

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager Report

DATE: February 2, 2006

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT**: A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities for the month of January, 2006, is attached for your review.

B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS**:

1. **Sonya Jungjohann** has been hired by the District as the 2006 I&E Intern. Sonya is a graduate student at UNO and is completing her thesis in Geography. She also teaches at UNO and Metro Community College. Sonya will be assisting in the coordination of Water Works and Earth Day Omaha. She will also be assisting with NRD education and volunteer programs. Her first day of employment was January 4th and will be working for us until June, 2006. Welcome!!!

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 January, 2006. 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 January 17, 2006. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

E. **NEWS CLIPS**:

- ➔ December 14, 2005, Randolph, NE Times article – New technology is planned to bring water from under the Mo. River
- ➔ January 7, 2006, Omaha World Herald Midlands Voices – Funding won't solve water issues by itself, written by State Senator Ed Schrock
- ➔ January 10, 2006, Lincoln Journal Star article – NRD's office addition built with environment in mind. Materials made from natural products and recyclables were used in the construction.
- ➔ January 10, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Proposal envisions 'conservation design' in western Douglas County. County Board may vote on design plan next month.

- ➔ January 13, 2006, Omaha World Herald Midlands Voices – NRD is doing its part on Republican River, written by Jasper Fanning, General Manager, Upper Republican NRD
- ➔ January 14, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Irrigators to negotiate over water release. A south-central Nebraska irrigation district will hold talks with the state about releasing its share of water to Kansas.
- ➔ January 23, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Trail, park improvements to get nearly \$1.6 million.
- ➔ January 23, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – A new lake called peril to wellfield. A proposal to dam the Platte River would affect drinking water used by Omaha and Lincoln, MUD's president says.
- ➔ January 24, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Money earmarked for wildlife.
- ➔ January 24, 2006, Omaha World Herald Public Pulse Letters regarding Platte River dam study:
 - A great idea, by Kevin Penrod
 - Stop this proposal, by Mike Ronkar
 - Not for sailing, by Gene Podany
 - Bring it on, by Warren Hutchinson
 - Where's the source?, by Gilbert A. Robertson
- ➔ January 24, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Bike racks will be added to buses.
- ➔ January 25, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Restrict wells before state does, Schrock warns water managers. The state senator's speech to NRD officials comes as the Legislature grapples with related issues.
- ➔ January 25, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Elwood's fish get more water from the Platte.
- ➔ January 25, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Compromise plan hailed in road dispute. All sides appear pleased with a plan to close Rainwood Road at night near Cunningham Lake.
- ➔ January 25, 2006, Lincoln Journal Star article – River dispute flows toward an uncertain conclusion. Republican River water battle.
- ➔ January 26, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Firms show interest in pedestrian bridge. Omaha officials expect 3 or 4 teams to compete for the long-delayed project.
- ➔ January 26, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Beutler seeks to revive irrigator fee proposal.
- ➔ January 28, 2006, Lincoln Journal Star Local View– Imperiled by its own popularity, by Tim Knott, President of the Friends of the Niobrara, Inc.
- ➔ February 1, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – 'Spring rise' releases OK'd for Missouri River. Some Midlands farmers fear the pulses could create flooding problems.
- ➔ February 1, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Farm Service Agency tries again.
- ➔ February 2, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Water official warns of 'decline.' Restrictions in Platte River basin must not damage the economy, a Gering NRD manager says.
- ➔ February 2, 2006, Omaha World Herald article – Funds sought to make water law work. State Senator Ed Schrock urges a \$10 million appropriation for the management system.

January 2006

Information & Education Report

Information

- ◇ Published two ads in Sarpy Chamber magazines
- ◇ Completed Levy Comparisons fact sheet
- ◇ Began preparations for Omaha Boat Sports and Travel Show
- ◇ Began work on design of web site ads on KETV.com
- ◇ Continued work on Winter SPECTRUM
- ◇ Continued work on exhibit for Visitors Center and update of Wildlife Habitat Dioramas
- ◇ Attended PRSA NE professional Development Conference
- ◇ Attended NACD Annual Meeting

Education

- ☐ Continued to plan Spring NRD programming
- ☐ Continued working with Nebraska Pheasants Forever on Leopold Education Project workshops for 2006
- ☐ Continued promotion of NRD outdoor classroom grants
- ☐ Continued working on the NRD Display in the Visitor's Center
- ☐ Attended LEP State Coordinators Meeting in Lansing Michigan
- ☐ Attended Water Works 2006 Planning Meeting
- ☐ Facilitated Project WILD workshop for 20 UNO Pre-service Teachers
- ☐ Attended Statewide Information & Education Meeting
- ☐ Attended LPRCA Outreach & Education Committee Meeting
- ☐ Planned for Environmental Studies Class from Millard South to attend NRD programming every other week for the entire Spring Semester
- ☐ Information/Education Intern started work on 1/4/06
- ☐ Arranged for NRD to support the Omaha World Herald's Newspaper In the Classroom program
- ☐ Started planning for Envirothon 2006
 - Sent out applications
 - Checked tests/award files/supplies
- ☐ Up-dated Tree postcards, and mailed to participating teachers
- ☐ Continued planning for Earth Day 2006
- ☐ Continued planning for Speaking Engagement at PF Statewide Meeting in February
- ☐ Managed 35 volunteer hours

January, 2006

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Updated: January 17, 2006

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 Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
 - ★ Purchase Agreements, deeds (90th to Giles) (Tr. 19 deed, Tr. 23 easement) (W)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
 - ★ Purchase Agreements, deeds (90th to Giles) (Tr. 19 deed, Tr. 23 easement) (W)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - Closing with Bundy's (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
 - Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National Property) (P)
 - Hansen ROW Condemnation (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements as needed (F)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Western Douglas County Trail – Ehrhart Griffin professional services contract (P)
 - ★ Mopac Trail – Purchase Agreements and easements (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - California Bend – Appeal District Court ruling on Wright's tenant (Arp) (W)
 - ★ Lower Decatur Bend – Closing for Williams (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 (F)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites** (Woodward/Petermann):
 - Dam Site 19 agreement (F)
 - ★ DS 13 Agreement with Elkhorn and Omaha (P)
 - ★ DS 13 Closing with Metro Community College (P)
 - ★ Dam Site 1 and 3c contract with HDR (P)
 - ★ Dam Site 13 Agreement w/SID 512/Elk Ridge (N)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
- **Other:**

Midlands Voices

Funding won't solve water issues by itself

BY ED SCHROCK

The writer, of Elm Creek, Neb., is a state senator representing Nebraska's District 38.

I commend The World-Herald for its editorial-page interest in the State of Nebraska's water issues and how to fund the actions necessary to resolve those issues.

Water use and management is one of the most critical issues facing the State of Nebraska. As a state, we are blessed with a great resource and have, until now, avoided many of the water problems that our neighboring western states have faced.

As chairman of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee and co-chairman of the Water Policy Task Force, I have been part of an important process to bring our water management into the 21st century. With the passage of Legislative Bill 962 in 2004, we took a major step forward.

As with any management issues, funding is a critical component. A Jan. 3 editorial is correct in stating that "Nebraska leaders have serious work ahead as they weigh the options (for management) and how this toll (the cost) should be paid."

That serious task, though, is made more difficult when too much emphasis is placed on costs, instead of on all the management tools, and on dollar figures that make good headlines but are not realistic.

Solving our water issues requires a balanced approach to reducing water use between regulation, education and financial programs to retire acres, if necessary. Solving these issues by funding alone will not get the job done.

The biggest problem in finding solutions is the unrealistic expectations created by tossing out numbers like \$300 million to \$375 million that have no basis in reality. We cannot spend that type of money. Nor should we.

Repeating those figures in the press over and over simply

creates unnecessary roadblocks to a meaningful discussion. Funding for water is important. It is maybe one of the most important funding items we will face in the next decade and beyond. That funding has to be realistic and part of a balanced approach if we hope to achieve a water management strategy that supports our state economy now and our children and grandchildren later.

The Republican River provides an example of how this works. This year, the basin's natural resources districts adopted necessary, groundbreaking regulations that reduce groundwater use in the basin below levels ever thought possible and lower than those of most of our neighboring states.

The irrigators in the basin have taken it a step further and have conserved even more water by using 15 percent to 30 percent less than what was available to them in their allocation. This self-regulation has been a critical step in meeting our compact allocations. The basin irrigators are to be commended for this effort, and we need them to do this again in 2006.

