

# MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager Report

DATE: December 7, 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 November, 2007, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**
1. P-MRNRD employee **Adam Weimer** has been selected to fill the position of Water Supply Operator for the Washington County Rural Water Systems 1 and 2. He will be working out of the Blair Field Office and will assume his new duties in late December. Adam previously served as the District's Surveyor. 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, 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 November 13, 2007. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
- E. **PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP REPORT:** Attached is the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Monthly Update for November, 2007. Please review and if you have any questions, contact me. The next Partnership meeting will be held on December 20, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. at the NRC.
- F. **SADDLE CREEK ROAD RELOCATION STUDY:** An information meeting was held on November 14, 2007 to inform the public of the findings of the Saddle Creek Road Relocation Feasibility Study. The purpose of the study was to investigate alternates to the current alignment of Saddle Creek Road. The study was sponsored by the City of Omaha and the University of Nebraska Medical Center. A copy of the information distributed at the meeting is attached.

- G. **TERN AND PLOVER CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP:** As you are aware, the District is a member of the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership. I have attached a copy of the Partnership's newsletter, "As the Plover Terns," for your review and information.
- H. **STEVE CHICK, NRCS STATE CONSERVATIONIST, INSPECTS PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED SITES S-27, 31 AND 32:** On November 27<sup>th</sup>, NRCS State Conservationist Steve Chick visited the watershed rehabilitation construction site for Papillion Creek watershed dams 27, 31 and 32. The dams are located 2 miles south of Highway 370 and west of 36<sup>th</sup> Street near Papillion. The three dams were built as a result of a flood in 1964 that damaged cropland, pastureland, roads, railroads, bridges and utilities lines. Due to the urban growth that has occurred downstream these three dams have been reclassified as high hazard dams requiring the rehab of these structures. The NRCS Watershed Rehabilitation Program is being utilized to rehab and extend the lifespan of these structures. A copy of an article that appeared in the Friday Message, written by Steve Chick, is attached.
- I. **NEWS CLIPS:**
- ✓ November 4, 2007, Grand Island Independent article – Private-sector effort helping to restore Platte River
  - ✓ November 9, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Papio-Missouri NRD will fight Platte restrictions. The board votes 6-5 to join other groups challenging curbs on future water uses in eastern Nebraska.
  - ✓ November 11, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Bicycle maps
  - ✓ November 14, 2007, Omaha World Herald – Robert Nelson column – Don't use voodoo spell to kill messenger
  - ✓ November 14, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star editorial – A spectacular success for the Platte River
  - ✓ November 16, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star editorial – Independent stance wise on Platte River study
  - ✓ November 19, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article - \$50 million for dry city. NRD lays out the cost of correcting the flood threat along Dead Man's Run.
  - ✓ November 21, 2007, Omaha World Herald editorial – A liquid reality. The lower Platte will soon be fully tapped. A legal fight over timing won't alter it.
  - ✓ November 26, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star editorial – Local View: Platte River coalition benefits state, written by Dean Edson
  - ✓ November 27, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Talks on Lower Platte solutions will go forward
  - ✓ November 27, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Lower Platte South NRD working on disaster plan
  - ✓ November 27, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Side to talk about water use. Proponents of saving water for endangered species will meet with those who want it for development
  - ✓ November 27, 2007, Douglas County Post-Gazette article – New floodplain maps available at open house
  - ✓ November 28, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Platte River maxed out, state says
  - ✓ November 28, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Lower Platte talks will move forward. Groups will meet again Jan. 10 on balancing issues of habitat and water development

- ✓ December 3, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – Update of flood plain will affect hundreds. Owners of homes that have been added may have to buy flood insurance but could cut their costs if they act promptly.
- ✓ December 4, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Parts of Platte River targeted in water study
- ✓ December 4, 2007, Lincoln Journal Star article – Farm Bureau looking for water alternatives
- ✓ December 6, 2007, Bellevue Leader article – Open house aims to inform residents about new floodplain
- ✓ December 6, 2007, Papillion Times article – Will you need flood insurance?
- ✓ December 8, 2007, Omaha World Herald article – New floodplain maps to be costly for some

J. **CONSIDERATION OF ADDITIONAL HOLIDAY (Monday December 24, 2007) FOR P-MRNRD EMPLOYEES:** The P-MRNRD office has been notified that President Bush has signed an executive order declaring Monday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, a holiday for federal employees. A similar situation occurred in previous years, most recently 2001, and; the Board of Directors designated it as a holiday for P-MRNRD employees.

**It is the GM's recommendation that Monday, December 24, 2007, be designated as a holiday for P-MRNRD employees.**

## **November 2007**

### **Information & Education Report**

#### **Information**

- ◇ Continued design of Chalco and Prairie View Rec Area signs.
- ◇ Continued work on SPECTRUM and e-mail version of SPECTRUM possibilities
- ◇ Photo files organization.
- ◇ Updated NRD web site pages and added P-MRNRD info to NARD web site.
- ◇ PCWP meetings and Forum planning
- ◇ Gave presentation to "Leadership Sarpy County" group
- ◇ Assisted in planning for FEMA Floodmaps meeting, invitations and media contacts.
- ◇ Finalized Yellow Pages advertising

#### **Education**

- Presented GPS program to Westside Middle School
- Presented Enviroscope to all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders at Trinity Christian School
- Attended Water Works planning meeting
- Met with adopt a school to plan programming for 2008
- Met to discuss Education coverage in Winter Spectrum
- Worked with Millard South group on a Park Clean up
- Presented Carrying Capacity program to Millard South Group
- Trained 11 preservice teachers at Creighton University in Project WET and Project Learning Tree
- Continued working on National Curriculum Writing Project
- Updated LRIP cover
- Started planning for LEP state coordinators meeting in January
- Continued working on Outdoor Classroom Grant promotion
- Continued working on Education Assistant Position Job Description

## November, 2007

1

Updated: November 13, 2007  
Project Managers Meeting

## **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 (W)
- **Big Papio :** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
  - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96<sup>th</sup> St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
  - Bundy and others ROW preparation (potentially modify ROW/offer) (N)
  - Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National Property) (P)
  - ✳ Hansen ROW Condemnation settlement (W)
  - ✳ Glasshoff levee easement (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
  - Floodway Property purchase agreements as needed (F)
  - King Lake closing (W)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
  - ✳ Mopac Trail (Hwy 50 to Lied Bridge) –Educational Land & Funds condemnation; closings (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
  - ✳ Missouri River Trail – Qwest Relocation Payment (P)

- **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 and #9 ROW) (W)
  - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
  - ★ S-31 – Handle Moore condemnation (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites** (Woodward/Petermann):
  - ★ Amend Omaha/Elkhorn Agreement for DS-13 (W)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
- **Other:**
  - Kennard Wastewater Interlocal Agreement (Woodward) (P)
  - Ft. Calhoun Wastewater Agreement (Bowen) (N)
  - ★ Dakota County FP Mapping contract with PBS&J (Woodward) (N)

## **MONTHLY UPDATE**

### **NOVEMBER 2007**



The Partnership held Communication Team meetings on November 16 and November 29th, 2007 to discuss the public outreach program and plans for future public forums. In addition, a Partnership meeting was held on November 15, 2007. Full meeting minutes and other materials are updated regularly on the Partnership's new website: [www.papiopartnership.org](http://www.papiopartnership.org).

#### **Stage IV Watershed Evaluation**

HDR presented an update on the hydrologic and hydraulic analysis and explained how Low Impact Development (LID) would be incorporated in to the calculations. The LID template and assumptions were discussed. The schedule for the project has been revised:

#### **DECEMBER**

- Finalize results for modeling scenarios including existing conditions, future conditions, LID, and regional detention

#### **JANUARY 2008**

- Review results and prepare remaining public education materials.
- Plan for Public Forums in February.

#### **FEBRUARY**

- Hold 5 Public Forums at various locations throughout the watershed to inform and receive input on watershed planning.

#### **MARCH**

- Hold 2 Public Forums at several locations throughout the watershed to inform and receive input on watershed planning.
- Review public input.

#### **APRIL**

- Review public input and prepare final watershed scenario as recommended by the Partnership.

#### **Public Outreach and Involvement**

Partnership members are taking a more active role to reach out to the public. A list of civic organizations and homeowners group is being updated for the watershed and a flyer will be sent to these groups inquiring if they would like

a partnership member to come speak to their group. Flyers will be mailed in early December.

Members of the Partnership are also meeting with public officials to make sure they are aware of the upcoming public forums aimed at completing a comprehensive watershed plan.

IMS has completed the Stage IV fact sheets and boards. They will be working with the Partnership to help coordinate plans for the public forums in February and March 2008.

Remember, the ultimate goals of this public involvement process are to:

1. Explain the urgency and need for a watershed plan. Recent public opinion surveys show that a large majority feel water quality and flood prevention are "very important".
2. Receive public input on potential stormwater solutions based on Stage IV Study preliminary results
3. Result in a comprehensive watershed plan that is 1) technically proven to improve water quality and reduce flooding 2) publically acceptable and 3) economical

#### **Preliminary West Papillion Creek Floodplain Maps Update**

The public Open House was held on December 6, 2007 at the Papio Missouri NRD office. The event was a success with over 120 people attending. Thanks to all the partnership members who helped out!

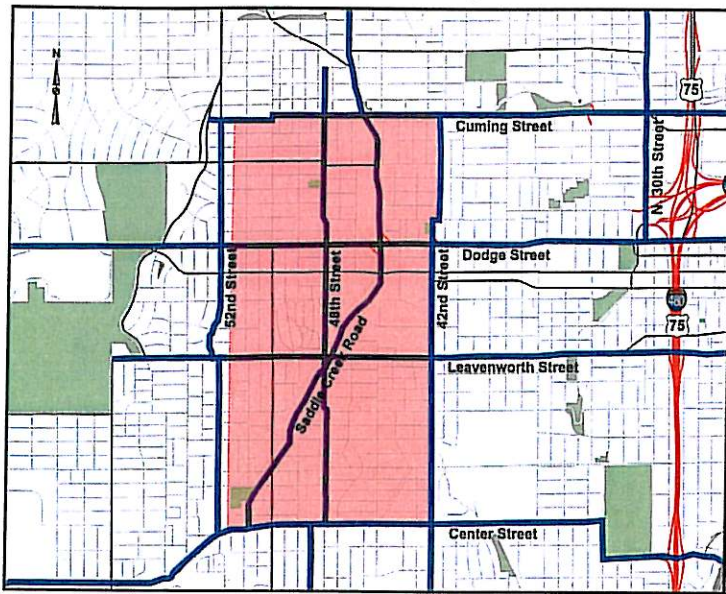
The next Partnership meeting will be held on December 29<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM at the Papio Missouri NRD office. The featured speaker will be Pat O'Brien with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality. He will present the results of the Papillion Creek Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study.

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!**



# Public Information Meeting Saddle Creek Road Relocation Feasibility Study

November 14, 2007



Study Area

The City of Omaha and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) are studying potential improvements to Saddle Creek Road between Leavenworth Street and Cuming Street. For purposes of evaluating the potential impacts of the improvements, a larger Study Area has been defined. The Study Area is generally bounded by Cuming Street on the north, Center Street on the south, 42nd Street on the east and 52nd Street on the west.

## What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to investigate alternatives to the current alignment of Saddle Creek Road as recommended in the 2004 Destination Midtown Study. Destination Midtown was one of the largest and most proactive planning studies in the history of Omaha. This effort established an overall vision for the midtown area through a series of public meetings, workshops and design charrettes attended by well over 800 people. The recommendations from the Destination Midtown Study were adopted into the City of Omaha's Master Plan in

2004.

## Why are improvements needed?

The proposed improvements address the following needs in the study area:

- Improved transportation system that provides safe, reliable and efficient movement of vehicles and pedestrians to and through the study area
- Reduced roadway flooding of Saddle Creek Road.

## What are the other potential benefits of the improvements?

Other potential benefits of the improvements include:

- Opportunities for residential and commercial development
- More contiguous property to support future expansion of UNMC campus

## What improvements were considered during the study?

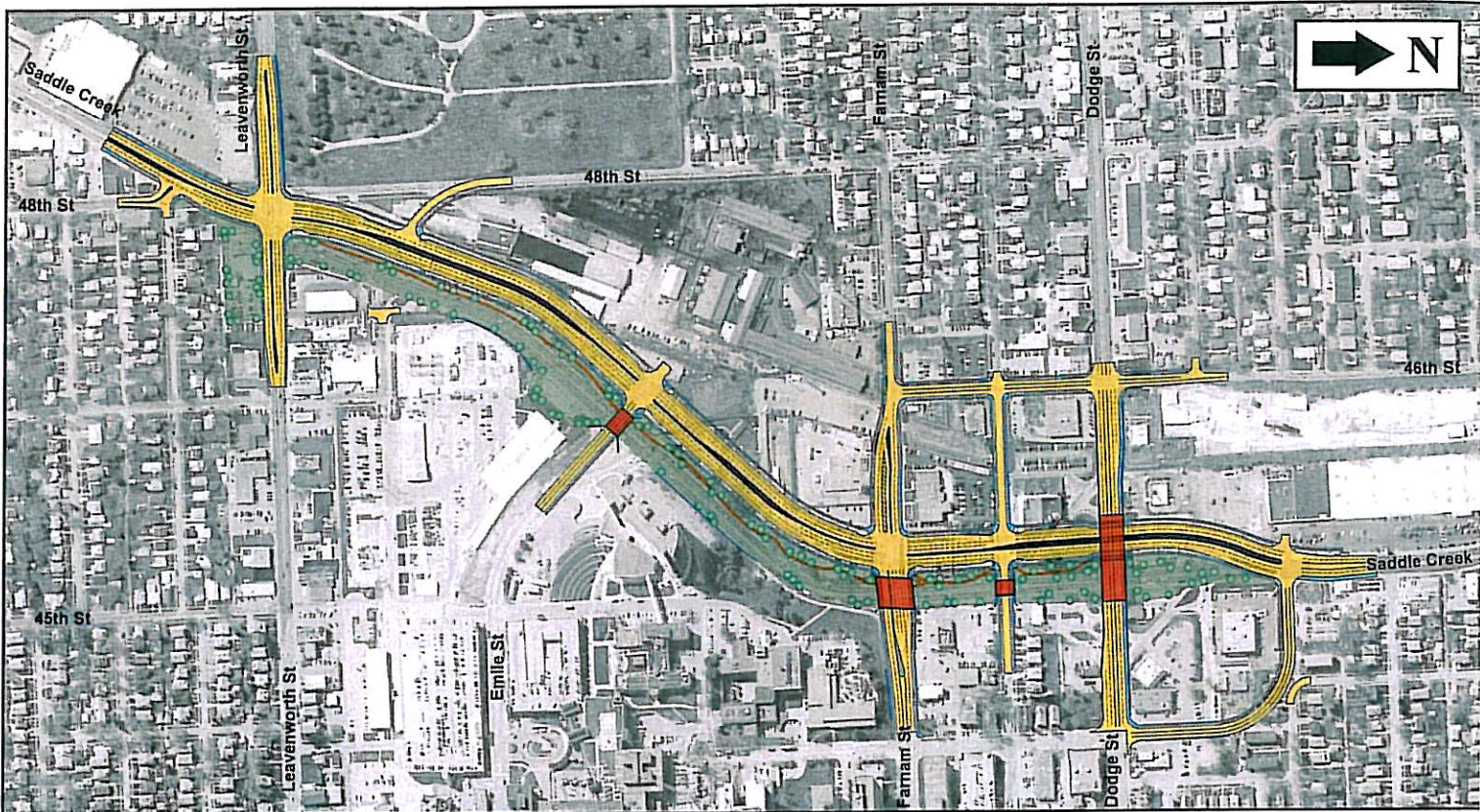
Many options were considered in the study, including various alignments for Saddle Creek Road. Many of these alignments were found to impact neighborhoods too greatly or were not feasible for engineering reasons. Several options for the intersection of Dodge Street and Saddle Creek Road were also considered, including an at-grade intersection, a grade-separated interchange and an indirect interchange. Various alternatives for improving the flooding situation were considered as well. The alternatives presented tonight represent the improvements best suited to meet needs of the study area.

