the basin to manage and regulate groundwater. Provide Nebraska with a basis to develop groundwater and surface water policies and procedures.

Data produced by the study are available on the COHYST Web site at <http://cohystr.dnr.state.ne.us>.

Sources: Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, COHYST Technical Committee

cautioned that the depletion lines should not be interpreted to mean that a well outside the boundary does not affect the river. Wells outside the line still may cause stream depletion, he said.

The map's impact area includes land encompassed by natural resources districts with water resources that were classified in September under a new state law as fully appropriated.

Anderson said he expects little change in the final version of the map that will be presented next summer.

Plans for a program to address the habitat needs in the central Platte are expected to be completed no sooner than the end of 2005, said Jim Cook, an attorney for the Natural Resources Department. That's when the council will advise the governor on whether Nebraska should participate in this cooperative, basin-wide effort.

Cook said paranoia is to blame for taking so long for the three states to work out details of the cooperative agreement. "No-body trusts anybody else around the table," he said.

He said, however, that negotiators are all committed to making it work.

Cook said the issue is important to all Nebraskans because the Platte is the backbone of the state's economy.

"It's a water source for Lincoln and Omaha. Folks are interested in the wildlife values the Platte provides, whether it's sandhill cranes or endangered species. Everybody likes rivers. They like water in them," he said.

Groups decry cuts to conservation programs

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP)—Some environmental groups say deep cuts to the U.S. Agriculture Department's conservation programs will hurt farmers in Nebraska and across the country.

The Environmental Defense and the Environmental Working Group say farmers seeking to conserve water and other natural resources on their land will be hurt by the cuts.

Congress provided about \$4 billion for federal conservation programs for the 2005 fiscal year when lawmakers passed the 2002 farm bill. But Congress cut those funds by \$465 million in the recently passed omnibus bill.

Farmers already face long lines when they go to apply for the programs, said Scott Faber, a water resources specialist with Environmental Defense. Now, he said, those long lines will be even longer.

Four out of five farmers seeking funds to improve air and water quality or to create wildlife habitat are being rejected due to inadequate funding, Faber said.

They have cut "things specifically designed to help farmers use their water with greater efficiency," Faber said.

He said there is a huge backlog

of farmers willing to share the cost with the government to use their water with greater efficiency. In Nebraska, those conservation programs have helped farmers with the cost of converting to more efficient irrigation systems, as well as the cost of installing water meters.

"I think a vast majority of farmers prefer to see conservation funding protected, either because they are eligible for funding or they are already facing regulations and are concerned about the risks of new regulations," Faber said.

He said cutting conservation

funding also increases the likelihood of Congress' having to pass more emergency disaster funding for weather disasters that could be partially prevented through better conservation practices.

Congress has broken faith with farmers by cutting the conservation funding provided by the farm bill, said Ken Cook, executive director of the Environmental Working Group.

As a result, more than 80 percent of farm spending is flowing to a handful of large farmers in a handful of states, he said.

NRD is banking on 30-foot-long river

■ The portable model will be used to educate Nebraskans about water issues.

BY DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nebraska's shortest river will be long on education and information.

Actually, the Harmony River isn't a real waterway. But when it surfaces next spring in southeastern Nebraska, it will teach people moving along its serpentine, 30-foot length about how water is managed and mismanaged.

The steel and plywood model planned by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District is one of three Nebraska projects to receive education grants for 2005 from the nonprofit corporation Water for the West.

The other recipients are a conservation and education public information program involving the Groundwater Foundation in the Republican River Basin and a Nebraska Public Television program on the history of irrigation in the state.

The projects are designed to

inform people about water issues.

The Harmony River exhibit, for example, will depict a river from source to mouth. It will be situated on a floor and be about 12 inches high.

"The idea is to show how a river system works with the lay of the land and with groundwater," said John Turnbull, general manager of the York-based Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District.

"We want people to know that when you do something in one place, then something happens to water someplace else," he said.

Turnbull anticipates setting up the portable river at festivals, schools, shopping centers and other places where people gather.

"People will walk along the river and read a series of questions and answers," Turnbull said. "They'll learn about in-stream flows, power production and groundwater and surface-water irrigation."

At the river's mouth, the exhibit will ask viewers to suggest a management plan for the fictional Harmony River Management Board.

The model is the brainchild of Scott Snell, the NRD's public relations specialist. It will be constructed this winter, Turnbull said.

The Republican River project is an attempt to help irrigators and others across much of southern Nebraska learn how to comply with terms of a settlement between Kansas and Nebraska on sharing water in the stream.

It is the work of a coalition of NRDs, irrigation districts, farm organizations and the Groundwater Foundation.

The project involves developing a spreadsheet to help landowners make decisions on crop and water options, hosting a series of public informational meetings and creating a nonprofit foundation to raise money to help retire irrigated cropland and reduce water use.

The Nebraska Public Television program would be the latest in a series on water issues in the state.

"We want people to know that when you do something in one place, then something happens to water someplace else."

*John Turnbull,
general manager
of the Upper Big Blue
Natural Resources District*

It would look at the history of irrigation in the state from the late 1800s to the development of Lake McConaughy in the 1930s and '40s, and to the boom of deep-well irrigation in the last half of the 20th century.

Other grant recipients were in Colorado, Idaho, California and Washington, D.C.

Water for the West was created to inform people about the history, culture, politics and benefits of water and power generation in the western United States.