At the same time, the state used a relatively small amount of money to leverage more than 30 times that amount in federal funds to retire irrigated acres in the basin. This balanced approach is the common-sense solution that is typical of Nebraskans and their legislators.

The Attorney General's Office, the Department of Natural Resources and the local NRDs have worked tirelessly to develop realistic solutions to our problems. Let's focus on the facts and the reality of our situation. Let's not keep diverting our attention with big-number headlines and unrealistic dollar figures.

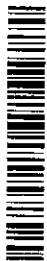
TIMES

WEDNESDAY WEEKLY

RANDOLPH, NE

Circulation = 944

12/14/2005



New technology is planned to bring water from under the Mo. River

BISMARCK, N.D. — A plan to draw water from beneath the Missouri River for a thirsty North Dakota county would be among the first along the longest U.S. river and one of only a handful such projects in the nation.

Called angle wells, the system would use the Big Muddy's sand and rock riverbed to help filter the water to near "bottled-water quality," said Doug Nebauer, executive director of the Bismarck-based South Central Regional Water District.

It would provide an additional 3.5 million gallons of water daily to some 3,500 residents of northern Burleigh County, from north of Interstate 94 to Wilton, said Joe Bichler, a project manager with the Bartlett & West engineering firm of Bismarck.

"Rural water is a fast-growing need in northern Burleigh County," said Nebauer. "Most of the well water there is quite unsatisfactory."

Angle wells use a new technology to provide "good water and good yields at the lowest construction costs," Nebauer said. "It has achieved all goals."

Construction of the \$17 million project began this summer, with the first phase to be completed in mid-2007. The entire project is slated for completion in 2009, Bichler said.

Residents approved a \$10 million bond issue last year to help pay for the project, Nebauer said. State and federal funds are being added, he said.

Two of the six planned intake pipes have been placed at the site, about 10 miles north of Bismarck. A third is slated to be in place this month.

The wells are placed at angles ranging from 14 degrees to 23 degrees from the river's edge, with pipes extending underground to about 100 feet offshore and up to 38 feet beneath the Missouri's riverbed.

Slotted screens with ceramic filters in the 16-inch double-wall pipes allow groundwater and river water to be sucked from beneath the riverbed. The water goes through additional treatment before tying into pipelines.

The system is unaffected by ice, silt or low water, Bichler and Nebauer said.

"There are an awful lot of benefits to it," said Jame Todd, an engineer with the federal Bureau of Reclamation in Bismarck. He said the agency is studying the technology, hoping that it could provide a reliable water supply for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

Silt clogged the intake pipe at Fort Yates on Thanksgiving weekend in 2003, leaving hundreds without water. A temporary intake system was built at a cost of nearly \$3 million.

Todd said soil samples have been taken at Fort Yates, "but so far, we haven't found soil conditions like they are in Bismarck."

For the system to work, the riverbed must have loose rock and gravel, not clays that are found in some of the river's stretches that have

been flooded by dams, Bichler said.

"It's a viable solution to a challenging problem — if you have the right soils," he said.

Martha Silks, a Perry, Kan.-based hydro-geologist who worked on the Burleigh County project, said only a few such systems exist in the United States.

An angle well project planned for the Lewis and Clark Rural Water System will pipe Missouri River water from Vermillion, S.D. to customers in South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota.

Executive Director Troy Larson said that system differs from the North Dakota project in that it would tap into an aquifer adjacent to the Missouri River, at least at first.

Angle wells were placed along the Hudson River, near Albany, N.Y., to provide municipal water.

"They were completed in 2003 and were the first in the United States, as best as we can tell," said Gary Smith, who works for White-Pierce, a Topsham, Maine-based civil and environmental engineering firm.

He said a similar system is being developed in Orange County, Calif. Those wells would go beneath the Pacific Ocean's floor to draw water for a desalination plant.

South Central Regional Water District has about 30 years remaining on a 40-year contract with the city of Bismarck to purchase water.

NRD's office addition built with environment in mind

Materials made from natural products and recyclables were used in the construction.

1-10-06
BY ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS
Lincoln Journal Star

The most visually striking feature of the newly remodeled Lower Platte South Natural Resources District offices is the 14-foot-tall ficus tree planted in an atrium graced by a skylight.

But there's more to the district's new office addition, and not all of it is as visible as the tree.

Much is hidden in the paneling, counters, tiles, railings, light and plumbing fixtures and heating and cooling units.

All are designed be less of a burden on the environment.

"We wanted a sustainable building where building materials don't go from cradle to grave," said Ed Ubben, projects coordinator for the Lincoln-based district.

Under the direction of the district's board, designers used "green" building materials made from natural products and recyclables wherever possible.

If you go

Visitors can view "green materials" and environmentally friendly features used in remodeling the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District offices at 3125 Portia St. during a Friday open house from 3 to 6:30 p.m. The work includes an outdoor "rain garden" that collects runoff from a parking lot and rooftops.

Some of the wall insulation, for example, came from scraps of denim.

Bathroom countertops are made of recycled paper and resin. Paneling is manufactured with sorghum. Beams and railings are made from compressed wood.

Cabinets are made with straw sandwiched between veneer.

Many of the "green" building materials came from Straw, Sticks and Bricks, a Lincoln store at 2324 O St. that specializes in such products, according to Ubben.

To save energy, the district installed a geothermal system that relies on water collected in 18 wells, each 200 feet deep, buried under a parking lot.

In the winter, a heat pump extracts heat from the water, which is

a constant 54 degrees. And in the summer, the same system uses the water to cool the building.

Ubben said the district also is using motion detectors to turn lights off and on when a person enters a room. Water-saving toilets, designed with two flushing options, also have been ordered and will be installed soon.

Another unique environmentally friendly feature is the "rain garden."

Assistant manager Paul Zillig said the system collects runoff from the east parking lot and rooftops and filters it naturally through rocks and soil before it is released into storm sewers. The rain garden complements an existing wetland, which collects runoff from the west parking lot.

Total cost of the remodeling project is estimated at nearly \$600,000, according to Ubben.

District officials will offer tours of the newly remodeled building during an open house from 3 to 6:30 p.m. on Friday. The public is invited to attend.

The Lower Platte South NRD is made up of mostly Lancaster and Cass and parts of Otoe, Seward, Butler and Saunders counties.

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

Proposal envisions 'conservation design' in western Douglas County

1-10-06

By KRISTIN ZAGORSKI
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Builders would not grade land, lay out streets on a grid or fill neighborhoods in western Douglas County with evenly spaced houses under the county's proposed development plan.

Instead, they would let hills stand, build roads that hug the landscape and cluster houses in order to preserve the features — such as woodlands and creeks — that give the western part of the county its rural flavor.

ON OMAHA.COM
A draft of Douglas County's proposed development plan

The use of design patterns that preserve the character of western Douglas County is part of the county's proposed development plan, which was revealed last week to the public.

The concept, known as conservation design, is not new to the area, said Marty Shukert of

Omaha's RDG Planning and Design, which wrote the draft of the county's plan.

The practice, Shukert said, was used in Linden Estates, northwest of 132nd Street and West Dodge Road.

Part of that neighborhood features green space, which includes wetlands that handle much of the area's storm water drainage, he said.

Conservation design also can be seen near Happy Hollow. See Develop: Page 2

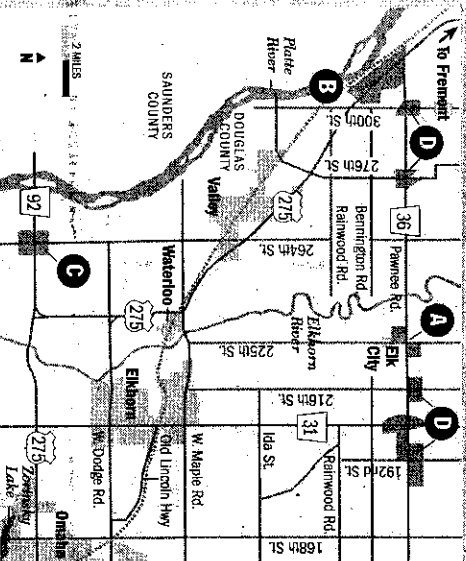


JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

Western Douglas County would be developed much like Linden Estates, near 132nd Street and West Dodge Road. If the county's development plan is approved, Under conservation design, the land's natural features would be retained.

Commercial development

The updated draft of western Douglas County's plan calls for commercial developments to be clustered at key intersections along Nebraska Highway 36 and U.S. Highway 275.