## What alternatives are being presented tonight?

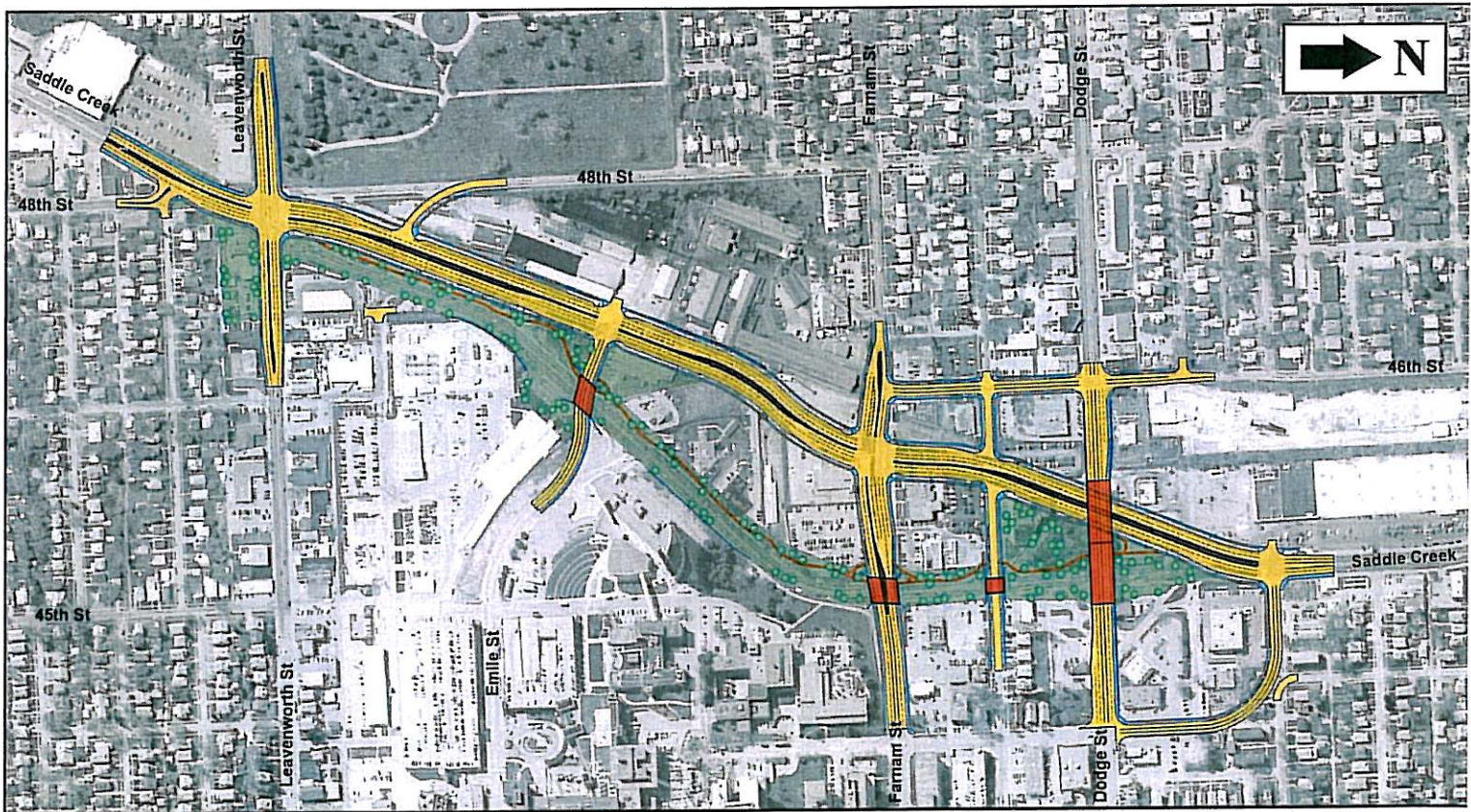
Three alternatives are being presented at tonight's public meeting. They include:

- No Build Alternative (Do Nothing)
- Rebuild on Existing (Offset) Alignment
- Rebuild on New Alignment





Rebuild on Existing Alignment



Rebuild on New Alignment



### What is included in the alternatives?

The features of the three alternatives are summarized in the table below. The No-Build alternative is also sometimes called the Do Nothing alternative. It serves as the baseline to compare the features and performance of the other two alternatives and is required as part of the environmental study that will follow the current study. With this alternative there would be no improvements constructed in the study area.

Feature	No-Build	Rebuild on Existing Alignment	Rebuild on New Alignment
Flood Control		✓	✓
Green Space / Trail		✓	✓
Improved Traffic Flow		✓	✓
Improved Pedestrian Safety		✓	✓
Catalyst for Redevelopment		✓	✓
Expanded UNMC Campus			✓

The two “Rebuild” alternatives include the following common features:

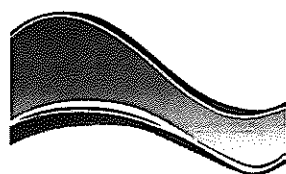
- A drainage swale for conveying stormwater through the study area between Davenport Street and Leavenworth Street. The swale would be located on the current alignment of Saddle Creek Road and convey the runoff from storms that the existing storm sewer cannot accommodate. Detention areas for storing stormwater are also included.
- An attractive green space with an opportunity for a recreational trail through the study area with possible connections to other trails within the Omaha area.
- A reconstructed Saddle Creek Road. The new Saddle Creek Road would have a wider median, wider sidewalks and the potential for on-street parking and bicycle lanes.
- An indirect interchange at Dodge Street and Saddle Creek Road. Dodge Street and Saddle Creek Road would be grade separated as they are today. Access between the two streets would occur via other roadways such as 44th Street, 46th Street, Davenport Street, Douglas Street and Farnam Street.
- A new Dodge Street bridge would span both the drainage swale and the new Saddle Creek Road. Other bridges over the swale would be provided at Douglas Street, Farnam Street and Emile Street.

### What is the difference between the two “Rebuild” alternatives?

Both “Rebuild” alternatives address flooding issues, provide a green space and trail, improve traffic flow, improve pedestrian safety, and could serve as a catalyst for community redevelopment. The Rebuild on Existing Alignment alternative would move Saddle Creek Road to a location immediately west of and parallel to the swale. The Rebuild on New Alignment alternative would move Saddle Creek Road farther to the west than the Rebuild on Existing Alignment alternative and thus provide the opportunity for an expanded contiguous campus for UNMC.

### What is the schedule for the project?

The current study represents the first step in the overall timeline for the project. The focus of this effort has been on the feasibility of study alternatives. The next step will be an environmental study that will look more closely at the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives and identify a preferred alternative. This effort will occur in 2008. Preliminary and final design are anticipated in 2008-2009. If funding is identified, right-of-way acquisition and construction would likely begin in 2010.



# Saddle Creek Road Relocation Study



Swale Rendering

## How much will the project cost?

The estimated cost of the project is summarized below.

Cost	Rebuild on Existing Alignment	Rebuild on New Alignment
Construction (\$Millions)	18	19
Right-of Way & Relocation (\$Millions)	17-20	21-24
Potential Redevelopment Investment (\$Millions)	250-350	

## How will improvements be paid for?

Federal funds were used to fund the current study and the environmental study that will follow. More federal funds are anticipated this year that would fund preliminary and final design activities. Funding has not been identified for right-of-way acquisition and construction. Funding options include federal funds and possibly public-private partnerships. The project could be constructed in phases as funding becomes available.

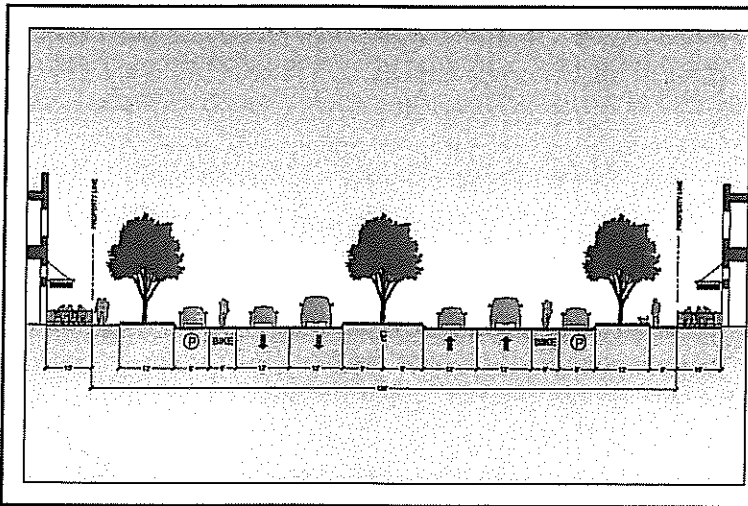
## What are the conclusions and recommendations of the Feasibility Study?

- The project has merit.
- The project is feasible.
- All 3 alternatives should be evaluated further as part of the environmental study.
- Public input is needed.

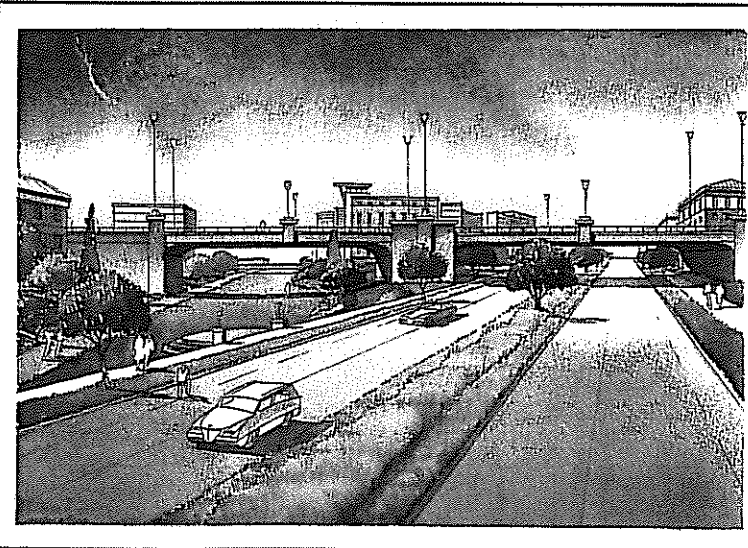
## We want your input!

Completing a comment form is the best way to ensure that your comments are recorded and available to us during the remainder of this study and during future project phases. You can e-mail us at [saddlecreek@hdrinc.com](mailto:saddlecreek@hdrinc.com) or visit a project information page that is linked to the Destination Midtown website ([www.destinationmidtown.org/saddlecreek](http://www.destinationmidtown.org/saddlecreek)) and the City of Omaha website ([www.ci.omaha.ne.us](http://www.ci.omaha.ne.us)). There will also be additional public meetings and opportunities for public input during subsequent phases of the study. If you have questions or would like additional information regarding the Saddle Creek Road Relocation Feasibility Study, please contact Leanne Zietlow of HDR Engineering at (402) 926-7186.

**Thank you for attending tonight's meeting  
and for providing your input!**



Proposed Saddle Creek Road Cross Section



Dodge Street Bridge Rendering



## Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership

Conservation. Sensible Solutions.

*A Newsletter by and for our Volunteers and Partners*

### Changing of the Seasons—Fall is Here!

Greetings!

Signs of Fall are everywhere—from the colorful and falling leaves to the crisp blue skies and the skeins of snow geese flying south as fast as their wings can carry them.

Partnership staff had a busy summer! Some of our outreach activities included: Sensory Safari at the Lincoln Children's Zoo (for the visually impaired), World's Largest Outdoor Classroom at the State Fair, and a booth

at the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance Water Quality Open golf tournament.

The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership celebrated the ending of the field season and beginning of Fall with their Annual Appreciation Picnic and Awards. *See pages 1 and 2 for details.*

Fall is also a time for cleaning, and as you'll see on *page 3*, the UNL Wildlife Club helped with the dusty

task of cleaning and organizing our warehouse.

On *page 2* is an introduction to our newest member, Mary Bomberger Brown, and get reacquainted with a past technician, Kari Andresen, on *page 3*.

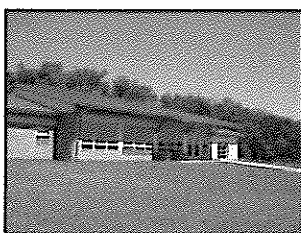
**Watch for our new and improved web page—it's coming soon!** Same address, new look. <http://ternandplover.unl.edu> See you in the Spring! *Chris Thody—Editor*

#### Inside this issue:

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### Picnic on the Prairie

Saturday, September 22nd was the date of our eighth annual Appreciation Picnic. The picnic is the culmination of our field season, and it's our way of giving back just a little for all the hard work and effort our volunteers and partners have contributed.



Audubon Nebraska's beautiful Spring Creek Prairie was the setting for the picnic. The weather was superb, the food was plentiful, and the accommodations were first-rate.

This year the annual gathering gave us an excuse to show off our new logo, designed by Sarah Rehme. And this logo was edible! Thanks, Sarah, for the delicious design.



Our picnic is also a time to honor those people who have gone above and beyond what has been asked of them. We have a fantastic group of individuals that give their time and expertise to our program. See the Annual Awards article on *page 2*.

A special thank you goes out to George Rezac for being our official photographer for this event.

#### Special points of interest:

- Annual Awards Announced.
- New Program Coordinator Mary Bomberger Brown leaps into position.
- See what former Technician Kari Andresen has been doing.
- UNL Wildlife Club helps clean up a very messy warehouse.
- Consider a donation to the Tern and Plover Conservation Excellence Fund. Details included inside.

As the Plover Terns

## Annual Awards



*Diane Pratt*

All who participate in the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership are winners. Each individual has a unique contribution to make. We appreciate every single minute each volunteer is able to afford to help us reach our goal—increasing the number of least terns and piping plovers, and someday to see them off the endangered species list.

There are a few individuals we would like to give special thanks to. These individuals have gone above and beyond what has been asked of them, and our Partnership is extremely grateful for their extra effort.

Diane Pratt, a 6-year volunteer, logged 37.75 hours and received the “Golden Binocular Award” for the most hours volunteered this year.

Additionally, Diane put in another 121.5 hours as a volunteer technician, a new position created this year.

Elliott Bedows, a 2-year volunteer, logged 27.5 hours and received the “Silver Binocular Award” for the second most hours volunteered this year.

*Congratulations, Diane and Elliott!*

## Coordinator's Corner



*Mary with volunteer Ruth Eigsti at the Appreciation Picnic.*



*Removing old mylar from fiberglass poles during shop cleaning.*

First, let me introduce myself. My name is Mary Bomberger Brown and I am the new Program Coordinator. I joined the Partnership this summer, on July 9.

I am a native Nebraskan, growing up and going to school in Lincoln, including the University of Nebraska. Life has taken me to university positions in New Jersey, Connecticut and most recently, Oklahoma. Despite living all across the country, I've maintained a close connection to the state, so Nebraska really is my home. Every summer since 1982, I was part of a large research project studying Cliff Swallows, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*, in western Nebraska. We were based at the University of Nebraska's Cedar Point Biological Station (CPBS) near Ogallala. Biology summer courses are taught at CPBS, so if you are interested in learning biology the “right way”, meaning out of doors, keep CPBS in mind (cpbs2@unl.edu).