- A** Pedestrian-friendly historic shopping district in Elk City at 22nd Street and Highway 36.
- B** The stretch of Highway 275 north of Valley is envisioned as having a business park and light industrial development.
- C** A mixed-use site could spring up at 26th Street and Nebraska Highway 32.
- D** Other intersections along Highway 36 that have been identified as being ripe for commercial development are 192nd, 216th, 276th and 300th Streets and Nebraska Highway 31.

SOURCE: RDG Planning and Design

DEAN WINKEL/THE WORLD-HERALD

Develop: County Board may vote on design plan next month

Continued from Page 1

Boulevard in the Dundee neighborhood, Shukert said. Streets there follow the contours of the land, and storm water flows to a low point, he said.

Unfortunately, Shukert said, houses were built in the low point in the 1950s, and now basements there flood when rainfall is heavy.

Under the county's proposed development plan, the low point would hold wetlands or a lake instead of houses, he said.

The update to Douglas County's development plan — which covers rural areas in the western part of county — is the first since 1998.

The revisions are intended to identify what types of developments should be put in undeveloped parts of the county, said Kent Holm, the county's environmental services director.

The plan also addresses how the developments should be connected to water and sewer lines and to existing roads, he said.

A public hearing on the plan will be held Wednesday at a

meeting of the Douglas County Planning and Zoning Commission. The meeting is at 6 p.m. at the county offices at 3015 Menke Circle, northwest of 93rd and Maple Streets.

Public input also will be taken before the County Board votes on the plan, probably next month, Holm said.

Shukert said one of the planners' main goals was to create more sustainable development forms, no matter whether houses are close together in neighborhoods or spread farther apart in rural areas.

In areas where compact, suburban-style housing is proposed — generally in areas that lie within the Papillion Creek watershed — the idea is to create a framework in which neighborhoods are connected and where open space and greenways permeate developments, Shukert said.

"It's really much more of a designed environment that's meant to create something a little bit different from a continuation of the trends of the past."

NRD is doing its part on Republican River

BY JASPER FANNING

The writer, of Ogallala, Neb., is general manager of the Upper Republican Natural Resources District.

The irrigators in the Republican River Basin in southwest Nebraska have stepped up to the plate — especially in the Upper Republican Natural Resources District, where stringent allocations were implemented as early as 1978.

The Upper Republican NRD has led the state and, arguably, the nation in implementing local controls to conserve groundwater for the future. Over the past 25 years, this NRD has reduced the allocation of groundwater to the point that the allocation is less than the full irrigation requirement of corn, the predominant crop of the area. This is a difficult task, as economic viability hangs in the balance.

Much like in other rural areas of the state, irrigation development is by far the largest economic development activity that occurs in the Republican River Basin. The Upper Republican NRD stepped up to the plate again when faced with the Republican River compact settlement.

The NRD agreed to further reduce its allocation to 13.5 acre-inches. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources determined this reduction would be sufficient under normal climatic conditions. The one-inch reduction in allocation equates to about 37,500 acre-feet.

Tabulation of meter readings indicate that irrigation withdrawals in the NRD were 15 percent below the amount allocated, which equates to irrigators using about 78,500 acre-feet less than their allocation in 2005.

Unfortunately, it appears that even reductions in irrigation of this magnitude by individual NRDs, in spite of the economic cost, will not increase stream flows to the extent required in the necessary time frame to enable Nebraska to comply with the Republican River compact.

Irrigators in the Upper Republican NRD averaged 11.4 inches of irrigation for each certified acre. This usage figure and those from the previous 25 years are a testament to the fact that irrigators use only what they need. There is no wasting going on in the basin.

Numerous articles have questioned the notion of paying irrigators not to irrigate. While a fair question, the details of the situation also are worthy of discussion.

The programs labeled as "paying irrigators not to irrigate" are designed to assist the state in achieving and maintaining compliance with an interstate compact entered

into by the state.

In fact, the DNR's informational brochure regarding the Republican River compact states, "It is expected that Nebraska should be able to maintain most, if not all, of its existing uses in normal years. In water-short years, which occur 25 percent to 33 percent of the time, Nebraska will have to reduce consumptive use to stay in compliance with the compact."

The physical properties of the aquifer and its connection to the Republican River and its tributaries, combined with the accounting procedures of the settlement, make that compliance difficult during a drought period. It is not as simple as a small reduction in the amount of irrigation water applied.

While the "fair" thing to do would be to limit every irrigator to a small amount, the complexity of the hydrological system and accounting procedures do not allow that simplistic approach to be sufficient to ensure Nebraska's compliance with the compact.

Positive impacts from reducing pumping in upland areas farther from the stream may not be accounted for in the compact for many years, even decades, while the reductions and negative economic impacts are realized immediately.

It's these complexities that make it necessary to target consumptive use reductions as near the stream as possible and make incentive programs an attractive alternative in comparison to regulation.

While Nebraska has several options, only one option agrees with "the Good Life." That option is to employ the solution with the least overall economic cost to the state in terms of compliance with the compact.

That solution could quite possibly include fairly compensating individuals who, because of the complexities of the settlement entered into by the state, are left shouldering the majority of the state's responsibility to reduce depletions to stream flow during drought periods.

The NRDs have taxing and legislative authorities that are too limited to comply with the Republican River compact without assistance from the state. Thus, we are looking to the state for assistance in funding the types of projects that will be necessary to comply with the compact.

We can make the system work. But during times of drought, we must have creative solutions in addition to further regulation to make compliance possible.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 2006 7B

Midlands Voices

Irrigators to negotiate over water release

■ A south-central Nebraska irrigation district will hold talks with the state about releasing its share of water to Kansas.

By DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A south-central Nebraska irrigation district will negotiate with the State of Nebraska over releasing its share of the water in Harlan County Lake down the Republican River to Kansas.

"We know what we'd like if we could write a blank check," Mike Delka, manager of the Red Cloud-based Bostwick Irrigation District, said Friday. "We know what we want our future

to look like, but we don't know if there's any help out there. We have a lot of issues."

The district stores water in Harlan County Lake on the Republican River and delivers it via canals to farmers to irrigate nearly 23,000 acres of cropland. The state is seeking access to this year's supply of water because Nebraska has a legal obligation under a 1943 agreement not to use more than its share of the river.

Nebraska Department of Nat-

ural Resources officials say the state is falling out of compliance with the agreement because of drought and heavy use of underground water in the basin.

After hearing from more than half of its 250 landowners this week, the Bostwick board of directors agreed Friday to continue talks with state officials.

Landowners were not unanimous in their approval to negotiate. Many want to see viable, sustainable flows return to the river, Delka said. Farmers received no water from the district in 2004-05 and didn't expect any this year.

"We had responses ranging from 'Don't talk to them' to 'Yes, and do it quickly' and 'If it's not

worth this much, walk away,'" he said.

No potential price tag has been made public, but it would cost the state about \$2.5 million if the farmers were given \$100 an acre for water that would irrigate crops. Gov. Dave Heineman this week proposed spending \$3.5 million to \$5 million in state and other funds this year to send more water downstream to Kansas and avoid potential penalties.

A final decision by the district on a deal with the state would include a public meeting and a vote by landowners, Delka said.

"We live and die on surface-water irrigation," Delka said. "If you gave me the water, you could keep your money."

Trail, park improvements to get nearly \$1.6 million

1-23-06
By LARRY PORTER

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission approved Friday the allocation of money from four grants totaling nearly \$1.6 million.

Omaha will receive \$109,000 to construct a half-mile concrete trail that will connect the West Papio and Big Papio trails. That money will come from the Recreational Trails Program, a federal fund that receives motor fuel taxes.

That fund also will provide \$45,500 for a 4½-mile equestrian trail parallel to the Mo-Pac trail that will run from Springfield to the Platte River.

The grants and other allocations:

Trail Development Assistance — Chappell: \$15,000, trail from lake to downtown. Bancroft: \$16,335, trail from arboretum to Neihardt Historical Center. York: \$59,903, Mincks Park trail. South Sioux City: \$23,950, trail to connect the Eco Path and Tri-State trail. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission: \$30,000, resurface four-mile section of Cowboy trail near Valentine.

Recreational Trails Program — Chappell: \$147,122, trail north and south sides of Chappell Lake. Columbus: \$119,542, half-mile extension of Pawnee Park East trail. Wolbach: \$64,696, trail skirting Cot-

tonwood Lake. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission: \$137,772, development of 6½-mile trail within the South Shore area of Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area for snowmobile, equestrian, hiking and mountain biking use. Lower Platte South NRD: \$255,100, construction of motocross/BMX track at Abbott Sports Complex in Lincoln. U.S. Forest Service-Halsey Area: \$14,000, renovation of three- or four-mile stretch of Dismal River trail.

Land and Water Conservation — Osmond: \$50,000, poolside park improvement. Lincoln: \$25,000, Pioneers Park playground. Lyman: \$10,600, Sugar Town Park playground. Dorchester: \$16,160, City Park shelter. McCook Junction: \$23,950, softball field. Loup City: \$65,000, Northwest Park project.

State Wildlife Program — \$51,440 for statewide survey of breeding birds; \$31,606 to determine the importance of the Rainwater Basins to the buff-breasted sandpiper and other high-priority shorebirds; \$33,380 to evaluate Platte River wetland restorations; \$35,000 for an easement to permanently protect 160 acres of native tallgrass prairie adjacent to Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie; \$65,000 to improve survey techniques and to provide incentives to private landowners to conserve mountain plovers; \$43,574 to determine the value of playa wetlands to wildlife in southwest Nebraska; \$30,000 to evaluate grassland management for at-risk bird species; \$10,000 to study blue suckers; \$30,000 for surveys of tern and plovers; \$15,000 for partnership with the Nature Conservancy to improve woodland management along the Missouri River; \$5,000 for grassland restoration.

A new lake called peril to wellfield

■ A proposal to dam the Platte River would affect drinking water used by Omaha and Lincoln, MUD's president says.

BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER
1-23-06

A massive lake proposed along the Platte River near Mahoney State Park would flood wellfields for Lincoln and Omaha, resulting in enormous costs to reconnect those water supplies. The impact could be enough, some say, to scuttle the lake proposal.

"The lake as configured in the (newspaper) is not going to happen," said Tom Wurtz, president of the Metropolitan Utilities District in Omaha.

"You can't say you're going to take one-third of the water supply of Omaha and all of the water supply in Lincoln and say you're going to have economic growth — that's not going to happen."

Bing Chen, the University of Nebraska professor who envisions the lake as a catalyst for

economic development, said the costs would be worth it.

"They'd have to move — yes, it's a pain," Chen said of the wellfields. "But given the long-term benefits for the metroplex, that pales in comparison." Chen is chairman of computer and electronics engineering at the Kiewit Institute.

MUD would lose the \$350 million it is investing in a new wellfield and nearby treatment plant, Wurtz said.

The wellfield has been built and the treatment plant is scheduled to begin operating in 2008. The project was designed to meet the Omaha area's water needs for decades to come, accounting for one-third of MUD's total capacity.

Steve Huggenberger, assistant city attorney in Lincoln, said the cost of replacing Lincoln's
See Lake: Page 2

Lake: Omaha's economic growth linked to wellfield

Continued from Page 1

wellfield and treatment plant, if both were flooded, could reach \$1 billion. Virtually all of Lincoln's water comes from the wellfield that would be flooded. A nominal amount comes from another site.

State Sen. Pam Brown of Omaha, who is sponsoring a bill to study the feasibility of the lake, said she thinks engineers can come up with a solution to the problems faced by MUD and the City of Lincoln.

"This is not meant in any way to jeopardize our drinking water," Brown said. "If anything, it's supposed to make things like that better."

The 80-square-mile lake would include residential, com-

mercial and business development on one side and generally natural areas on the other.

Chen said it's the type of project that could help the state retain some of its brightest young people.

"Do you want to be the next Appalachia or do you want to create a vision for yourself?" Chen said. "That's a question eastern Nebraska has to ask itself."

State Sen. Rich Pahlis of Omaha, a co-sponsor of the study proposal, said addressing the issues raised by MUD and Lincoln are the reasons behind the \$3 million study.

"That's why you'd have a study — to find out the good, bad, the ugly," Pahlis said.

Economic growth and expanded recreational opportunities have been touted as among the primary benefits of the lake. A hydroelectric dam also would provide about 50 to 70 megawatts of electricity.

But Wurtz said economic development would be a casualty of flooding the wellfield. The Omaha area cannot grow without that water.

"Maybe a lake would be a good idea," Wurtz said. "But Omaha needs this wellfield for economic growth."

Lake water, Wurtz said, is not a suitable substitute for water from an aquifer.

For one thing, pumping by the cities would affect the lake's level, lessening its attractiveness for recreation, he said.

For another, MUD would be trading a "very pure" water source — the aquifer — for surface water subject to contamination by human activity. Indeed, Wurtz said, reservoirs built for drinking water often restrict human access.

Huggenberger said a look at MUD's political troubles in building its wellfield indicates how difficult it would be for Lincoln to move to another spot along the aquifer. MUD struggled for years to overcome opposition by local landowners and government officials.

"If the question is 'Could we move?' We could probably move," Huggenberger said. "But I don't know if the state is willing to spend that much money to have us move."

MIDLANDS

Money earmarked for wildlife

W-H
1-24-86

The Army Corps of Engineers will spend more than \$54 million this year to protect endangered or threatened species along the Missouri River, the agency announced Monday.

Most of those efforts will focus on restoring habitats for the pallid sturgeon, an endangered fish, and two shorebirds — the interior least tern and piping plover.

The corps will monitor the response of sturgeon to a plan to encourage spawning by releasing water this spring from upstream dams on the Missouri River. — AP

W-H
1-24-06

A great idea

The proposal to dam the Platte River, which would create a giant new lake between Omaha and Lincoln, is worthy of study and serious consideration.

Having spent considerable time on vacation at Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri, I have witnessed the enormous economic impact that such a large body of water creates.

Boat shops, ski shops, marinas, hotels, motels, resorts, restaurants, outlet malls and a myriad of seasonal entertainment venues all are lured to the primary drawing card — the water. This creates hundreds if not thousands of jobs, new income and additional tax revenue.

Having a new "Nebraska coastline" lying between the state's two major metropolitan areas not only would be a boon for tourism but also would help Nebraska keep its best and brightest in our state.

I, for one, would love to put an end to those six-hour drives to Camden County, Mo., and start spending my vacation dollars and other discretionary income on a waterfront cabin 20 minutes from home.

Kevin Penrod, Omaha

Stop this proposal

The proposed dam on the Platte River is a shortsighted idea.

Has anyone considered how the City of Lincoln would get its municipal water supply, given that the current wellfield would be flooded? And don't even think about water-source security with an above-ground reservoir system.

The \$2 billion cost of the project wouldn't even cover the legal battles associated with this idea. Stop it now before another cent is wasted.

Mike Ronkar, Bellwood, Neb.

Not for sailing

The proposed new lake — 22 to 30 miles long, 145 miles of shoreline — along Interstate 80 would be great for the eastern part of Nebraska.

Wow! We could have boat races — model boat races, that is, because the lake would be only about 8 inches deep.

Every Nebraskan knows that the Platte River is almost always a mile wide and an inch deep.

Gene Podany, Omaha

Bring it on

What a great idea.

I have crossed the Platte River while coming home from Nebraska Cornhusker football games for 46 years. I often looked southward to what I always thought would be a great lake site.

I have expressed that idea to every Nebraska governor and senator. Now it looks like we are on the right track.

The end result not only would be a source of water for recreation and power for Omaha, Lincoln and other cities but also a source of drinking water that would keep us from draining our underground aquifers. If the lake were built, I hope managers would allow farmers to pull water from the lake to irrigate their crops (another economic benefit).

Water is essential for our future generations. Don't allow humans to become the endangered species. Bring on the dam.

Warren Hutchinson, Atlantic, Iowa

Where's the source?

Before \$3 million is spent on the study of the environmental impact of the proposed "Lake Ashland," perhaps somebody should determine where the prime ingredient for a lake — namely, water — would come from.

Lake McConaughy is drying up and has been for years.

Gilbert A. Robertson, Gretna, Neb.

Bike racks will be added to buses

By MICHAEL O'CONNOR

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

1-24-06

Commuters and others in the Omaha area soon may be able to ride a bike and a bus on the same trip.

Metro Area Transit hopes to equip nearly all of the 130 buses in its fleet with bike racks. MAT hopes to install them within a year.

The racks attach to the front of the bus and are easy to use, said Curt Simon, MAT's executive director.

Bicyclists just place the bike in the rack and secure the bike with a metal bar.

It will cost about \$120,000 to equip all buses with the racks. MAT intends to use federal funds to cover the cost.