My attentions were focused on Cliff Swallows during those years, but I spent a lot of time simply watching terns and plovers live their lives. Over those 25 years, we learned a lot about Cliff Swallows and the natural history of Nebraska. Without doubt, the two most important things we learned are what a remarkable place Nebraska is and what remarkable people live here. We are fortunate to live in this part of the world. After the summer was over and I was back in the city, sitting at my desk, I'd often think of the wide expanse of clear, blue sky during the day and the bright, crisp stars at night. Truly, ‘there is no place like Nebraska’. Those memories and a desire to help conserve and maintain a Nebraska for everyone are what brought me to the Partnership.

Thanks to Renae Held, our former Program Coordinator, for all she did for the Partnership. She left us with

a healthy, vibrant program and Nebraska with a lot more terns and plovers. We all wish Renae good luck in her new position with the New Mexico Game and Parks Department's Threatened and Endangered Species program.

By working together, as Partners, we can accomplish great things. Join us by contributing your time, energy and enthusiasm to the Partnership. We could not do what we do without our volunteers. Thank you for your tireless work and commitment!

Please consider a financial contribution to our efforts with a donation to the Tern and Plover Conservation Excellence Fund (#10234), through the University of Nebraska Foundation ([www.nufoundation.org](http://www.nufoundation.org)). The terns and plovers will be very grateful for your help.

More later, Mary

## Keeping in Touch

*Kari Andresen*

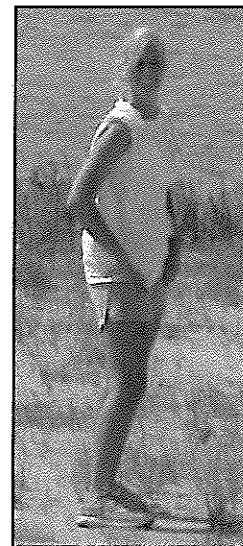
I have to admit I was a bit unsure of what was in store for me when I was offered a position as a Conservation Technician for the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership. This was my first "wildlife job" as a fresh graduate of the University of Nebraska with a BS in Natural Resources and one of only a handful of women who had majored in Fisheries and Wildlife. I would be conducting intensive field work, studying these "little shorebirds" (terns and plovers) I had only read about. By the end of the summer, I was definitely sun burned from long days on the sand pits, but I *felt* like an expert, I knew the calls of each bird, how to spot a camouflaged nest in the sand through a spotting scope, how to age an

egg and a chick, and even how to drive an airboat (even if it was only for a few minutes)! My passion for ALL bird species was ignited and I wanted to learn everything I could and I was lucky enough to have had the best teachers: Renae Held, former TPCP Coordinator and John Dinan, former Non-game Bird Program Manager at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Both were positive, challenging educators that taught me what I would like to emulate as a supervisor. I was also fortunate to have a fantastic co-worker, Sam\*, who was just as eager to learn as me and taught me a lot as well. My position as a Conservation Technician encouraged values and skills that I use everyday throughout my career as a Bird Biologist and more recently as an Envi-

ronmental Scientist. A position with the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership as a Conservation Technician turned out to be one of my most rewarding work and personal experiences and opened a door to a successful career in the natural sciences.

I continue my career working as an Environmental Scientist for a consulting and engineering firm in Kansas City, MO. My position lets me be on the front lines of environmental protection, as I aid in providing environmentally conscious solutions for engineering projects of all sizes. I will also begin a Master program in Ecology at the University of Kansas in January.

\*Sam (Wilson) is currently the Non-game Mammal and Furbearer Program Manager at Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



*Kari Andresen, Conservation Technician, 2003*

## UNL Wildlife Club Helps with Cleanup

It's amazing what the promise of homemade cookies can do. Six sturdy UNL Wildlife Club students donned their gloves and pitched in to help clean up years of accumulated equipment and stuff in our warehouse.

The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership was able to make a small donation to the Wildlife Club general fund in thanks for their efforts.

As you can see from the pictures on the right, this was no small task. The before picture was actually shown to the Club during one of their meetings and they still offered to help!

Thanks to the acrobatics and strong muscles of these willing students, we got a jump start on next season and know what we have and what

we may need to acquire in the coming months.

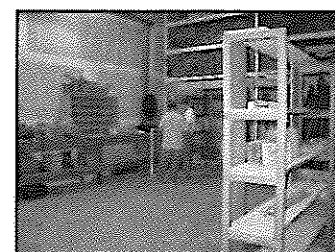
Thanks to all the students that helped, and a special thanks to Jason and Lars, who showed up both evenings and did an excellent job of organizing and inventorying.



*Left to right: Angie, Jason, Lars, Ted, Colleen, Aaron*



*before*



*after*



## Featured Colonies

The Partnership monitored terns and plovers at two unusual sites this year. The birds chose to nest at a lakeshore housing development and on the top of a huge manmade sand pile. They successfully hatched and fledged young at both sites.

### Legacy

Legacy Resources, LLC, previously associated with Harwest Industrial Minerals Corp, recently began reclaiming sand and gravel from the Loup Public Power District (LPPD) sand pile near the Genoa, NE Headworks facility. The 315 acre sand pile is the accumulated material from over 70 years of dredging and maintaining the Loup Canal. When LPPD dredges the canal, the outflow sand from the slurry pipes makes great tern and plover nesting habitat. That wide expanse of sand must look like a terrific sandbar to the birds. With the cooperation of Legacy, Harwest, and LPPD, we monitored least tern and piping plover nests. Both species began laying eggs on approximately 20 May

and eggs began hatching around 15 June. Nearly all fledglings were independent of their parents by 8 August and no birds of either species were seen after 13 August. It appears that migrating least terns used this site in 2007. In this species, post-breeding adults, non-breeding adults, and independent fledglings form pre-migratory loafing flocks in preparation for their migration to the Gulf of Mexico. This facility, with the pond, broad expanse of sand and proximity to the Loup Canal and River is important to terns for more than just nesting activity. There is no definitive evidence that migrating plovers used the facility. We appreciate all the assistance and support we received from Legacy, Harwest and LPPD personnel.

### Riverview Shores

As sand and gravel mines age and are taken out of production, the sand pit lakes left behind are attractive to real estate developers for conversion into sandy beach housing communities. One such community supported a

colony of least terns, piping plovers and killdeer. We are grateful to the homeowner's association, the real estate developers and contractors for their help and cooperation during the 2007 nesting season.

There were essentially no high elevation sandbars in the Platte River for the birds to nest on this year. High water levels kept nearly all of the potential sandbars covered. Terns and plovers will only build their nests on dry sand, which is only found on high elevation sandbars. The sandbars that were available were too wet for the birds to use. They cannot successfully incubate a clutch of eggs or rear a brood of chicks in a soggy nest. As a result of the high water and lack of high elevation sandbars, the birds were forced to depend on manmade sites for nesting. Sand and gravel mines and sandy beach housing developments provided this habitat for the birds.



Satellite view of Loup Diversion Canal—2003  
*Courtesy of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission*



Aerial view of Riverview shores  
*Courtesy of Riverview shores*



## Research

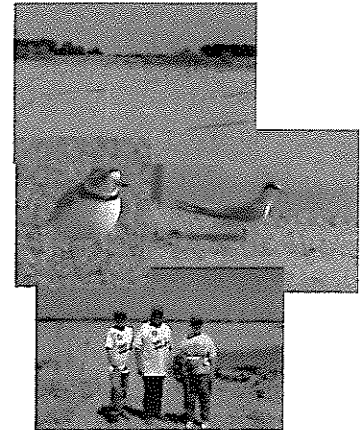
We are planning a full summer of least tern and piping plover research in 2008, in addition to our continued monitoring and management program. Two recent Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership research publications are:

Marcus, Jeffrey F., John J. Dinan, Ron J. Johnson, Erin E. Blankenship, and Jeanine

L. Lackey 2007. Directing nest site selection of least terns and piping plovers. *Waterbirds* 30 (2): 251–258.

Thody, Christine M., Renae J. Held, Ron J. Johnson, and Jeffrey F. Marcus in review. Grassroots conservation: volunteers contribute to projects and foster a supportive public. *Journal of Extension*.

Marcus et al discusses the use of our attractant-deterrent techniques to direct nesting birds away from potentially problematic areas to safer ones. Thody et al discusses the contribution of volunteers to conservation programs. Volunteers who work with and appreciate the TPCP mission become a supportive, valuable voice for grassroots, common-sense conservation.



Top: Deterrent mylar flagging.  
Left: Piping plover  
Right: Least tern  
Bottom: Volunteers at Schuyler

## Least Terns, Piping Plovers and the Lewis and Clark Expedition

The 1804–1806 expedition lead by Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark encountered many least terns and piping plovers on their epic journey across the continent. There are entries about both species in the expedition journals.

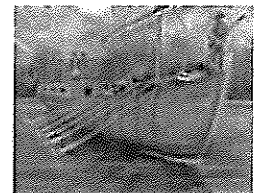
They observed least terns nesting on sandbars in the Missouri River on 5 August 1804 when they were encamped near what is now Burt County, Nebraska. Meriwether Lewis wrote:

“I have frequently observed an aquatic bird (*Sterna antillarum*) in the cours of ascending this river but have never been able to procure one before today, this day I was so fortunate as to kill two of them, they are here more plenty than on the river below. they lay their eggs on the sand bars without shelter or nest, and produce their young from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the last of June, the young ones of which we caught several are covered with down of a yellowish white colour and on the back some small specks of a dark brown. They bear a great resemblance to the young quale of ten days oald, and appear like them to be able to runabout and

peck their food as soon as they are hatched. this bird, lives on small fish, worms and bugs which it takes on the virge of the water. It is seldom seen to light on trees an(d) qu(i)te as seldom do they lite in the water and swim tho’ the foot would indicate that they did, it’s being webbed” (from Moulton, G. E. 1987 *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. Vol. 2: August 30, 1803–August 24, 1804, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE; spelling, grammar and punctuation as written in the journals).

Despite the fact that Lewis and Clark provided a detailed description of least terns, they were not identified as a separate species until 40 years later, in 1847.

Lewis and Clark found piping plovers as far north as the Little Sioux River, near what are now Burt and Washington counties in Nebraska. They referred to them as “small kildee” in their journals. The 1804 Lewis and Clark sighting and description of piping plovers predated their 1823 identification as a species by nearly 20 years.



## Outreach Activities

We are excited about the new and different directions our education and outreach programs are taking.

### New Webpage Design

The TPCP web page is undergoing a major renovation. We are still at <ternandplover.unl.edu>, but, please be patient with us, this is a "work in progress". We plan to unveil the redesigned webpage in January 2008. We are adding more interactive features. Video and audio clips of both species will be available along with a montage of still photographs. We will keep you up to date on our research and outreach activities via an interactive blog page. Any sightings of terns and plovers can be reported to us on an online report form. Many of our educational programs will be available on the web page, too. This includes programs designed for groups that typically are not reached by conservation education programs. We want to make practical, on-site, on-the-job information available to real estate, construction, utility and mine personnel. These folks are increasingly important to us, considering the rapid development of sandy beach, lakeshore housing developments.

### Valley Housing Development

Our efforts to prevent bird-people conflicts at residential housing developments is expanding. We recently met with the City of Valley zoning board, mayor, city manager, USFWS, mine personnel and representatives of Dial Development Corp to discuss this issue. Dial is planning to convert an out of production mine (previously owned by Mallard Sand and Gravel) into a housing development in 2007–2008. We want to work cooperatively with all these groups to insure that the terns and plovers are able to nest successfully.

### Pronatura Noreste Sister Site

We have begun talks with Pronatura Noreste about forming a sister site relationship with them. Pronatura



Noreste is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico. Their mission is to conserve and protect the flora, fauna, and ecosystems of northeastern Mexico, including Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and San Luis Potosi. They are recognized as a scientific and

educational organization by the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) in Mexico. CONACYT is analogous to the National Science Foundation in the United States. You can read more about them on their web page <www.pronaturane.org>. Our terns and plovers migrate to and overwinter along the Gulf of Mexico, including the

northeastern coast of Mexico. Pronatura Noreste has a program focused on the Laguna Madre, including the large wetland area south of Brownsville, Texas. Terns and plovers are only in Nebraska for 12–14 weeks, most of the year they are migrating to or are on their wintering grounds. In order for us to be complete and most effective, our conservation and management programs need to include this important time of the year. This is an opportunity for us to cooperate with conservation and management people in the geographic area where our birds winter.

### Curriculum Development

We are venturing into the realm of math and science curriculum development. We recently began working with the NIH-SEPA (National Institutes of Health-Science Education Partnership Award) program. The program we are involved with is administered by the University of Nebraska Medical School. We are collaborating with them to develop math and science programs for underserved schools in Nebraska and South Dakota. Specifically, we are working on curricula for Native American K-16 (post-high school) schools. Since birds are an important part of traditional Native American culture, this program is a great fit for us. By the way, the Pawnee word for plover is *ūt*.

### Golfers Learn About Terns and Plovers

We have been involved with quite an assortment of other activities. In September, we participated in the Water Quality Open Golf Tournament at the Quarry Oaks Golf Course near South Bend, NE. This educational-sporting event aims to educate golfers about the Platte River and Nebraska's water resources. The Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance hosts the tournament every year. We had an information booth at the 11<sup>th</sup> hole tee box. Most of the golfers hit their drives into the rough between



*Chris Thody and Mary Brown*

the sand trap and trees on the right side of the green, they just didn't believe us when we warned them that the wind was pushing the balls into a slice. We hope that they did believe us when we told them about the Partnership, least terns and piping plovers.

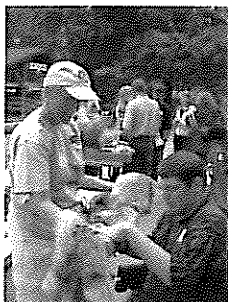
### State Fair

We took our "Fill the Bill" program to the World's Biggest Outdoor Classroom event at the Nebraska State Fair. This event is designed to excite elementary students about Nebraska, biology, and our environment. We showed the students the various ways that birds forage. They certainly had fun pretending to be swallows, hummingbirds, terns, and plovers.

*cont. page 7*

*cont. from page 6*  
Sensory Safari

We spent a special day at the Sensory Safari, hosted by the Nebraska Safari Club and held at the Lincoln Children's Zoo. The Safari is directed toward children who are visually impaired. Helping children experience nature with their other four senses is a fascinating exercise. How do things smell? What do they feel like? What shape and size are they? How do they sound?



Many people were involved with the planning and operation of the Safari, and we were pleased to be a part of it. We were even filmed and the video was featured on the Lincoln Journal Star's web page!



*Left: Mary Brown with Jakob Solheim.*

*Above: Left to right: Mary Brown, Bryce McCuiston, Jordan Merriman*

## 2008 Current Calendar of Events (Subject to Change)

### January

1st—New Year's Day  
21st—Martin Luther King Jr. Day  
23rd—Service Learning Fair, UNL City Campus

### February

2nd—Groundhog Day  
14th—Valentine's Day  
18th—President's Day  
25th—Nebraska Tern and Plover Meeting; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Hardin Hall, UNL East Campus  
28th-29th—Nebraska Chapter of The Wildlife Society meeting

### March

1st—Nebraska Statehood Day  
9th—Daylight Savings Time begins  
14th-16th—Rivers and Wildlife Celebration in Kearney. This annual celebration of Sandhill cranes, Nebraska and the Platte River is shaping up to be quite an event. Robert Bateman and Donald Kroodsma are two of our featured speakers. Plan to attend the RWC, 500,000 Sandhill cranes is an unforgettable spectacle. Check out their website at [www.nebraska.audubon.org/ne-rwc.htm](http://www.nebraska.audubon.org/ne-rwc.htm).  
17th—St. Patrick's Day  
23rd—Easter

### April

Piping plovers start to arrive in Nebraska as early as the first week in April.  
20th—Passover  
22nd—Earth Day  
25th—Arbor Day  
Look for least terns in May.