The bike racks have been popular in other cities, Simon said.

Omaha bikers have told MAT of their interest in the racks.

Bikers could ride their bike to a bus stop, or they could ride their bike on a trail, then grab a bus where the trail ends, Simon said.

The bike racks fit well with plans to promote cycling in the Omaha area, said Tammie Dodge, project manager for Activate Omaha.

Activate Omaha is involved in a public awareness campaign about bicycle safety that's planned for this spring.

The idea came out of a workshop last fall aimed at making Omaha a better place for cycling.

The awareness campaign will include presentations to neighborhood and community groups and employees at local businesses, Dodge said.

The safety effort is an important first step in drawing more cyclists onto the streets. She said there are people who would bike to work, but don't think it is safe.

A key part of the effort will be making drivers aware of



Getting Around

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Herald Square,
Omaha, NE
68102. Include
name, address
and day phone.

the rights of bikers in traffic and cyclists aware of their responsibilities.

The safety effort is tied to a goal of creating a citywide bicycle and pedestrian transportation map and guide.

Q&A

Q. Does the City of

Omaha have any plans to change the timing of traffic lights along Harrison Streets? The red lights for east-west traffic on Harrison are too long at 144th, 156th and 168th Streets. The long red lights hurt traffic flow and cause backups during rush hour.

Doug Bradley,
Douglas County

A. The City Traffic Engineering Office says it will review the timing of lights at those intersections.

Street closings

■ Starting Wednesday, 16th Street from Pershing Drive to Ida Street will be closed for repairs required to fix a water-main break. The closure will last three days.

■ Also Wednesday, the 120th Street entrance to eastbound West Dodge Road will be closed. The ramp closure is necessary to pour concrete for the eastbound lanes of the new expressway. The closure will last from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Restrict wells before state does, Schrock warns water managers

■ The state senator's speech to NRD officials comes as the Legislature grapples with related issues.

1-25-06
BY DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — It's time for Nebraskans to consider at least a temporary halt to the drilling of new irrigation wells, State Sen. Ed Schrock said Tuesday.

"I'm an irrigator. I'd be the last one in the state to deny a farmer a chance at an economic future that's evident from drilling an irrigation well," he said. "But I'm to the point where maybe I think we've got enough irrigation wells in this state."

Schrock made his remarks to about 300 members of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts — managers and directors of local natural resources districts who are responsible for managing the state's underground water.

Well-drilling moratoriums are in place in many western and central areas of the state plagued by drought, but drilling is permitted in most eastern regions.

Nebraska has 89,831 active irrigation wells, and University of Nebraska-Lincoln studies indi-

cate the water table has declined. Declines of up to 20 feet in the past five years have been measured in areas with heavy concentrations of irrigation wells.

Schrock, a Holdrege-area farmer and chairman of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee, acknowledged that some would not agree with him.

"It would be nice if you would step in and take control and not have the state do it and not have (LB) 962 do it," he said.

Legislative Bill 962, the water law passed in 2004, integrates the management of groundwater and surface water.

Strong words about water issues also seeped into legislative debate Tuesday.

State Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln introduced an amendment that would give the state the power to restrict pumping from wells dug after Jan. 1, 2001, in the Republican River basin.

"What it really does is shift the power away from the NRDs, which I think have failed," he said.

Beutler said his proposal could not be the only solution to the problem. But he said the Legislature needs to act quickly to pressure the parties involved to make compromises that could lead to a solution.

"You've got to send a message to the people who can make this happen, and you've got to send it this year, and you've got to send it early enough that they can reach a compromise," he said.

Lawmakers adjourned without taking a vote on Beutler's amendment, which was offered to LB 32, an NRD-related measure.

Schrock, in his talk to the water managers, said he opposed Beutler's amendment.

"I'm not so sure Senator Beutler is as interested in passing an amendment as he is in having the discussion on the issue," Schrock said.

In a related development, Nebraska and Kansas officials will tussle Thursday to discuss Nebraska's efforts to comply with the Republican River Compact.

U.S. Reps. Tom Osborne, R-Neb., and Jerry Moran, R-Kan., and Attorneys General Jon Bruning of Nebraska and Phill Kline of Kansas will meet in Concordia, Kan.

World-Herald staff writer Martha Stoddard contributed to this report.

Elwood's fish get more water from the Platte

By LARRY PORTER

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

1-25-06

LINCOLN — Elwood Reservoir's valued fish species, including walleye, muskies, wipers and spotted bass, began receiving water Tuesday that should ensure their survival through the rest of the year.

Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District officials received permission Monday night from the State Natural Resources Department

to override the Platte River's in-stream flow appropriation and began the diversion process Tuesday morning.

Elwood, the state reservoir hardest-hit by the prolonged drought, is currently 43 feet below full pool. It will receive a flow of 190 cubic feet per second through Feb. 15, which is expected to raise the level by 10 to 12 feet.

At this time of year, the Central Platte Natural Resources District owns the right to a flow

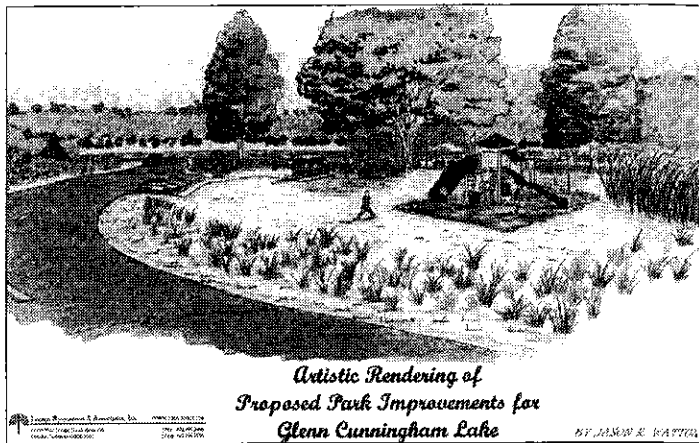
in the river of 500 cubic feet per second from Lexington to Columbus. The Platte's daily flow last week averaged about 600 cfs. The diversion of 190 cfs into Elwood reduces the river's daily average flow below the appropriation, which required Central Platte NRD to waive its right to the water.

"It's a tough decision when you pit one wildlife decision over another," said Larry Hutchinson, a fisheries biologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



*Existing Conditions at
Glenn Cunningham Lake
on 1/13/06*

BY JAMES R. WATTON



*Artistic Rendering of
Proposed Park Improvements for
Glenn Cunningham Lake*

BY JAMES R. WATTON

The current condition of the area on the east side of Cunningham Lake is shown at left. The drawing at right is of proposed improvements.

Compromise plan hailed in road dispute

By RICK RUGGLES

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER
1-25-06

A plan to close Rainwood Road died Tuesday and was replaced by a proposal to gate it at night to deny criminals the cover of darkness in a park on the east side of Cunningham Lake.

Omaha businessman Walter Scott's Centennial Farms altered its request before the Omaha City Council to completely close the road and won council members' praise in the process.

John Boyer, Scott's attorney, suggested Tuesday that Rainwood Road be electronically gated near the lake from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.; that a couple of lights be erected in the park area; that Rainwood just east of the gate become a no-parking zone at night; and that the park area and an access road be improved, triggering what he hopes will be an improvement of facilities all the way around

All sides appear pleased with a plan to close Rainwood Road at night near Cunningham Lake.

Cunningham Lake.

Council members were delighted with the compromise.

Councilman Franklin Thompson alluded to the resentment expressed by neighbors and others that an affluent family might have the clout to close a public road. Thompson said that through the compromise, "a class war has been averted, and we understand that all rich people aren't bad."

Councilman Frank Brown asked the audience, many of whom attended the meeting strictly to see what would happen with the road, if they approved of the compromise. Most raised their hands or clapped. The council unanimously shelved Centennial Farms' initial proposal to close the road.

Scott's Centennial Farms originally had hoped to have Rainwood Road shut down as well as the Cunningham Lake park and access road into which Rainwood Road leads. Attorneys said crack pipes and condoms were found in the park, and obscene messages were scrawled on the outhouse walls.

Scott and two other families related to him live in three homes, one with 24,000 square feet of space and two with about 9,000, in the Rainwood Road vicinity.

Horseback riders, windsurfers, hikers and others said the area provides the best lakeside access. They expressed their contempt for the concept of closing Rainwood Road. Council President Dan Welch two

weeks ago encouraged Scott's attorneys to find a compromise.

Boyer said Tuesday that he arrived at the new plan after discussions with Scott, Mayor Mike Fahey and council members.

He said the cost of implementing the new concept will be calculated over the next few weeks. Boyer said Scott's Centennial Farms would contribute to the project, but it was not clear how much money would be donated.

Councilman Chuck Sigerson praised the Scott family as among the most philanthropic in the city. "In this case," Sigerson said, "we have a wonderful compromise."

Horseback rider Bob Armstrong, who lives near the North Omaha Airport, said he was surprised. "I think it's a wonderful solution," Armstrong said. "It's more than I ever dreamed of."

River dispute flows toward an uncertain conclusion

BY ART HOVEY
Lincoln Journal Star

1-25-06

ALMA — The panoramic landscape painting that dominates one wall of the community center here 180 miles west of Lincoln shows water rushing away from snow-capped mountains and straight at you through a raging stream.

A scene dripping with irrigation potential reinforces the billboard message 50 miles farther east in the Republican River Basin. "Water Is Life" proclaims the foot-tall lettering on a sign outside the Bostwick Irrigation District office at Red Cloud.

But reality in the often-arid area along the Kansas border between Alma and Red Cloud has not been nearly as reassuring or as inspiring lately.

Headed toward another planting season, farming brothers Doug, Bill and Jim Kahrs, their six sons and other irrigators whose corn-growing success depends heavily on irrigation are caught up in a crisis of historic proportions.

One dimension of that crisis has the Kahrses and other users of surface water around Franklin closely monitoring tense, unprecedented and ongoing negotiations between the irrigation district and the Department of Natural Resources in Lincoln. The result

See RIVER, Page 2A

River

Continued from Page 1A

could release Republican water from the already badly depleted Harlan County Reservoir to fend off a Kansas lawsuit.

"I'm not mad," said Doug Kahrs, 69, during a rumbling pickup tour over gravel roads and through the snowless river bottom where no corn has been grown for the past two years. "I'm concerned for these boys' future."

One big reason for concern is that, after four decades of irrigating with Republican water, this could become the third year in a row in which the irrigation district will have no canal releases to offer the Kahrs family and 250 other customers.

The Republican is a mere trickle obscured by hundreds of yards of brown reeds along U.S. 183 on Alma's western outskirts.

The reservoir fed by the river is down 17 feet from its outlet point near Republican City. It has retreated at least a mile from the highway that normally forms its farthest western boundary.

As the Nebraska Legislature scrambles for longer-term answers that would help make up a deficit in Kansas' share of water, the Kahrses know they might be voting soon on a stop-gap measure.

It calls for a one-year relinquishment of water supply to the state that would flow into Kansas near Superior.

Eleven miles below the dam, in an area where five generations of Kahrses have carved out their agricultural livelihood, Kahrs has yet to hear any numbers that he regards as adequate financial compensation from the state for a move that might lower the lake 18 inches.

Although he wouldn't disclose any proposed figures, "they've got to do better than that," he said.

At least as frustrating, from his vantage point, is the absence of a long-range strategy from the state for the basin's future.

"We hear a lot of options, talks, but we don't hear anything about a

long-range plan," Kahrs said.

West from Red Cloud, the view along U.S. 136 is of mostly dry stream beds, sagging barns, rusting grain trucks and ranging cows that often provide the only sign of life between one hill and the next.

The occasional car or truck typically hurries through tiny towns — Inavale, Riverton, Franklin, Bloomington — without stopping.

At Alma, population 1,200, the shrunken lake also has lessened the town's appeal as a resort. And banker Scott Johnson keeps hearing a familiar question as he and his farmer-customers look at cash flows and the early details of credit renewals.

"The general question is how do we plan for 2006?" Johnson said. "The unfortunate thing, even today, is that we do not have an answer to that."

Beginning with last year, groundwater irrigators in the Alma-based Lower Republican Natural Resources District also moved into uncharted territory. Under new allocation rules, wells in Harlan and surrounding counties can draw only a dozen or fewer inches per growing season.

A well-drilling moratorium is also in place to prevent the sucking effect of more groundwater pumping on surface water levels.

Because of timely rains last year, many area farmers got by with 7 or 8 inches of well water. But if 2006 stays as dry as it is now, the pressure to pump more heavily from existing wells could get a lot more intense by July.

The impact passes quickly to main street in an area that relies so heavily on agriculture.

"You lie awake a lot at night thinking about it," Johnson said.

Richard McClymont, one of the partners in Landmark Implement

Inc. at Holdrege, insisted that area water woes were not responsible for the decision to close the Alma John Deere outlet Jan. 1 and to pare back from five area locations to four.

"However," McClymont added, "water issues down the road are definitely going to impact all of us, and we need to find out from our gubernatorial candidates what their stance is."

At a time when grain prices are low and the prices of fuel and fertilizer are high, Johnson said a return to economic conditions as severe as the 1980s farm crisis could be as few as 12 to 18 months away.

"We may revisit the mid-1980s all over again."

With so much at stake, Johnson is among many drawn into debates about how much of the cost of this water crisis should be borne by those who live in the river basin and how much of it should be shouldered by the state.

Johnson is also among those who see parallels between the Republican River water compact and Kansas and Nebraska's 2005 payment of \$145.8 million to the Central Interstate Low-Level Waste Compact.

That payment resolved a long-standing legal dispute that arose with the state's refusal to host a nuclear waste dump in Boyd County.

"I guess we're asking for help, too, then," Johnson said.

How much help the Legislature will provide was far from clear as the deadline for bills arrived last week and lawmakers began hearings on ideas that made it beyond that point.

No senator has followed through on a recommendation from the Governor's Water Policy Task Force that called for a statewide vote on dedicating a portion of the state sales tax to a water incentive fund. A primary purpose for such a fund, as seen through task force eyes, would be to pay farmers not to irrigate.

Also out of the hearings picture is a proposal from Lincoln Sen. Chris Beutler that would have imposed what Beutler called "a water

conservation fee" on irrigated land on a per-acre basis and on municipalities on a per-capita basis.

Still in the picture is Gov. Dave Heineman's plan to spend about \$3.5 million on water issues along the Platte and Republican rivers.

Mike Clements, general manager of the Alma-based Lower Republican Natural Resources District, isn't too impressed with the state's water response.

"Grasping at straws," he responded when asked about potential impact. "Grasping at short-term straws."

Terry Woollen, a groundwater irrigator four miles north of Alma thinks he and his peers eventually will be faced with even stiffer water conservation measures.

"I think the allocation will probably eventually have to be lowered," Woollen said, "especially during drought times. And that's difficult to swallow, because that's when we need the water the most."

Campbell farmer Nelson Trambley, a member of the Governor's Water Policy Task Force, expects the state to step up to a much greater extent than it has so far.

"The state of Nebraska signs this compact," Trambley said. "The state of Nebraska is responsible for this compact."

If all irrigated land in the Republican River Basin reverted to unirrigated status, it would cut a tax valuation of about \$2.1 billion in half, I said.

"We're not trying to fight it state. We just want to retain our little economy down here."

Franklin-area farmer Doug Kahrs offers an upbeat message about Harlan County Reservoir.

"One of these years, it's going to fill," he said. "Every year that goes is a year closer."

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



CLEMENTS



JOHNSON

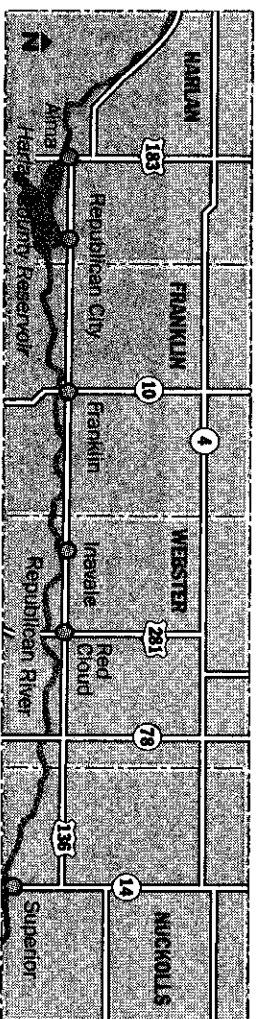


ART HOVEY/Lincoln Journal Star

Corn producer Nelson Trambley of Campbell, a member of the Governor's Water Policy Task Force, says loss of irrigation in the Republican River Basin would cut total tax valuation of about \$1.2 billion in half.