## Coming Soon!

T-shirts, hats and travel mugs adorned with least tern and piping plover illustrations by noted wildlife artist Julie Zickefoose will be available for purchase soon. Watch our web page for details.

To see more artwork by Julie Zickefoose, go to [www.juliezickefoose.com](http://www.juliezickefoose.com)

For other items available at the UNL Maps and Publication Store, go to <http://nebraskamaps.unl.edu/home.asp>

## Healthy Families Play Outside *by Mimi Wickless, Lincoln Children's Zoo*

**Healthy Families Play Outside** includes a year-long advertising campaign and nature safari supported by the Zoo and its partners, and a variety of individual activities, programs, and educational handouts created, sponsored and implemented by each of the partners for their corresponding networks.

The **Healthy Families Play Outside** project has five components:

1. A city-wide advertising campaign that promotes outside active play and healthy physical activities and habits
2. A year-long, city-wide safari that involves outdoor sites, events, and activities coordinated and implemented by the Zoo and supported by the partners
3. Several coordinated activities that are independently planned and promoted by the partners to support the advertising campaign and the safari sites
4. A website that will provide ideas and information about healthy outside play, information about the safari sites, and a calendar of events that support the project
5. Sales and coupons donated by local businesses that encourage outdoor activities.

The goals of the **Healthy Families Play Outside** project are:

- To educate families about the importance of outdoor physical exercise and the benefits inherent in this kind of activity
- To introduce Lincoln's parks and outside spaces to low-income and immigrant families
- To provide an incentive for families to get outside and play in Lincoln's parks and outside spaces
- To focus media attention on the need for active, physical, outdoor play and the resources available in Lincoln



**Partners:** Nebraska Game and Parks; Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department and Pioneer Park Nature Center; Lincoln City Libraries, Lower Platte Natural Resource District; University of Nebraska Extension; Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools; Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.

Partners will plan and implement individual activities, resources, and events that support the goals of the **Healthy Families Play Outside** project. Each partner will participate in project meetings, distribute information about project activities through its network, and maintain records of time and fiscal expenditures relating to the project so match can be met.

In addition to the partners, supporting entities and the services they provide include:

- 1) Dimensions Foundation and Groundwater Foundation - encourage network families to register to participate in the treasure hunt
- 2) UNL College of Education and Human Sciences – maintain the listserv that will provide consistent communication among all partners and supporting entities
- 3) Lincoln Public Schools – allow use of school property as potential treasure chest locations
- 4) Lincoln/Lancaster Health Department (Jane Linsenmeyer) – distribute information about and encourage families to Register to participate in the treasure hunt.

**The Zoo's Role:** The Lincoln Children's Zoo will: 1) provide staff to coordinate the project and implement the city-wide, year long treasure hunt, and 2) act as the program's fiscal agent.

## Health Families Play Outside, cont.

**Evaluation:** Success will be measured by:

- 1) The number of families that register to participate in the treasure hunt
- 2) The number of businesses and organizations that become supporting entities as the project matures
- 3) Attendance at partner functions
- 4) Media enthusiasm for the project
- 5) Website hits
- 6) Survey responses of those who register and those who finish.

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools will conduct the evaluation. Gwen Nugent will be the primary evaluator for this grant. Throughout the year, the treasure hunt coordinator will gather opinions from participants and partners and problems will be corrected as they occur.



The **Healthy Families Play Outside** safari will get families off the couch and take them to unstructured corners and hidden places within Lincoln thus encouraging a sense of exploration and discovery. It will provide opportunities throughout the year to experience the natural environments in the Lincoln community.

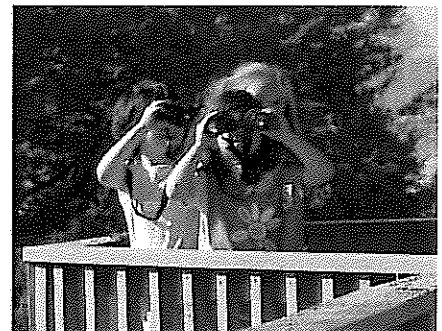
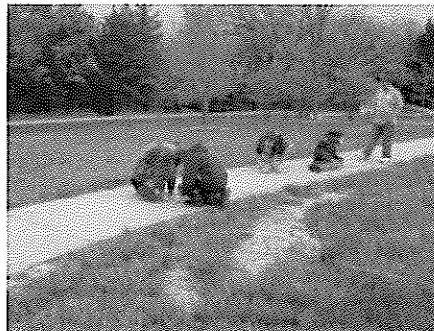
When a family registers to participate they will receive a safari duffle bag that contains: a map, a journal/site-clue book and a package of crayons. Registrations will be taken at all public libraries, a few schools, and at all partner facilities.

There are 35 spots in our safari, identified in the site-clue book by a name and address. Many are accessible by city bus – with a minimum of walking. Some are accessible from hiker biker trails, some are right on our city streets. Families are encouraged to walk, skip, bike, roller skate, and skateboard to these locations. All 35 sites will have a post, with an embossed symbol on it, placed somewhere on the site. These posts will be found using the clues in the safari journal. After the post is found, the participants will make a rubbing of the symbol in their journal. In 12/35 cases, completing this rubbing entitles the family to a souvenir – something provided by our sponsors that encourages healthy families to play outside or rewards their effort (a flashlight, a magnifying glass, a Frisbee, a bottle of bubbles...).

In addition to the health benefits, the **Healthy Families Play Outside** project introduces Lincoln residents to the facilities in the community that support and encourage outdoor activity and it provides incentive to participate for an entire year. It is only over time that habits are altered or created. We hope that if a family plays together outside for an entire year the activity may become a habit and continue even after the incentive of “winning” is gone.

The program is slated to start in January, 2008, but requests for registration materials will be taken at [HFPO@lincolnzoo.org](mailto:HFPO@lincolnzoo.org) beginning immediately. When materials are available registration information will be sent.

A website will be created to support the safari at [LincolnSafari.org](http://LincolnSafari.org). This website will contain a calendar of events for all the partners and will be linked to all the partner websites and other sites that encourage outside play. The website [www.MyYard.org](http://www.MyYard.org) is an example of what information the LincolnSafari site will contain.



# About the Partnership

## Mission Statement

*The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership (Partnership) studies and protects endangered Least Terns, threatened Piping Plovers and other birds within the Platte River system, Nebraska, in a manner that minimizes conflicts with private industry, and educates and involves local communities in this effort.*

**History:** The Partnership was founded in 1999 to prevent and resolve conflicts between nesting birds and sand and gravel mining industry operations. Jeanine Lackey and Ron Johnson from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, and John Dinan of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission initiated the program. The approach of the Partnership is to work with all interested parties to find sensible, proactive solutions to protecting terns, plovers, and other components of the Platte River ecosystem, while ensuring that business, industry, and private interests are free to continue to operate with minimal interference.

## Partnership Activities

- Protect colonies from predation and human disturbance using electric fences, exclosure cages, and signage.
- Create strong working relationships between sand and gravel mining companies, homeowner's associations, local governments, conservation organizations, and the public.
- Prevent and mitigate conflicts between nesting birds and business' interests.
- Increase awareness and appreciation of conservation issues by participating in events that educate the public, business, and government.
- Involve students through our "Job Shadowing" program.
- Monitor tern and plover colonies through our community based "Adopt-a-Colony" volunteer program.
- Produce publications such as the poster "A Tale of Two Birds" and companion educator's packet/CD, as well as research publications, our biannual newsletter, brochures, fact sheets, and web page.

## Partnership Impacts by the Numbers

43—Number of conflicts resolved since 1999.

60—Number of Volunteers per year.



130—The minimum number of additional piping plovers estimated to have been produced because of Partnership management techniques.

430—The minimum number of additional least terns estimated to have been produced because of Partnership management techniques.



ZERO—The number of prosecutions and fines participating industry partners received since 1999.

## Partners



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Program Coordinator  
3310 Holdrege Street  
153C Hardin Hall  
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Office: (402) 472-8878  
Fax: (402) 472-3461  
mbrown9 AT unl.edu



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Fax: (402) 472-3461  
Email: cthody2 AT unl.edu



*Partners: Arps Gravel and Concrete, Girl Scouts-Great Plains Council, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Lyman-Richey Corporation, Mallard Sand and Gravel Company, Harvest Corporation, The Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nongame Conservation Fund, Overland Sand and Gravel Company, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Western Sand and Gravel.*

Please consider a donation to the Tern and Plover Conservation Excellence Fund. Contact Ann Bruntz at 402-458-1176 for [abruntz AT nufoundation.org](mailto:abruntz AT nufoundation.org) for more information.

## Consider Donating to the Tern and Plover Conservation Excellence Fund

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**MARYLAND:** For the cost of postage and copies from the Maryland Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 974-5534, 1-800-825-4510.

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**NEW YORK:** Office of the Attorney General, Department of Law, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

**WASHINGTON:** Secretary of State at 1-800-332-GIVE.

**REGISTRATION WITH A STATE AGENCY DOES NOT CONSTITUTE OR IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THAT STATE.**

**Thank you for your support!**

**1. Watershed Rehabilitation is an Important Program for Nebraska** – Tuesday afternoon I visited the watershed rehabilitation construction site for Dams 27, 31 and 32 within the Papillion Creek watershed, which is about 2 miles south of Highway 370 and just west of 36<sup>th</sup> Street near Papillion. Flooding in the Papillion Creek Watershed in 1964 resulted in 7 people losing their lives. Those floodwaters damaged cropland, pastureland, roads, railroads, bridges and utility lines. In the early 1900's Papillion Creek had been straightened, which of course sped up runoff of exacerbating the damages that would occur in the 1964 flood.

Following that flood, SCS provided watershed planning assistance to the watershed sponsor (local conservation district, which later became the Papio-Missouri River NRD) by developing a watershed plan that resulted in the installation of 27 grade stabilization structures. Those 27 dams were originally designed to pass a 100-year storm event and had a lifespan of 50 years. The tremendous urban growth that has occurred downstream from these dams has rightfully resulted in reclassifying them as high hazard dams. A high hazard dam possesses the potential for loss of human life in the event of dam failure. So, as these dams approached their original 50-year lifespan they became excellent candidates for the NRCS Watershed Rehabilitation Program. Using the authorities of this program we contracted with HDR to design dam rehabilitations that will allow for passage of the probable maximum precipitation storm event of 32.5 inches of rainfall in 24 hours. These dams are designed to avoid overtopping in the event of such a storm and they contain an intricate set of seepage drains to eliminate dam piping concerns. The restored dams will extend the lifespan of each structure for 100 years.



This recent slide of Papillion Creek area shows the urban development that has occurred downstream from Papio Dams 27, 31 and 32. These dams are now providing flood protection for millions of dollars of property, which makes it extremely important to utilize the Watershed Rehabilitation Program to rebuild these dams to meet high hazard requirements.





NRCS Engineer Jason Sall is standing beside one section of the 36-inch diameter concrete pipe being installed in Dam 27. 185 feet of this pipe will be buried as the principal spillway. The earthen dam, once constructed over the pipe, will stand 54 feet tall from outlet to top of dam. Over 6000 yards of sediment will be removed from the original storage area to help create the 100-year storage design. This dam is being constructed within an existing subdivision that has grown around the watershed dams in recent years.



The team above is providing leadership for the design and construction inspection of Site 27 dam rehabilitation. From left to right are Cory Heitman (HDR Project Inspector), John Cambridge (HDR Project Manager), Martin Cleveland (PMNRD), Jason Sall (NRCS Government Representative), Chuck Leinen (NRCS Alternate Government Representative) and Kelly Thompson (Contractor and owner of Thompson Construction). Again note the close proximity of the homes to this dam site.

**2. A Few Hours in the Field with Bill Best** – On my way to Omaha on Tuesday I shared a couple of chilly hours in the field with Weeping Water Resource Conservationist Bill Best. Below is a summary of the two terrace projects we visited. Bill shared that the Weeping Water staff (Bill, Ed Chmelka, Jeremiah Schutz and NRD Technician Cindy Spillinek) are pushing hard to complete 88 terrace jobs this fall. They have 33 EQIP contracts with terraces scheduled for this fall plus 55 NRD cost share projects for terraces. Overall the Weeping Water office is administering 49 active EQIP contracts for about \$1.25 million. I also want to recognize NRD Secretary Jean Ulrich, who has been an integral part of the conservation team in Weeping Water for a long time.

## Teer, Pat

---

**From:** Cleveland, Martin  
**Sent:** Friday, November 30, 2007 11:03 AM  
**To:** Teer, Pat; Winkler, John; Petermann, Marlin  
**Subject:** FW: NRCS Friday Message  
November 30, 2007

Pat/John/Marlin:

I don't know if you typically pass on the NRCS friday message to the Board, but in this case the NRD's S-27 project is featured with great text and photos and it might be a good update for NRD Directors. See below article.  
Martin

---

**From:** Puls, Ralph  
**Sent:** Friday, November 30, 2007 10:25 AM  
**To:** Winkler, John  
**Cc:** Cleveland, Martin; Petermann, Marlin  
**Subject:** FW: Friday Message November 30, 2007

John,  
Kelly and Linda sent me Steve Chick's Friday message. The P-MRNRD/NRCS cooperation in the rehabilitation of Papio Watershed structures is item no. 1. He included a couple of photos.

Ralph Puls  
Land and Water Programs Coordinator  
Papio-Missouri River NRD  
8901 S. 184th Street  
Omaha, NE. 68138  
402-444-6222  
rpuls@papionrd.org

---

**From:** Fravel, Kelly - Dakota City, NE [mailto:Kelly.Fravel@NE.nacdnet.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, November 30, 2007 8:25 AM  
**To:** Puls, Ralph  
**Subject:** FW: Friday Message November 30, 2007

Ralph,

Fyi...P-MRNRD made the first paragraph under watershed rehab.

---

**From:** Chick, Steve - Lincoln, NE  
**Sent:** Friday, November 30, 2007 8:12 AM  
**To:** ( alan.feyerherm@mail.house.gov); ( ben\_nelson@bennelson.senate.gov); ( bmore7875@aol.com); ( cacek@npnrd.org); ( cburkhar@unlnotes.unl.edu); ( cburling@unicam.state.ne.us); ( chudkins@unicam.state.ne.us); (

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**Subject:** Friday Message November 30, 2007

To: All Employees and Conservation Partners  
2007

November 30,

The weather person said 48 degrees, sunny and light breeze for Tuesday morning, so I took donned my light jacket and headed for the field. The 31 degrees, stiff breeze, cloudy sky and dampness in the air made me recall that weather people represent the only profession I know that can be wrong more than 50% of the time and still get paid. Here is my message for this week.