Republican River water battle

Drought, irrigation and other factors have lowered the Republican River so much that it may violate a river compact with Kansas. Farmers in the valley who have irrigated with the river's water for four decades may have to go without irrigation for the third year in a row.



What's at stake

What's happened? A combination including drought, heavy irrigation pumping and conservation measures that hold back runoff into the Republican River and its tributaries has put Nebraska at risk of violating the terms of a river compact with Kansas. Legal action could follow as soon as 2007.

What's at stake? If Nebraska can't find a way to improve the Republican flow and appease Kansas, it could face substantial financial damages. Colorado paid Kansas \$34.6 million last year as a result of a similar dispute involving the Arkansas River.

What's next? The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and the Boswick Irrigation District at Alma are negotiating a proposal that could pay Boswick's irrigators a fee to relinquish water from the Republican's Harlan County Reservoir for one year to temporarily boost the Kansas outlook. "We're waiting on them for some information at this point," Boswick Manager Mike Delia said of his state counterparts Monday. Other possibilities as unusual as pumping Platte River water into the Republican also have been discussed.

MATT VAN DRIEST/Lincoln Journal Star

Firms show interest in pedestrian bridge

■ Omaha officials expect 3 or 4 teams to compete for the long-delayed project.

1-26-06

By C. DAVID KOTOK

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Omaha city officials feared that no one would be interested in building the long-delayed pedestrian bridge over the Missouri River.

A sense of relief filled the City Hall conference room Wednesday when more than 20 people from construction, engineering and architectural firms came to a meeting called to gauge interest in the \$22 million project.

"It's always better when you have more than one company interested," said Jennifer Mahlendorf, deputy chief of staff to Mayor Mike Fahey.

Based on Wednesday's response and the technical questions asked, Mahlendorf said she expects that three or four teams will compete to design and build the pedestrian bridge.

The project has drawn praise as a potential exclamation

mark on the riverfront development and criticism as an example of a pork-barrel project with little value. In 2000, then-Sen. Bob Kerrey won \$19 million in federal funding for the bridge.

If all goes as planned, final design work and construction could begin this summer on the link between pedestrian and bicycle paths in Omaha and Council Bluffs. That would put the project two years behind the original construction date.

There is no longer a preconceived design for the bridge. Plans have been abandoned for a curved suspension bridge with twin spires.

But city officials still will be looking for more than a steel and concrete slab over the Missouri River that would match the nondescript I-480 and I-80 spans.

"The bottom line is we want a visual icon for the city,"

See *Bridge*: Page 2

Bridge: Interested firms from area, other states

Continued from Page 1
Mahlendorf said.

Design will play a much bigger role than price in selecting a company to build the bridge.

According to the city's request for proposals, a selection committee will base 45 percent of its decision on the design, including its "aesthetic and visual impact."

Thirty percent of the evaluation will be based on the team's qualifications and experience.

The specifications set a cost limit of \$22 million but a price below that cap is worth only 5 percent on the evaluation. Various technical factors also will be used in the evaluation.

The committee will recommend a design to Fahey, who will make the final decision.

The original bridge design was scrapped after initial bids came back at \$45 million in March 2004, double the expected cost. Attempts to make the original design work and re-

bid it failed when all indications pointed to cost overruns.

The city adopted the less traditional approach of seeking design and construction proposals at a set price. Mahlendorf declined to name any of the companies represented at the meeting. She said those who expressed an interest were both Omaha-based and out-of-state firms.

The city has set a timeline for the selection process:

■ March 29: Companies sub-

mit their proposals, and the committee begins to evaluate their designs.

■ April 10 through 14: Companies are individually interviewed about their designs.

■ April 28: The committee recommends a design and a construction team to Fahey.

■ May-June: Fahey makes his selection.

■ June-July: The selected team receives formal notice to begin a final design, site preparation and construction.

Beutler seeks to revive irrigator fee proposal

1-26-06

By MARTHA STODDARD
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — A Lincoln lawmaker is trying to revive his proposal for making irrigators pay for managing the state's water resources.

State Sen. Chris Beutler filed a motion Wednesday to bring Legislative Bill 930 out of committee for debate by the full Legislature.

The bill would establish annual fees on irrigated land and municipal water systems. Each would pay a total proportionate to their water use.

At \$2 per acre and \$1 per city resident, the fees would raise about \$17.3 million. The money would go to a Water Conservation Cash Fund and be used for managing groundwater and sur-

NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE 2006

face water in the state.

Beutler's attempt to revive the bill requires 30 votes, a tough standard because the Natural Resources Committee has already killed the bill.

Committee members voted 7-0 to drop the bill shortly after its public hearing last week.

Beutler vowed to be persistent in bringing up water issues during this legislative session.

He said he will push those inside and outside the Legislature to address the state's obligations

under a compact with Kansas over water in the Republican River basin. One study has suggested that the state could owe Kansas \$15 million in damages.

Earlier Wednesday, Beutler withdrew an amendment that would have given the state authority to regulate pumping from wells drilled in the Republican basin after Jan. 1, 2001.

Anyone who put in a well after that date should have been aware that they were doing so at their own risk, he said. State law also allows natural resources districts to impose different regulations on wells dug after that date.

Sen. Ed Schrock of Elm Creek argued against Beutler's amendment, saying NRDs that took no action to curb pumping are paying the price now. Water alloca-

tions in the Lower Republican NRD are the lowest in the state, he said.

Schrock has proposed creating a water management program to help pay for the work required of NRDs under the Nebraska Ground Water Management and Protection Act.

The proposal has been advanced by the Natural Resources Committee as an amendment to Legislative Bill 933, which makes several technical changes to state water law.

Schrock also has introduced bills that would allow NRDs to levy another 3 cents of property tax per \$100 of assessed valuation and appropriate \$10 million of state general funds. Both bills would direct the money for use in water management.

Imperiled by its own popularity

BY TIM KNOTT

As president of Friends of the Niobrara Inc., a citizens organization dedicated to the preservation of the scenic qualities and natural beauty of the Niobrara River Valley, I would like to take this opportunity to inform my fellow Nebraskans (those who may not already be aware) of a natural treasure that lies in our back yard in the northern part of the state.

The National Park Service, in its recent publication of the Draft Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Niobrara Natural Scenic River, points out for us here in Nebraska just what we have in this place. I quote directly from that document: "The archeological and recreational significance of the Niobrara Valley is unmatched elsewhere in the Great Plains."

Further in this document, it declares this area to be of awesome beauty and diversity, easily recognized by citizens and scientists alike, an area of high sandstone cliffs and more than 200 waterfalls flowing into the untamed Niobrara, an area of flora and fauna diversity that is unequaled anywhere else in Nebraska. "The Niobrara River Valley helps to define what is Nebraska, but it is indeed a national treasure whose significance runs far beyond the state's borders."

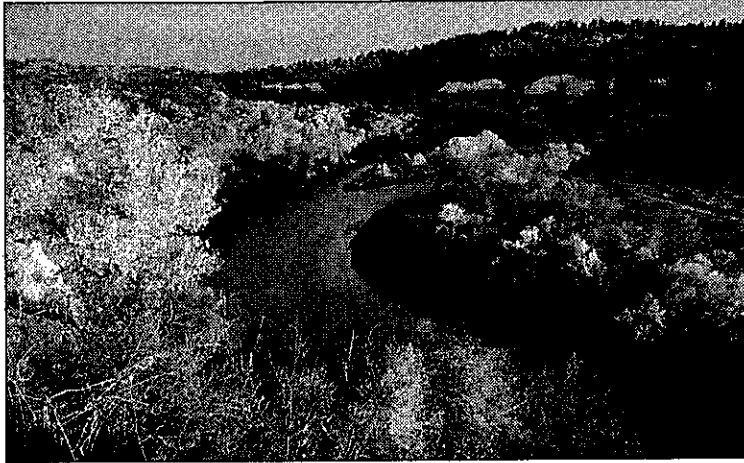


IMAGE COPYRIGHT MICHAEL FORSBERG

Nebraska's Niobrara River Valley offers natural wonders in the forms of water, plants and wildlife.

As one who has canoed its waters, who has stood by the many waterfalls and marveled at their wonders, who has walked its woodland and prairie trails and who has enjoyed its magnificent plant and wildlife populations, I can tell you that everything in the Park Service document describing the beauty and unique qualities of the Niobrara River is true.

But there is a peril in all this wonder and beauty that is the Niobrara; it is a slow and progressive one. As people discover the Niobrara,

they want to claim it as their own, build cabins, second homes and other types of development, not just leaving the mild footprints that are suggested from one's coming to enjoy beauty in natural places.