1. Watershed Rehabilitation is an Important Program for Nebraska
2. A Few Hours in the Field with Bill Best
3. Ted Tietjen Very Thankful to NRCS
4. Ken Noonan Is State Office Employee of the Month/Last 2 Decades
5. Milton Rogers Officially Named State Director of FSA
6. Merle Illian Retiring
7. Karen Ott's Update

- John Ranney Terraces – Our first stop was at an impressive EQIP terracing contract where the Ranney's are installing 17,500 feet of tile outlet terraces, 24 risers and 5037 feet of tile. The contractor for both of the jobs we visited is Hauschild Construction.



Bill Best is standing by a riser on Ranney's recently constructed terraces. Bill is a very well respected Resource Conservationist who has been in Weeping Water for nearly 24 years. Anyone with experience in building terraces would agree that these on Ranney's farm are extremely well constructed.



The picture above is Lloyd Ranney (John's father) in March of 1945 talking to Soil Conservation Service Conservationist F.J. Chase. One on one technical assistance was and is the strength of SCS/NRCS. However today we are challenged to obligate and administer about \$50 million annually in cost sharing funds, which makes one on one time like this a little more challenging. You will note that F.J. Chase was a little smarter than me in his choice of coats.

- Clayton Miller Terraces – It was at the Clayton Miller farm, 2 miles west of Elmwood, where we caught up with Harry Hauschild and his crew laying the tile lines. Miller is adding 5200 feet of terraces, 5 risers and 11 feet of tile through a Lower Platte South NRD cost share project.



Harry Hauschild is operating the tiling machine as an employee keeps a close eye on the progress. The risers are offset 4 feet off the tile line in each terrace channel.



Bill Best and Harry Hauschild are pictured next to the tiling machine and a pile of the plastic tile. Harry Hauschild has been a long-time leader of the Nebraska Land Improvement Contractors Association and has served as the National President of the National Land Improvement Contractors Association.

**3. Ted Tietjen Very Thankful to NRCS** – I received a very nice phone call this week from Southwest Nebraska RC&D Council Member Ted Tietjen thanking me for allowing Gary Wells and Dave Griffith to travel to McCook this week for the Republican River Riparian Partnership meeting titled “The Republican River YR2037 & Beyond.” Ted reported that NRCS Landscape Architect Gary Wells provided a very professional presentation on how a stream corridor functions, while Dave Griffith presented an outstanding overview of NRCS’s vision for 30 years and beyond. Ted went on to comment that, “Your people really care.” I appreciate very much Ted recognizing Gary and Dave specifically, but all of our employees for being passionate and committed to improving the natural resources. Ted also shared that the more he gets around the more he realizes how SCS/NRCS, NRDs and many other partners have made such a difference on the landscape. The meeting in McCook was a huge success with 90 attendees including 20 landowners. We appreciate Ted’s commitment and passion, too!!

**4. Ken Noonan Is State Office Employee of the Month/Last 2 Decades** – I have selected Ken Noonan as the December “State Office Employee of the Month,” but in reality he has been our “Employee of the Past 2 Decades.” Ken

has held many positions within Nebraska in SCS and NRCS including Range Conservationist and District Conservationist in the field followed by several leadership positions in the State Office. I have known Ken since 1992 when I came to Nebraska as the Deputy State Conservationist. I have watched him expand and strengthen the RC&D Program from 2 RC&D areas to statewide coverage with 12 RC&D areas. I have observed him use his great leadership skills to provide strong and supportive leadership to our field offices. While I greedily wish Ken would continue working until I retire, I feel very fortunate that he has continued his career to nearly the 40-year mark. For these reasons and many more I am pleased to share that Ken is the December "State Office Employee of the Month/Last 2 Decades."

**5. Milton Rogers Officially Named State Director of FSA** – I am very pleased to share that Milton Rogers was recently confirmed as the State Director for FSA. I have enjoyed very much working with Milton for several years in his capacity as Chairperson of the FSA State Committee. Milton owns and operates a 1550 acre dryland wheat and millet farm in the Nebraska Panhandle. I have very much appreciated his practical experience advice in the past and I certainly look forward to a continued strong relationship with Milton and FSA in the future. Congratulations Milton!!

**6. Merle Illian Retiring** – Today, Ken Noonan and I are traveling to Red Cloud to celebrate the retirement of RC&D Coordinator Merle Illian. I am not sure celebrate is the best word to use as neither Ken or I are too excited about losing Merle to retirement, but he is certainly deserving of this next step in his life. Merle Illian actually began his career with the Corps of Engineers working at the Harlan County Dam in the early 1970s. He briefly worked for the Bureau of Reclamation on the Snake River Irrigation Project in Boise, ID before joining the Soil Conservation Service as a Soil Conservationist in Alma in 1974. From Alma, Merle moved to St. Paul as a Soil Conservationist and then to Butte as a District Conservationist. He later transferred to Creighton as a District Conservationist and then in 1983 he moved to Red Cloud as the District Conservationist. In 2000 he was selected to serve as the RC&D Coordinator for the newly authorized Trailblazer RC&D where he has done an outstanding job providing leadership and support to the Trailblazer RC&D Council. A couple of years ago I participated in a tour hosted by the State RC&D Association, which included a visit to Republican City's American West Theater, which was formerly the Republican City High School. I recall that high school sports record holders were still listed on the wall inside the old high school. Merle Illian was still listed on the wall as holding the record for low hurdles, which he achieved in 1967. That was probably a pretty good sign that Merle had a bright future ahead of him as he has been successfully clearing hurdles in his SCS/NRCS career ever since. Merle shared with me that he was working at the Snake River Canyon when Evil Knievel made his famous failed attempt to jump the canyon on his jet propelled motorcycle. Evil would have been wise to have consulted with the hurdles champion before making his infamous leap. Congratulations to Merle Illian on his retirement and best wishes for the future!!

**7. Karen Ott's Update** – You can feel Karen's exhaustion in her written words. It is great that the expanded tire business is booming, but like all stewards of the land Karen's real desire is to be on the farm. As an NRCS employee I can certainly understand Karen's commitment to the land. Here is Karen's message for the week.

"It's done. After a Herculean effort Thanksgiving weekend Horse Creek Tire reopened for business Monday morning to an avalanche of customers. At closing time we breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Well, we've survived our first day," chalking up the increase in traffic not to the new building, but to the fact that the business had been closed since the Thursday before.

When Tuesday rolled around we were just as busy...or busier; Wednesday was the same....and today (Thursday) we began scheduling customers instead of just taking them as they came.....there weren't enough hours in the day to accommodate them all.

We had expected some growth...but nothing like this. I guess it's true what they say....location is everything.

Excuse my brief report this week but I'm bone tired, and for the first time since I was a little girl I'm suffering from growing pains, the sort aspirin, and a few soothing words, can't touch.

As grateful as I am the business is thriving my heart yearns to be here...at home...on the land, I belong to it body and soul and nothing will ever change that."

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The anticipation of the naming of a new head coach has everyone speculating this week. There is certainly no place like Nebraska. Go Husker Volleyball Team!! Have a great weekend!!

Steve Chick  
State Conservationist





## **Private-sector effort helping to restore Platte River (G.I. Independent, 11-04-07)**

By Robert Pore

[robert.pore@theindependent.com](mailto:robert.pore@theindependent.com)

As Nebraska begins its efforts to restore wildlife habitats along the Platte River under the Platte River Compact, what role The Nature Conservancy will play is still up in the air, according to Chris Helzer of Aurora.

Helzer, program director for The Nature Conservancy's Eastern Nebraska Project Office, spoke before members of Grand Island's Rotary Club Tuesday about the conservancy's Platte River restoration efforts.

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit, private sector effort to restore biodiversity around the world.

Since 1951, the conservancy has protected more than 117 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of rivers worldwide. The organization has more than 1 million members who are involved in conservation projects in all 50 states, along with 30 countries.

The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program is designed to develop and implement a program to maintain, improve and conserve habitat for four threatened and endangered species that use the Platte River in Nebraska: whooping cranes, piping plovers, interior least terns and pallid sturgeons.

Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and the U.S. Department of the Interior are partners in the compact, which went into effect at the beginning of this year.

"That is still sort of in flux," Helzer said. "We have been involved in discussions about this from the beginning." He said compact partners are "getting down to the brass tacks" in beginning to implement the restoration plan.

"It's a big question about how much of this (the conservancy's restoration efforts) is going to be involved," Helzer said. "The restoration is certainly a big thing that they would like to do. It's my hope, if nothing else, to provide the research and development of how to do that well."

Helzer has worked for the conservancy for 10 years and is in charge of the management of 6,000 acres of conservancy land along the Platte River and in southeast Nebraska.

He said the conservancy has been working to restore biodiversity along the Platte River in Nebraska since the mid-1990s.

One of the programs Helzer said the conservancy is using to help conservation efforts along the Platte River is a high-diversity prairie restoration strategy.

Under that strategy, the conservancy is trying to link isolated areas of grassland together to increase the land's biodiversity health.

"We can easily get seed mixtures of the 220 to 230 plant species that we plant to show up on these grasslands," Helzer said. "We can take what was a very fragmented area of grassland and build it into something that is much more contiguous."

Helzer said the fragmented prairie program and other conservation programs to restore biodiversity along the Platte River are showing results in helping to restore a biological balance along the river, along with being compatible with sustainable crop and livestock practices.

Along with restoring fragmented areas of grassland into a contiguous prairie, Helzer said the conservancy has also been successful in restoring commercial sandpits along the river into areas of biological diversity.

"I would like to say that a lot of what we are doing is going to be implemented, but it's not our say," Helzer said. "All we can do is be part of the process and help out where we can help out."



# Papio-Missouri NRD will fight Platte restrictions

BY NANCY GAARDER  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The water wars have come to eastern Nebraska.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District on Thursday narrowly voted to challenge the right of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to seek restrictions on future water uses along the lower Platte River.

The NRD board voted 6-5 to join with seven other natural resources districts; three public power, irrigation and reclamation districts; and the City of Papillion in forming a coalition to challenge Game and Parks' conclusion that further depletion of the Platte River would jeopardize the survival of endangered and threatened species.

**The board votes  
6-5 to join other  
groups challenging  
curbs on future  
water uses in  
eastern Nebraska.**

NRD General Manager John Winkler told the board that it was the first entity to formally vote to join the coalition and that decisions by other boards would follow.

Several citizens and board members tried unsuccessfully to persuade the district not to join the coalition, saying the effort would be a misuse of tax dollars.

The coalition is expected to cost at least \$42,000 and could lead to a court challenge.

See NRD: Page 2

11/9/07

## NRD: Board votes to fight Platte water restrictions

Continued from Page 1

NRD Assistant General Manager Marlin Petermann said Game and Parks did not follow proper procedures in asking the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to declare the lower Platte fully appropriated. Instead of issuing a "biological opinion," which is essentially a scientific analysis, the commission should have filed for rights to river water, he said.

NRD board member Rich Tesar questioned the commission's science.

"Do I think there is some voodoo science out there?" Tesar

asked. "... Yes, I do, but I can't prove it. I'm not a scientist."

Game and Parks Assistant Director Kirk Nelson said before the meeting that the NRD's opposition is mystifying. The district, he said, helped fund the study that it's now challenging. The study took years to complete, he said, and the science is the best available.

The study was done by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and was peer-reviewed, Nelson said, which means that outside experts analyzed it for scientific soundness.

"This should be an easy one for

people to say, 'Yes, we agree with saving the river,'" Nelson said. "My comment on all of this is: What audience out there is in favor of less water in the Platte River? Stand up, let me see you."

Lynn Moorer, an environmental attorney, told the board she believes that the fight is a fundamental one over who controls water in the state.

"This coalition is about a power struggle — not science," Moorer said. "This coalition, comprised primarily of NRDs, wants to wage a very large, expensive and prolonged battle with state agencies over who controls water in Nebraska."

Other opponents of the NRD's decision said the Game and Parks proposal was the best way to preserve the river because it would prevent additional, future withdrawals of water.

That, said Moorer and others, would protect the Platte River aquifer that supplies water to Omaha, the integrity of a cleanup of polluted groundwater and habitat for wildlife.

Voting for the measure were: Tesar, Jim Thompson, Rick Kowalski, Tim Fowler, John Conley and David Klug. Voting against it were: Richard Patterson, Dorothy Lanphier, Fred Conley, John Schwoppe and Dick Connealy.

## NOTES

### Bicycle maps

Omaha-area bicyclists will soon have a variety of maps to chart their way across the metro area and beyond.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District recently revised its popular Metro Area Trails Map. The map features trails, parks and recreation areas in Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie Counties.

Within weeks, the Omaha/Council Bluffs Metro Area Bicycle Map will be released as a compliment to the NRD map.

"It is designed as a tool to help you find routes to take you through the city by bicycle," said Marty Shukert of RDG Planning and Design. "Trails don't go everywhere and people often have to use the street system for commuting. That's where this map will come in handy."

A peek at the map is available at [www.activateomaha.org](http://www.activateomaha.org).

Also, public libraries, bicycle clubs and bike shops in Omaha and other towns along the 4,675-mile route of the Lewis and Clark Trail are receiving bike maps of the route from the Adventure Cycling Association.

The updated maps steer cyclists to new off-road bike paths, paved rural roads and new gravel-road options. The maps list restaurants, hotels, campgrounds and public libraries.

The maps lead cyclists in the footsteps of the Corps of Discovery's 1804-1806 journey from Illinois to Oregon. The National Park Service funded the maps. For more information, visit [www.adventurecycling.org/routes/lewisandclark.cfm](http://www.adventurecycling.org/routes/lewisandclark.cfm).

# Don't use voodoo spell to kill messenger

W-H 11-14-07

The other day, I engaged in 24 minutes of voodoo exercising (Level 1 on the exercise bike) after which I took a voodoo nap (eyes closed, snoring sounds) to avoid household jobs that I was not actually doing, a process I call "voodoo honey-dos."

As you can see, I've embraced the trend of using the word "voodoo" as an adjective to discount the viability of whatever noun that follows.

This use of the word *voodoo* was popularized in 1980 by George H.W. Bush to describe fellow presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's supply-side economics. It took on new life with the publication of Robert



**Robert Nelson**

Park's 2000 book "Voodoo Science: The Road from Foolishness to Fraud."

Good read. But the term's meaning has morphed into a nasty little cliché of the politically slanted anti-intellectual.

tual.

Generally, when you hear someone call something "voodoo," particularly "voodoo science," it's very often describing credible work that comes to a conclusion somebody doesn't want to hear.

X This all came to mind last week, when the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District voted to challenge the right of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to seek restrictions on future water uses along the lower Platte River.

Game and Parks' assessment that further depletion of the lower Platte River would damage endangered species was based on a peer-reviewed study by University of Nebraska-Lincoln researchers. The study was partially funded by the NRD board that then voted to challenge it.

NRD board member Rich Tesar questioned the commission's science.

"Do I think there is some voodoo science out there?" Tesar asked. "Yes, I do, but I can't prove it. I'm not a scientist."

This is a funny comment on many levels of voodoo.

Here is a nonscientist calling a piece of science "voodoo science" while explaining that he is not a scientist and would be unable to prove through the scientific method his hypothesis that the UNL researchers are engaged in "voodoo science."

As Game and Parks Assistant Director Kirk Nelson noted, the study, by two respected ecology and hydrology experts, took eight years to complete, using the best methods available at, you know, our best research university. Also, the UNL study was analyzed by outside experts to verify its scientific soundness.

Nelson said the NRD board's opposition was "mystifying."

You know, like voodoo.

What is going on is simple. As environmental attorney Lynn Moorer said: Many irrigators, utilities and other water users in eastern Nebraska don't want the river's use controlled by state environmental researchers and regulators.

OK, fine. It's a political/economic argument.

Just say that. But please, don't use taxpayer money for a bunch of good science, then call it bad when the science might get in the way of growth and economic opportunity.

Here's a simple rule:

If you're not a scientist with expertise in the field of science at issue, you should avoid using the term "voodoo" or any similarly diminishing word to describe the science.

Otherwise, you're guilty of "voodoo argument," which is pretty much what the Greeks called sophistry.

"It is deeply frustrating," Nelson told me. "The science clearly says we're heading for the same problems in the eastern part of the state that have already gripped the western part of the state."

Meaning, basically, if we do nothing to check our water use, the Platte River and its basin will hold nothing but voodoo water.

+ 6

# A spectacular success for the Platte River

Wednesday, Nov 14, 2007 - 12:13:28 am CST

Wildlife lovers in Nebraska have good reason to celebrate these days.

Efforts to restore habitat on the Platte River have provided an immediate and spectacular payoff.

Last year a 200-acre, mile-long stretch of the Platte River next to the Audubon Society's Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon was restored to its pre-dam condition.

Trees and other invasive plants were removed, river channels were reshaped and several bare nesting islands were created.

The work had been completed for only several weeks when three migrating whooping cranes roosted at the site, according to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

This summer the stretch scored another important success when 10 pairs of least terns and two pairs of piping plovers nested on the islands. Least terns are an endangered species. Piping plovers are listed as threatened.

The two species had been squeezed out of their natural nesting grounds when low water flow allowed trees and vegetation to take root on the sand islands where they previously nested.

Wildlife officials said the nesting was the first in the central Platte in the past decade.

Another cause for elation this fall was the sighting of five whooping cranes on the Niobrara River. The group is one of the 250 whoopers that migrate from their breeding grounds in Canada to wintering grounds on the Texas Gulf Coast.

Whooping cranes are part of one of the world's most spectacular wildlife events, the seasonal migration of hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes and other water fowl that draws thousands of tourists to Nebraska in the spring and fall.

One of the key stops on this journey is the central Platte River. A map of the central flyway migratory route looks like an hour glass, with the Platte River at the narrow part of the hour glass.

The restoration project used by the whoopers, least terns and piping plovers was part of the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, which draws together a diverse group including farmers, hunters, birdwatchers in support of preserving the Platte River as a biologically unique landscape.

The project is funded by both private and public money, and covers land owned by nonprofit wildlife groups and private landowners.

"There's not many examples nationally where you can take this federal money, match it with state and private money and boom, you've got a measurable result," said Mark Humpert of the Game and Parks Commission.

Nebraskans can take pride at the recent victories in preserving the crucial Platte River stopping point for migrating birds. The success will be appreciated internationally.

# Independent stance wise on Platte River study

Lincoln Journal Star Editorial, Friday, Nov 16, 2007

Credit the Lower Platte South Natural Resource District for having the good sense not to unthinkingly pick a side in a brewing battle over the future of the Platte River.

The district's board of directors decided by a lopsided 18-3 vote not to join a coalition that is challenging a preliminary biological opinion that the lower Platte River in eastern Nebraska would be harmed by further depletions.

The opinion was issued last month by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

"We have been studying the river since the 1980s — more than 25 years — and feel the evidence is conclusive that the river can stand no further depletions," Kirk Nelson, assistant director of the commission said in a news release.

The commission said that further diversions of water from the river would "jeopardize the continued existence of the pallid sturgeons, interior least terns and piping plover that depend on the river for survival."

Almost simultaneously the state Department of Natural Resources issued a preliminary finding that would allow more water to be taken out of the river.

Among the users that would be interested in claiming more water from the Platte are irrigators, city governments and other users. The city of Lincoln, for example, gets its drinking water from a well field in the Platte River.

Joining the coalition would have put the lower Platte South in bed with a disparate contingent whose members in other circumstances might be vying with each other for rights to the Platte.

**Other natural resource districts didn't take much time to think before they jumped about the coalition's bandwagon. Earlier this month the Lower Platte North NRD and the Papio-Missouri NRD voted to join the group. So has the city of Papillion.**

**It's disturbing that the coalition has jumped to contest the Game and Parks Commission scientific study in such knee jerk fashion. The coalition seems single-mindedly focused on taking more water from the Platte for irrigation and watering city lawns, rather than finding a way to balance its members' desire for more water with the goal of protecting the river as a resource for wildlife and recreation.**

Also worrisome was the proposed governance of the coalition. As Lower Platte South general manager Glenn Johnson pointed out, a recent change in the proposed interlocal agreement would have allowed a five-member executive committee to operate on behalf of the coalition. This arrangement seemed designed to give the executive committee free rein without little input from coalition members.

There's little doubt that there is strength in numbers when it comes to arguing public policy. But elected officials should be leery of making hasty alliances, especially when their erstwhile allies include profit-minded irrigators, their opponents are publicly funded scientists and the future of the Platte River is at stake.

# \$50 million for dry city

NRD lays out the cost of correcting the flood threat along Dead Man's Run.

BY AIGIS J. LAUKAITS

Lincoln Journal Star

Correcting the flood problems in the heavily urbanized Dead Man's Run watershed in north-central Lincoln could cost \$50 million.

"It's by far the largest cost that we have identified in a master plan study," said Devin Biesecker, an engineer with the watershed management division of the city's Public Works & Utilities Department.

Dead Man's Run is the fifth watershed studied by the city and the Lower Plate South Natural Resources District. Earlier watershed master plans focused on Beal Slough, Southeast Upper Salt Creek, Stevens Creek and Cardwell Branch.

The primary goal of the Dead Man's Run study is to develop projects to reduce the potential for flooding, address existing erosion problems and improve water quality.

Right now, there are 982 build-

ings in the 100-year flood plain of Dead Man's Run. Implementing all of the recommendations in the study would reduce that to 172.

The Dead Man's Run watershed covers about nine square miles.

"With Dead Man's Run we're dealing with a watershed that is 100 percent built out already," said Paul Zilling, assistant manager of the NRD. "There's not much open space left."

Because the watershed is already developed, there is more stormwater runoff, officials say. That's also the reason for the high price tag.

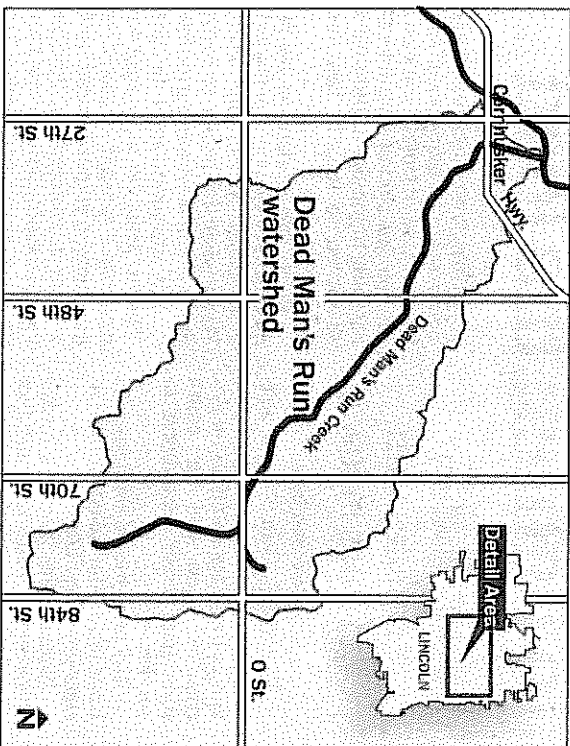
Dead Man's Run has experienced street flooding in recent decades but no major floods, Zilling said. The last major flood may have occurred in 1957.

So why spend \$50 million on such a project?

Flood insurance is one big reason. Hundreds of homeowners and businesses within the 100-year flood plain must have it. Not all, but many, Biesecker said. Insurance premiums can be \$800 or more a year.

"If they are removed from a flood plain, we would not have the mandatory flood insurance requirement," he said.

Watershed improvements —



Source: Lower Plate South Natural Resources District

like dry detention basins for temporary storage and sloping channels to give flood waters more space — also could protect homes and businesses from floods.

"If we ever did get a 100-year storm on Dead Man's Run, there would be a significant amount of damage — in the millions," he said.

CHAD GILL/LAND/Lincoln Journal Star

A 20-member citizens advisory committee assisted city and NRD officials with the study and provided feedback. Information about the watershed and potential improvements was shared at three open houses and several stakeholder-landowner meetings.

Part of the \$610,000 for the study

included the cost of developing new flood plain maps for Dead Man's Run, Biesecker said.

Some private property may have to be acquired on the lower end of the watershed toward Salt Creek.

"We don't want to buy improvements or buildings," Zilling said. "We're trying to work the open space we got there."

Also, because of the high cost, the city and the NRD will be looking to federal and state funding sources, he said.

The master plan study, which has been in the works for more than a year, will be presented to the NRD board on Dec. 19. The Planning Commission and City Council also may schedule public hearings in January and February.

Once a watershed master plan study has been adopted by the city, it becomes part of the Comprehensive Plan, a massive document that guides the city's growth.

The 13 projects proposed in the master plan study also can be incorporated into the city's capital improvement program.

City and NRD officials do not have a timeline for building the projects. "It's a fairly long process," Biesecker said.

Reach Aigis J. Laukaits at 402-473-7243 or [alaukaits@journalstar.com](mailto:alaukaits@journalstar.com).

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

# Omaha World-Herald

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LARRY KING, Executive Editor GEITNER SIMMONS, Editorial Page Editor

MIKE REILLY, Managing Editor

Continued

## A liquid reality

**A**ll the elements, it would seem, are in place for Nebraska's water wars to reach Omaha:

A stretch of river nearly spoken for. Urban developers and rural irrigators casting hungry eyes on what's left. And, inevitably, the future of endangered species.

This time, however, the outcome seems preordained. Whether it happens in a month or a year or two down the road, state water regulators say, the Platte River from Columbus to Plattsmouth is going to be declared "fully appropriated."

Interested state and local agencies could go to court, as some intimate, over whether that happens now. But by the time a judge ruled, it probably would happen anyway.

It is far better, then, for those agencies to work together — as they have on other issues — to prepare for the inevitable.

**The lower Platte will soon be fully tapped. A legal fight over timing won't alter it.**

The flash point of this discussion is a draft "biological opinion," done for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The document calls on the State Department of Natural Resources to declare the lower Platte fully appropriated in the department's annual review on the state of Nebraska's rivers, due next month.

The Platte's home stretch, according to University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty who did the study, is just about the last place on the river where three troubled species — interior least tern, piping plover and pallid sturgeon — can reproduce as they always have. Take out any more water, and those species could all but disappear from the Platte.

Aiding the survival of endangered and threatened species along Midland rivers is an acceptable societal goal — as long as human needs remain in first place. Further, the long-established principle of Western water law — "first in time, first in right" — should govern conflicts among human users of Nebraska water.

As long as metropolitan Omaha keeps growing, it will need water from the rivers and the wells they feed. (Ditto for Lincoln, which also draws its water from the Platte, and for other towns upstream.)

Concerns that the Game and Parks opinion could hinder future supplies have prompted the City of Papillion and two natural resources districts (thus far) to form a self-defense coalition. The Metropolitan Utilities District has not joined, but agency President Tom Wurtz says MUD naturally wants to preserve its ability to tap the Platte beyond one water plant that already is online and a second set to start up next summer.

Many Midlanders will remember how federal officials in the 1990s essentially gave terns, plovers and whooping cranes a senior water right in another section of the river — the central Platte. That set the stage for a three-state agreement that otherwise applies "first in time, first in right" to human water users from the Rockies to Grand Island.

The current situation isn't quite the same scenario, though. The Game and Parks Commission has rarely displayed the tin ear of its federal counterparts. More critically, the Department of Natural Resources thus far says the lower Platte is not yet fully appropriated.

And Attorney General Jon Bruning's office is telling both agencies that, under federal and state laws, Game and Parks' study cannot affect the DNR's ruling (because the ruling isn't a new water use).

The biological opinion must be taken into account from now on as individuals and entities ask the DNR for more surface water from the lower Platte. The document also will affect requests for groundwater after the basin is fully appropriated — which either is almost upon us or not much farther down the road.

So, Game and Parks' opinion will matter, but not quite yet.

\* \* \*

Thus it matters little, for either thirsty urban residents or the three troubled species, whether the lower Platte is declared fully appropriated now or a year or two from now. The birds and fish will neither die off nor flourish anew in that time. And the timing of a "fully appropri-

ated" designation wouldn't greatly affect water supplies for Omaha — either at present or for the future.

Here's why:

■ MUD already holds water rights for both its Platte water plants. By state law, only Mother Nature can keep MUD from fully utilizing those plants until at least 2026. If MUD says it isn't getting enough water to recharge its wells, any new users could be shut off. Lincoln is in a similar situation.

■ Once the lower Platte is fully appropriated, MUD would have to buy out existing water users when Omaha needs more water. A faster designation might make that task cheaper (since there would be fewer users to deal with).

But Nebraskans use less than 5 percent of their water for everyday needs. Irrigators, who use much more water more quickly, account for about three-fourths. State officials say MUD should have no trouble finding water "offsets" for future growth without seriously denting agricultural water supplies.

■ Terns, plovers and sturgeons won't drink the Platte dry. They merely need its water to be there, in its historic patterns, to provide optimal conditions for reproduction. The water should be there — without disrupting urban supplies — as long as humans don't ignore the animals' needs.

The coalition concerned about the Game and Parks opinion is suggesting the commission should seek an instream flow right, not an immediate fully appropriated designation. But the agency already has such rights on the lower Platte for the benefit of a dozen fish species, though not the pallid sturgeon.

Game and Parks officials say their rights already are as large as state law allows, but they aren't enough to help the three species. The Legislature would have to make a larger instream flow right possible. That could take a year or two.

■ So would a lawsuit if, say, the DNR were to decline to declare the lower Platte tapped out and environmentalist groups (with or without Game and Parks as a partner) tried to force an immediate designation.

By the time the courts could rule, development on the lower Platte almost certainly would have triggered the designation. And if Game and Parks got an increased flow right, state officials say, that in itself might be enough to push the lower Platte to its limits.

It would be surprising if the DNR could claim the authority to clamp down on new uses of the lower Platte if the evidence shows there's still water to be used. If it tried, that, too, could force lengthy lawsuits.

\* \* \*

No matter what happens, the days when Nebraskans could freely draw water from the home stretch of their most prominent river are nearly at an end. There would be little gained — and lots of taxpayer money transferred to lawyers — in fighting over that inevitability.

Members of the coalition and Game and Parks officials plan to meet next week to review the situation. Several of the invited parties have a record of cooperating on water and wildlife issues, including the instream flow rights that Game and Parks already holds.

The public interest would best be served if these organizations pull together again for the greater good. They need to take this latest painful step toward a system in which all Nebraskans not only appreciate the life force of water but also share it for the equitable betterment of all.



## Local View: Platte River coalition benefits state

By DEAN E. EDSON

Monday, Nov 26, 2007 - 12:13:52 am CST

On Nov. 16, 2007, the Lincoln Journal Star published an editorial entitled "Independent stance wise on Platte River study," wherein the Journal Star gave credit to the Lower Platte South NRD for choosing not to join the Lower Platte Basin Coalition.

Unfortunately, the editorial did not stop there; it went on to opine (based entirely on misunderstandings of the coalition) that the coalition is a "bandwagon ... single-mindedly focused on taking more water from the Platte for irrigation and watering city lawns" in lieu of "protecting the river as a resource for wildlife and recreation." Had the Journal Star contacted the coalition, it would have found the coalition's purposes to be good for Nebraskans and the Platte River.

The coalition should be commended for forming an alliance to promote sound management of water resources in the Lower Platte River Basin (Basin) — which encompasses almost 2/3 of the State of Nebraska, including the Elkhorn, Loup and Platte River watersheds.

The coalition, consisting of several Natural Resources Districts and other political subdivisions, is aimed at protecting available water in the basin for current and future uses, while also providing adequate and reasonable in-stream flows for the pallid sturgeon, interior least tern, piping plover (Protected Species) and their habitat.

The members of the coalition have been working with Game & Parks to support Protected Species in the Basin for at least 10 years. Initially, when Game & Parks applied for its current in-stream flow right for the Platte River, two members of the coalition joined that application and several other members worked with Game & Parks to achieve a sensible flow rate that protects wildlife and their habitat while allowing for responsible use of the water resource.

For the past eight years, the coalition's members have worked with Game & Parks to fund a multi-million dollar scientific study to examine pallid sturgeon habitat use in the Platte River. This study report was subject to extensive review by a team of independent peer reviewers, including leading federal and academic scientists, who raised concerns over the scientific methodology and assumptions of that study. Various peer reviewers found the study's recommendations were not supported by the data, while others noted the conclusions could not be endorsed or refuted due to insufficient analysis and flawed assumptions. They also identified serious statistical and hydrological problems.

For some unknown reason, Game & Parks simultaneously contracted with the same scientists to perform its own separate second study on the Platte River that, although still in draft form, is now the basis for Game & Parks' draft biological opinion on the habitat needs of the Protected Species in the Basin. No one has yet seen this second study that Game & Parks has done.

The coalition has concerns about the draft biological opinion and the soundness of the underlying second study. Whether the second study contains problems similar to those identified by the independent peer reviewers is unknown at this time as it has not been released to the public. The coalition hopes its continued dialogue with Game & Parks will answer some of these difficult questions.

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts is not a member of the coalition, but has been actively involved with all parties for the last 10 years on the Lower Platte River study activities. We encourage sound water management for all users and uses based upon sound scientific data that has been peer-reviewed by external parties. We commend the coalition for seeking to ensure future management of the basin is rooted in sound science. If flawed science serves as the foundation for all future water management decisions in the Basin, all users — domestic, municipal, agricultural, wildlife and recreation — will suffer in the long run.

# Talks on Lower Platte solutions will go forward

BY ART HOVEY / Lincoln Journal Star

Tuesday, Nov 27, 2007 - 08:20:54 pm CST

By Nebraska standards, getting natural resources district officials to sit in the same room with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to talk about threatened and endangered species might be almost as big a deal as Arab-Israeli talks in Annapolis, Md.

Both face-to-face exchanges occurred Tuesday, and both began and ended with expectations for quick results very much in check.

At Game and Park headquarters in Lincoln, the focus was on protecting Platte River habitat for the pallid sturgeon and two rare birds, the least tern and the piping plover, without shutting down the potential for more water development.

There were no major breakthroughs, but nobody ran screaming from the room either. And the two groups did agree to sit down again Jan. 10 with Ann Bleed, director of the Department of Natural Resources.

Kirk Nelson of Game and Parks and Stan Staab, Norfolk-based manager of the Lower Elkhorn NRD, seemed satisfied that something was accomplished over 2½ hours.

"I think it was progress, because Game and Parks was able to more clearly articulate our position," Nelson said afterward.

Staab didn't dispute that the Platte River basin east of Columbus doesn't have a lot of options to offer that could benefit one side without harming the other. However, he added, "I think there's some room to maneuver.

"There's a lot of technical information that both sides have to provide and both sides have to understand. And we're a long way from being able to do that."

Beyond that, Staab added, "I think it was quite an interesting day just to get us in the room, quite frankly, to talk about these issues."

There seemed to be abundant possibilities for that not to happen over the last few weeks.

As the year draws rapidly to a close, Bleed is preparing to make her final ruling on whether to shut down the lower reaches of the Platte to more irrigation development.

Adding to the tension is a pending report from Game and Parks on how much water needs to stay in the river to give rare birds and fish a chance at survival.

Complicating matters further is a decision by the Lower Elkhorn and other NRDs to form their own coalition to safeguard the potential for water development, building flood-control structures and other people priorities.

*Continued*

In taking stock Tuesday, Gene Zuerlein of Game and Parks called attention to an increase in the number of irrigation wells in the state from about 1,700 in 1940 to more than 103,000 in 2007.

Some of those wells are close enough to the Lower Platte to deplete its flows.

"If we don't protect it," Zuerlein said, "it will have a lot more impact in a lot of different realms."

That could include the pumping capacity of the wells along the river near Ashland that provide Lincoln with its drinking water.

Beemer farmer Lloyd Nellor said there was at least one more side to that story for him and other NRD members. "I think the last thing we want to do is destroy wildlife and fish . . .," Nellor said.

"But we've got to have some growth. We've got to have some water to play with."

Bleed later pointed out that vested interests should work on an integrated management plan for the Lower Platte without waiting for the day when her department might put a moratorium on irrigation expansion.

And if, for example, potential partners in a plan for the river and its tributaries agree that there can be no more depletions in surface flows, that plan might have to address restrictions on users of both surface and ground water.

"The surface guys aren't going to be happy," Bleed said, "if they're restricted and other people aren't."

# Lower Platte South NRD working on disaster plan

By the Lincoln Journal Star

Tuesday, Nov 27, 2007 - 02:49:36 pm CST

The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District is undertaking a planning effort to develop a multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan for the district.

The plan will be a community-guided document that will identify each participating community's vulnerability to such natural disasters as flood, drought, earthquake, wildfire, winter storm, tornado/high wind storm and dam failure, the district said in a news release.

The district is working with the state Department of Natural Resources, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency on the plan. Each community and county in the district is eligible and encouraged to participate in the planning process.

The Lincoln-based NRD includes most of Lancaster and Cass and parts of Otoe, Saunders, Butler and Seward counties.

The plan will set goals for each community, establish mitigation alternatives and prioritize projects that can alleviate potential damages to property and life in the event of disaster. Proactive hazard mitigation planning allows a community to take action to reduce or eliminate these threats.

The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 requires a FEMA-approved pre-disaster hazard mitigation program be in place before funding is granted for post-disaster mitigation projects.

Once a hazard mitigation plan is developed and adopted, a given jurisdiction is eligible for pre-disaster mitigation project grants to implement the mitigation solutions identified in the plan. After the plan is adopted by each local participating community, it must be approved by both NEMA and FEMA.

The Lower Platte South NRD has hired JEO Consulting Group Inc. to help develop the plan over the next two years. This project is being funded by a grant from NEMA/FEMA and the Lower Platte South NRD.

## New floodplain maps available at open house

Over 2,000 residents and businesses in the West Papillion Creek Watershed area in Sarpy and Douglas Counties are receiving invitations to an open house Thursday, December 6, to view preliminary flood insurance maps being considered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Public officials, local emergency management personnel, insurance agents, and realtors are also encouraged to attend the open house sponsored by FEMA, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, and local floodplain officials. It will be held from 4-8 p.m. at the Natural Resources Center, Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 8901 S. 154<sup>th</sup> Street, Omaha.

The reason for the open house is that FEMA is considering preliminary revised floodplain maps for the West Branch Papillion Creek Watershed. This past summer,

letters were sent to residents and businesses by the cities of Omaha, Papillion, La Vista, Gretna, Bellevue, and Sarpy County indicating that these new maps show that property once believed outside of floodplain areas are now included and may be subject to periodic flooding. Portions of Boys Town and unincorporated Douglas County are also in the affected area.

Property owners located in the new 100-year floodplain, or area that has a one-percent chance of being flooded in any given year, may be required to purchase flood insurance. Insurance would be purchased through the National Flood Insurance Program, administered by FEMA, after the new maps have gone through the public comment period and are adopted by FEMA and the local communities.

Existing floodplain maps are based upon land uses from the 1970s and do not accurately reflect

impacts from considerable urbanization within the Papillion Creek Watershed. Updated floodplain maps provide property owners, floodplain managers, realtors, insurance agents, engineers, and others a much more accurate, reliable, and available source of floodplain information.

FEMA has been working closely with local communities, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD), and HDR Engineering, Inc. to ensure these updated maps are based upon the most accurate information and technology available.

After the public meeting, FEMA will initiate a statutory 90-day public review and appeal period. Floodplain maps have been posted on the Internet and are available to view at [www.dogis.org](http://www.dogis.org) for areas within Douglas County or [www.sarpy.com/gisviewer/](http://www.sarpy.com/gisviewer/) for Sarpy County.

Post-Gazette  
11-27-07

# Sides to talk about water use

11-27-07

## Lincoln considers joining planned water group

Lincoln has not joined the lower Platte River basin coalition but is considering joining a yet-to-be-formed smaller group, Assistant City Attorney Steve Huggenberger said Monday.

The smaller group is interested in examining the science of the (Game and Parks) biological opinion and not as interested in doing some of the other political activities that the larger group is coming into," Huggenberger said.

The city has a big interest on the lower Platte River because that's where Lincoln gets most of its drinking water. The Lincoln Water System owns and operates a system of well fields and a \$90 million water treatment plant near Ashland.

Huggenberger said the smaller group has no name and has not drafted goals or a purpose statement. He said more information would become available in a week or two. He said other members of the

small group could include Nebraska Public Power District in Columbus, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District in Holdrege, Metropolitan Utilities District in Omaha and a couple of reclamation districts.

Huggenberger said the city has not ruled out joining the coalition.

"I think there are some common interests between the larger group and the smaller group, and we could join together with the larger group to pursue some of these common interests, certainly the examination of the biological opinion," he said.

The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District this month voted not to get in the middle of the dispute.

Directors voted 18-3 not to join the coalition. However, the board did direct its staff to monitor the issues involved in the controversy.

— Al Landtells

## Proponents of saving water for endangered species will meet with those who want it for development

BY ART HOVEY  
Lincoln Journal Star

Movers and shakers from the world of water will sit down in Lincoln today to try to head off what is quickly becoming an ugly battle over the lower Platte River basin.

The dispute appears to leave little room for compromise between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and its allies, who are trying to keep water in the river for rare fish and birds, and a growing coalition trying to safeguard more water development.

Ann Bleed, director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, also is scheduled to attend.

You could call Bleed the woman in the middle.

No matter how things are resolved, she is likely to have a central role and could make a pivotal ruling as soon as January.

Her options appear to be three: ■ With the stroke of a pen, she could shut off further irrigation development and protect three species that depend heavily on Platte habitat while state and local officials work out a long-term river management plan.

■ She could go slower and consider an in-stream-flow request from Game and Parks.

■ Or she could do nothing, which could easily lead to a lawsuit

from the ranks of environmental groups.

Bleed adopted a diplomatic tone Monday.

"I would hope that we could sit down amicably, and figure out what is the best management decision, given the availability of whatever technical data we have before us," she said.

"I think, in the end, that serves all parties in the best way possible."

But it's a lot easier to divide up a cake when you're working with the whole cake. Others caught up in this struggle, or watching it from close range, suggest the state is

See WATER, Page 3B

## Water

Continued from Page 1B

down to its last morsels.

That includes Kirk Nelson of the Game and Parks Commission, who will host today's discussion at the commission's headquarters on North 33rd Street.

"We're always willing to talk," Nelson said, "and that's what we're doing now. We're exploring alternatives — but there aren't too many."

Mike Jess, of the University of Nebraska Water Center, can relate to Bleed's dilemma.

A decade ago, when he headed what was then known as the Department of Water Resources, Jess ended lengthy controversy by giving Game and Parks its first in-stream flow on the Platte.

"They didn't get the last drops," Jess said, "but it was pretty close to it."

Nelson was quick to point out that there's really no safe alternative for Bleed, if the objective is to stay out of court.

"She can get sued either way. She can get sued from the coalition, and she can get sued from the enviros."

It should be noted that Bleed already has made a preliminary decision not to close the lower Platte basin to more irrigation development based on an annual review and a Jan. 1 deadline.

But she also has made it clear that she wants to see a draft report from Game and Parks on the water needs of one species of fish, the pallid sturgeon, and two bird species, the least tern and the piping plover.

And she has reserved the right to change her mind.

She announced Monday that she has scheduled a Dec. 19 hearing to take testimony on her preliminary ruling that the lower Platte is not fully appropriated — that matters have not reached a point where water use has placed unsustainable demand on water supply.

From there, "It has to be within 30 days after the hearing that I have to make a decision," she said.

Natural resources districts, which preside over groundwater use at the local level, figure prominently in the coalition drawn together to defend water development.

John Miyoshi, general manager of the Lower Platte North NRD at Wahoo, said a state law adopted several years ago gives Bleed the right to declare river basins off-limits to more irrigation development.

But, according to Miyoshi and

others, fish and birds aren't supposed to be part of the rationale.

"The coalition is meeting with Game and Parks tomorrow," he said Monday, "and the main topic is to talk about an in-stream flow. And since the outset, partners in the coalition felt that the right way to preserve water for endangered species is to get an in-stream flow right."

"I guess we'll know a lot more after tomorrow," he said.

Stan Staab, Miyoshi's counterpart with the Lower Elkhorn NRD in Norfolk, said the impact of whatever happens will reach across much of the state to other rivers that flow toward the Platte.

"It does affect all of the Elkhorn basin and all of the Loup basin that stretches clear into the Panhandle," Staab said.

Even though coalition members might favor the option of an in-stream flow, Staab said that depends on how much water Game and Parks wants.

And, as of now, "the amounts of water Game and Parks is asking for are too high."

Nelson wasn't especially fond of the in-stream option. He said "it costs a lot of money, it takes a long time, and we don't think we'll end up with anything."

Jess suggested that the NRDs might be pushing in-stream flows, as a concept, just to buy time.

Over the years that decision might take, "applications for new uses could be initiated, and there's kind of an extended period before there would be a formal declaration."

As the Legislature adopted LB962 in 2004, giving Bleed moratorium authority, well drilling took off at a frenzied pace as irrigators reacted to fears about what might happen in their areas.

That included what Staab described as "historic highs" in the Lower Elkhorn.

In 2007, the NRD has received about 175 permit requests for new irrigation wells, more than last year but fewer than in 2004 and 2005.

Bleed noted that, even though she could act swiftly to cut off more water development there and elsewhere, that wouldn't be the last word either.

Her department or the NRDs could still grant variances "and the final decision of what happens in the basin is up to the development of an integrated management plan."

Reach Art Hovey at (402) 523-4949 or ahovey@alltel.net.

# Platte River maxed out, state says

11-28-07

By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — The Platte River in eastern Nebraska is so fragile that it's important to protect the historically meager amount of water flowing in the stream, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

"If we don't protect the flows, then there'll be a lot more impacts from (the river's role in) recharging well fields to the natural system of wetlands absorbing chemicals coming down the river," said Gene Zuerlein, the commission's assistant fisheries manager.

Zuerlein made his remarks during a meeting at Game and Parks headquarters with members of the Lower Platte Basin Coalition, a group of irrigators, cities and natural resources districts.

The coalition is challenging a preliminary Game and Parks study that additional degradation of the lower Platte and its tributaries by new water uses would jeopardize the existence of pallid sturgeons, interior least terns and piping plovers. Those species depend on the river for survival.

Coalition members fear that designating the river off-limits to new users could hinder future development in the region.

Lloyd Nellor of Beemer, a Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District director, said he was concerned that the commission's attempt to keep a certain amount of water in the river for habitat and wildlife would hobble the ability to control floods and provide underground water for economic development.

The Elkhorn River is a major tributary of the lower Platte. Flows from the Elkhorn, the Loup rivers and Salt Creek near Lincoln are important in creating the lower Platte's ecosystem from Columbus to its mouth at Plattsmouth.

Construction of flood-control dams and other structures would keep water from flowing down the Elkhorn and into the Platte.

Kirk Nelson, a Game and Parks assistant director, said the agency would work with the coalition on accommodating water needed for public safety and economic development.

# Lower Platte talks will move forward

11-28-07

Groups will meet again Jan. 10 on balancing issues of habitat and water development.

BY ART HOVEY  
Lincoln Journal Star

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"The surface guys aren't going to be happy," Bleed said, "if they're restricted and other people aren't." Reach Art Hovey at (402) 523-4949 or [ahovey@alltel.net](mailto:ahovey@alltel.net).



# Update of flood plain will affect hundreds

■ Owners of homes that have been added may have to buy flood insurance but could cut their costs if they act promptly.

BY NANCY GAARDER  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Hundreds of Omaha-area property owners who received the bad news in the mail about their properties' changing flood risk will have a chance Thursday to learn more in person.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and local flood officials will meet with people whose properties have been affected by the first systematic updating of flood potential in the metropolitan area in about 30 years.

About 2,600 properties are affected by the remapping of the West Papillion Creek and its tributaries.

Of those, between about 700 and 900 properties were newly added to the 100-year flood plain, said Paul Woodward, water resources engineer for the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

The rest were already in the flood plain. Woodward said an estimate isn't available of the number of properties being taken out of the flood plain.

A 100-year flood plain is an area that has about a 1 percent risk of flooding in any given year.

NRD officials say they hope that Realtors, insurance agents, public officials and local emergency management officials attend the meeting to learn more about the changing maps.

Those being placed in the flood plain are learning not only that their property is at greater risk than previously thought, but that they may have to buy flood insurance — properties with a federally insured mortgage must have the insurance if they're in a flood plain.

Additionally, being in the flood plain can make it harder for an owner to further develop prop-

## To learn more

**Open house:** 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
Thursday, Papio-Missouri River  
Natural Resources District, 8901  
S. 154th St. (Chalco Hills  
Recreation Area)

**Online:** Douglas County map:  
[www.dogis.org](http://www.dogis.org)

**Sarpy County map:**  
[www.sarpy.com/gisviewer/](http://www.sarpy.com/gisviewer/)

erty.

Mike Glaser, a partner with Marcotte Insurance Agency, said a fully-insured \$200,000 home with contents valued at \$100,000 would cost about \$2,000 a year to insure in a 100-year flood plain.

Glaser said these property owners have a window of opportunity to reduce their costs. If they buy flood insurance before the maps become official, they'll be grandfathered in at the price given to property owners outside the 100-year flood plain.

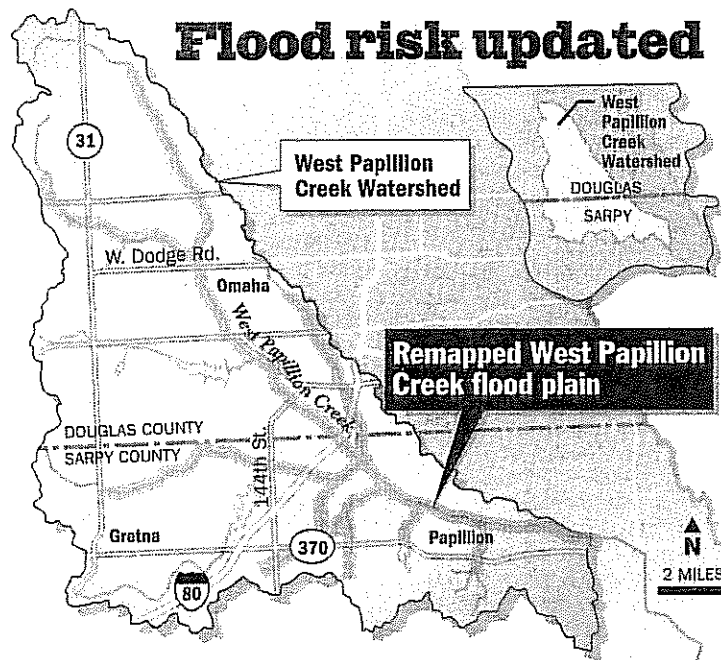
The hardest hit by insurance costs, Glaser said, will be commercial property owners because of the high value of their properties.

The existing maps date to the 1970s and have become outdated either because of improved mapping technology or because development has changed the amount of runoff in an area.

Thursday's meeting will trigger a 90-day public comment and appeals process.

Brian Bowman, spokesman for FEMA, said property owners will have to demonstrate with technical data that the maps are in error if they want to be exempted.

Officials will review the appeals and finalize the maps in late 2008.



MATT HANEY/THE WORLD-HERALD

# Parts of Platte River targeted in water study

By the Lincoln Journal Star

Tuesday, Dec 04, 2007 - 05:16:16 pm CST

The state's largest irrigation district has voted to join an ongoing management study of Platte River water resources in western and central Nebraska.

The study area will extend from the west end of Lake McConaughy and the Colorado state line in Deuel County to the Duncan river gauge in Platte County.

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's participation in the study will add Gosper, Phelps and Kearney counties — areas where the Holdrege-based district delivers water.

Central said in a news release that it is joining the study to develop modeling tools and identify and evaluate conjunctive management scenarios that could improve overall management and sustainability of water resources.

Conjunctive management refers to the recognition of the hydrologic relationship between surface water and groundwater and the efficient, sustainable use of both natural resources.

The estimated cost to Central for joining the study is \$224,518. The district has asked the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for \$107,100 to help defray study expenses.

Total cost of the study throughout the entire area is estimated at \$768,248.

Study sponsors include: Central Platte Natural Resources District, Nebraska Public Power District and the state Department of Natural Resources.

The Twin Platte Natural Resources District based in North Platte also has joined the study, adding portions of the South Platte River watershed to the study area.

# Farm Bureau looking for water alternatives

By ART HOVEY / Lincoln Journal Star

Tuesday, Dec 04, 2007 - 11:54:10 pm CST

KEARNEY — The Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation has until 2012 to eliminate what its members view as an unfair burden on agriculture in resolving state water issues.

But the state's largest farm organization will waste no time in trying to weed out a 2012 corn checkoff fee from a funding package approved by the Legislature in 2007.

Urged on by dozens of county delegates attending the state convention here, the Farm Bureau leadership will take aim at the checkoff fee in the 2008 legislative session.

If the Farm Bureau is successful, some \$44 million would be subtracted from the combined revenue solution to problems with water supply in the Republican River Basin and the rest of the state from 2012 to 2019.

Rob Robertson, part of the staff at the state office in Lincoln, said action by delegates Tuesday conveyed a larger message.

"Agriculture is picking up way more of the burden than it should in solving state water problems," Robertson said during a break in the delegates' resolution session.

"Irrigation is a huge economic benefit," he added, "and solving problems and finding solutions ought to be very broad-based."

Without irrigation powering their economies, many of the communities in central and western Nebraska wouldn't exist, he said.

The Farm Bureau's first choice for an alternative is more spending from the state's general fund. If that won't fly, the organization sees annual fees on wells as a better answer than fees on corn.

And those fees should apply not only to irrigation wells, but also to municipal, commercial and industrial water users.

Stratton farmer Kent Lorens, a convention delegate from Hitchcock County, said his experiences as a resident of the Republican River Valley have convinced him all taxpayers need to do more to resolve a river compact dispute with Kansas.

Lorens noted that details in LB701, which was adopted by lawmakers earlier this year, saddled him and other residents of the three Republican River natural resources districts with new property tax obligations and irrigation fees.

He's not saying that's excessive, but he pointed to the state's involvement in a low-level nuclear waste compact in the 1980s as an example of responding to a statewide responsibility.

The Republican River compact is a similar situation, he said, because it was the state that entered into the Republican River Compact with Kansas and Colorado.

*Continued*

“We all had to throw in on that as a state,” he said of the nuclear waste agreement. “And since the state was the one that signed the agreement and the compact for the Republican River basin, that’s why I feel the state should kick in and help with the water flow situation.”

Turning to more general fund spending, or to well fees, would also address a situation in which Lorens and other Nebraska farmers who don’t irrigate are being asked to pay a corn checkoff fee to address an irrigation-related shortage.

But more importantly, he said, “I feel we are a state and we should take care of our problems as a state as a whole.”

In other action in Kearney Tuesday, Farm Bureau members voted to strongly oppose using threatened and endangered species concerns as a reason to close the Lower Platte River Basin to more water development.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is completing a study expected to show that further depletions in flows in the river would threaten the survival of the pallid sturgeon and two birds, the interior least tern and the piping plover.

# Open house aims to inform residents about new floodplain

BY JASON GLENN  
LEADER STAFF WRITER

12-6-07

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District will hold an open house Thursday to offer information to 2,300 Sarpy and Douglas County residents and businesses affected by proposed changes to flood maps.

Paul Woodward, NRD water resources engineer, said the event will give the public a chance to learn and comment on how the new maps may change their status in the West Papillion Creek Watershed's 100-year floodplain.

Approximately 900 properties may be added to the floodplain, Woodward said. Residents and business owners, including 365 in Papillion, 100 in La Vista, 58 in Bellevue and five in Gretna, received letters this summer informing them of the changes.

The 100-year floodplain indicates a 1 percent chance that an area will flood in a given year.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency prepared the new maps based on recent data compiled by the NRD. The maps are preliminary and won't be officially adopted until 2009.

Woodward said the current maps are based on studies done in the early 1970s and don't accurately reflect how development and growth in the watershed have changed flood risks.

The changes mean those added to the floodplain may have to get flood insurance if they don't already have it. Any-

one is able to purchase flood insurance, but the federal government requires mortgage holders in high-risk areas to carry it.

Flood insurance is administered by FEMA and can be purchased through insurance agents.

Because the maps won't be officially adopted until 2009, property owners can save money by getting insurance prior to then and being "grandfathered" in at a lower risk level premium.

After the letters were sent out, Woodward said his office received between 50 and 60 calls from people concerned with the changes. He pointed out that the open house will in-

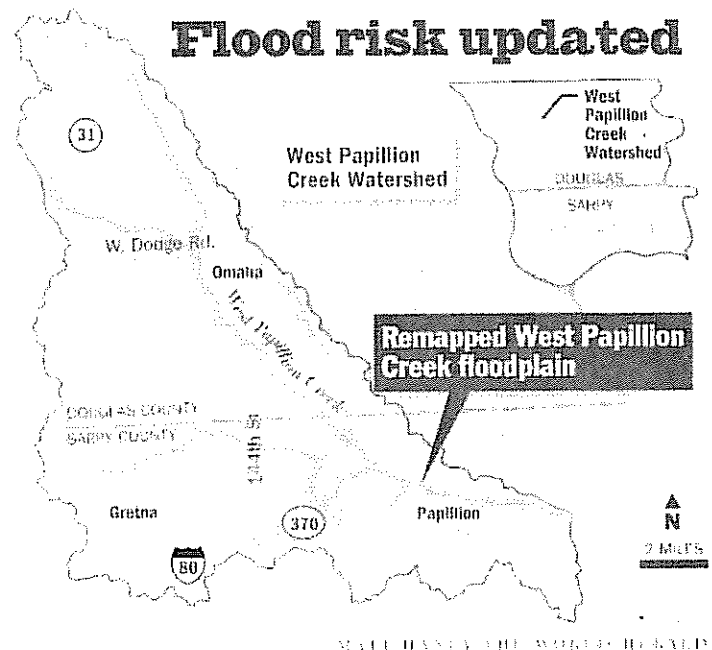
clude information on how property owners can protest and appeal being added to the floodplain.

Woodward said he hopes real estate agents, insurance agents and engineers will also attend the event.

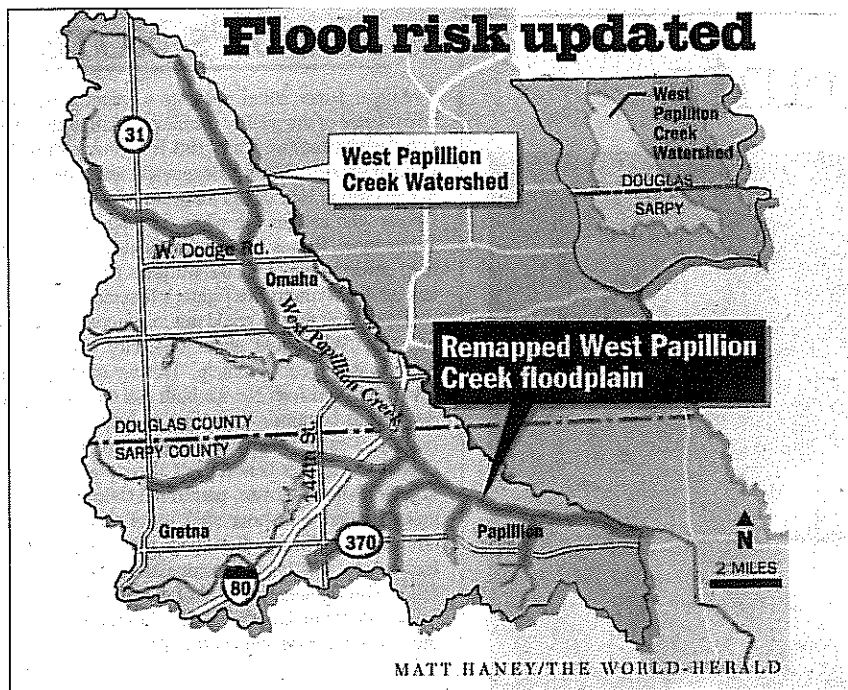
The open house will be held at the Natural Resources Center at Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 8901 S. 154th St., from 4 to 8 p.m. and will feature booths on how the maps are made, the appeal process and how to get flood insurance, among others.

Sarpy County property owners can go to [www.sarpy.com/gisviewer/](http://www.sarpy.com/gisviewer/) and enter an address to see if it is within the new floodplain boundaries.

## Flood risk updated



## Flood risk updated



# Will you need flood insurance?

BY JASON GLENN  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

12-6-07

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# New floodplain maps to be costly for some

12-8-07

BY NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The frustration was written on the faces of Ron and Sara Devries.

"Lower property values and higher insurance" was how Sara Devries summed up the effect of new federal maps that place the couple's home within the 100-year flood plain of the West Papillion Creek system.

More than 120 metropolitan-area property owners attended an open house Thursday at the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District to learn how new federal flood insurance maps of the West Papio might affect their homes and businesses.

The maps placed the Devries property near 168th and Harrison Streets inside the 100-year flood plain, whereas previous maps had indicated it was outside that zone.

The maps were commissioned by the NRD and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The open house triggered a 90-day public comment period. The maps aren't expected to be official until sometime in 2009.

The rub for the Devrieses is that only their deck is inside the

flood plain, but they still must buy flood insurance for the entire house.

The couple say they aren't sure how much the value of their \$260,000 home has dropped, between the change in flood plain status and the generally slumping housing market.

"Needless to say we're not happy about it," she said.

Like the Devrieses, Arlyn Slaughter bought his home, near 158th and Josephine Streets and valued at about \$225,000, because it backed up to the green space along the creek.

"I think I even paid a little extra for the lot," he said. "It's a little bit frustrating. When I bought the house, there was no indication the flood plain status could change."

About 2,600 properties were affected by the flood plain re-mapping. Many already were in the flood plain and simply had that status reconfirmed.

An estimated 700 to 900 properties were like the Devrieses' and Slaughter's, newly designated as in the flood plain.

Those property owners will have to buy flood insurance if they have a federally backed mortgage.