What we do in the next five years in the Niobrara River Valley will set its course for the next 100 years. We can keep this valley in its natural condition for future generations to enjoy as we have enjoyed it, or we can do nothing and let it turn slowly into one house after

LOCAL VIEW

another up and down the valley, as has befallen other wild and scenic rivers and other natural landscapes.

Although the Niobrara River itself enjoys the protection of the Wild and Scenic River Act, most of the land in the valley is privately owned. Management alternatives B and C of the Draft Management Plan call for procuring land under the Scenic River Act on a willing seller agreement by conservation easements — a program to keep the land in farming and ranching by buying development rights from the landowner.

Friends of the Niobrara supports Preferred Management Alternative B and feels that the National Park Service Draft Management Plan is the best way to protect the natural beauty and environmental integrity of the Niobrara River Valley and urges the support of Nebraskans.

Anyone wishing to read all or parts of the Draft Management Plan should consult the National Park Service Web site: www.nps.gov/niob.

Tim Knott of Lincoln received the Outstanding Conservationist Award from Nebraska Wildlife Federation in 2005.

LJS
1/25/06

'Spring rise' releases OK'd for Missouri River

WWT 2/1/06

■ Some Midlands farmers fear the pulses could create flooding problems.

By HENRY J. CORDES
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The federal government is moving ahead with plans to release more water into the Missouri River to aid an ancient, endangered fish. Now it's up to nature to decide whether the releases become a reality this spring.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gave final approval Tuesday to its plan to alter dam releases to produce two high-water pulses on the river.

Biologists have said the "spring rise" — intended to mimic the river's natural flow before it was dammed for navigation and flood control — is critical to survival of the endangered pallid sturgeon.

But the releases remain contingent on there being sufficient water stored in upstream reservoirs. That's intended to appease concerns of recreation interests in the Dakotas and Montana, where years of drought have dropped the man-made water bodies to histori-

cally low levels.

At this point, reservoirs are just short of the 36.5 million acre-feet of water required for the releases. More snow or rain on the Plains and solid runoff from Rockies snowpack will be needed to do it this year.

"It's going to be close," said Paul Johnston, a spokesman for the corps in Omaha.

If reservoir levels fall short of the target, the spring pulses will be pushed back to 2007. Either way, he said, the corps remains committed to the pulses.

The pulses would raise river levels less than 3 feet, far below what would cause flooding for communities on the river.

But the releases are expected to raise ire with farmers along the river's fertile banks. They worry that the releases could exacerbate flooding they sometimes see after major storms.

Corps arguments that the proposed spring rises are far smaller and of much shorter duration than previous proposals have not appeased foes.

"We see this as a foot in the door," said Randy Asbury, director of the Coalition to Protect the Missouri River, a Missouri-based group. "We will see higher and longer releases in the future, which we find very troubling."

DWH 2/1/06

Farm Service Agency tries again

PRINCE FREDERICK, Md. (AP) — A proposal to consolidate local farm offices, hastily scrapped last year amid outrage from farmers and Congress, is being pushed again as an effort to modernize a Depression-era network.

This time, officials are promising to be much less aggressive — even as they note that the offices have too few trained employees and that some computers are so old they can't connect to the Internet.

"I sincerely believe we can restructure and do a better job," Teresa Lasseter, the new Farm Service Agency administrator, said in an interview. "I don't want to close offices just to be closing offices. The only reason we would be closing offices is to provide better service."

No changes will happen without public hearings and talks with Congress, she said. State-level officials will have significant control over where cuts are made, she said.

The local office is essential to a farmer's bottom line. Producers must visit there to sign up for an array of government payments and loans.

More than 2,300 counties — virtually every rural U.S. county — have a Farm Service Agency Office. But having an office is no guarantee that it will be open on a given day or that a farmer will find answers in a single visit.

A business wouldn't operate that way, said Keith Widdow-



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Teresa Lasseter, the USDA's new Farm Service Agency administrator, says no offices will close without public hearings. She is seeking to improve service through a proposed consolidation of local offices.

son, who runs the offices in Maryland's Somerset and Worcester Counties. The offices, 18 miles apart, have two employees each.

At each office, if one staffer leaves, the other must juggle farmers lined up at the counter and tend the phones alone — and be an expert on dozens of different programs.

"It's not an efficient way to run the office," Widdowson said. "It worked years ago, when we had enough staff, but not anymore."

Merging might mean a longer drive for some farmers, but the result would be better, faster service, he said.

Amy Farrell worries about merging the offices she runs in Calvert and St. Mary's Counties because some producers

then would face a 90-minute drive. Still, she is reassured that state-level officials, not Washington bureaucrats, are being asked to design an overhaul.

"We've built up a good trust with all our farmers and producers, and if we can understand why we may have to consolidate, we can make the farmers understand why we have to consolidate," Farrell said.

Washington bureaucrats issued the order last fall that 713 offices, more than 30 percent, would have to close. Maryland and five other states — Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia — would have seen the biggest cuts, with 40 percent or more offices closed.

In Congress, word leaked before most lawmakers were briefed. They reacted with alarm, passing legislation that blocked any closures without public hearings or notice to Congress.

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, a former Nebraska governor and Lasseter's boss, said there won't be consolidation without involvement from lawmakers.

"We'll work with Congress. We heard the message, and we heard it loud and clear," he told reporters recently.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, said he is cautious but open to the idea.

"I never said no to reorganization last year," he said. "I only said what a screwy way of bringing this to our attention."

Water official warns of 'decline'

2-2-06

By DAVID HENDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

When water use in western Nebraska's Platte River basin is rolled back in coming years, the reduction cannot be allowed to wound the economy, a regional panel was told Wednesday.

"We can't afford economic decline. It's extremely important that we maintain and, if possible, enhance the economy," said Ron Cacek, manager of the North Platte Natural Resources District at Gering.

Cacek presented his district's plan Wednesday to integrate the management of surface water and underground water in the drought-stressed region. He spoke to local and state officials meeting about the issue in North Platte, Neb.

A 2004 state law requires

**Restrictions in the
Platte River basin
must not damage
the economy, a
Gering NRD
manager says.**

state and local water agencies to develop a basinwide plan to restore the balance between water use and supply and to address water conflicts and inequities across western and part of central Nebraska. The plan must return water use to 1997 levels and move toward balancing supply and demand.

The Platte basin upstream from Elm Creek — essentially the river's watershed in the western half of Nebraska — has suffered a half-decade of drought, and existing water uses exceed the supply.

The North Platte Natural Resources District's proposal includes continuing to ban well-drilling and irrigation expansion, developing rules for transferring groundwater within and out of the district, and eradicating invasive plants choking river channels.

The proposal responds to one offered in December by the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

Central's proposal suggested, in part, that some western Nebraska irrigators pump less groundwater to improve flows in the North Platte River and improve inflows into the district's primary reservoir, Lake McConaughy near Ogallala.

Cacek said Central's plan is more focused on its needs than the basin's needs.

Funds sought to make water law work

■ State Sen. Ed Schrock urges a \$10 million appropriation for the management system.

By MARTHA STODDARD
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — Nebraska's system for managing surface and groundwater resources will work only if there is enough money to fund it, a state lawmaker said Wednesday.

Toward that end, State Sen. Ed Schrock of Elm Creek urged the Legislature's Appropriations Committee to put \$10 million of state funds into helping natural resources districts carry out their responsibilities.

"The one message I heard from the State Water Policy Task Force more than anything is that (Legislative Bill) 962 is no good without adequate funding," Schrock said, referring to the 2004 bill that created the state's management system.

The \$10 million that Schrock proposes would be for fiscal year 2006-07, although he said it could be spread over two or three years.

The request would be on top of the \$3.2 million in new spending for water management that Gov. Dave Heineman has in-

cluded in his budget recommendation.

Appropriations Committee members questioned whether the state should foot the bill for problems created when irrigators use more water than nature can sustain.

State Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln, who has proposed charging a fee to irrigators and other water users to pay for water management, raised many of the questions.

The state bears the legal responsibility for water agreements with other states, yet local natural resources districts make decisions about water allocations. Then those districts come to the state seeking money to carry out their responsibilities, he said.

"We need to create some incentives down there where the state doesn't come in and bail them out every five years," Beutler said.

Schrock said farmers already pay a heavy property tax burden in Nebraska, heavier than in surrounding states. He also said irrigation benefits the entire state by adding to the economy.

NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE 2006

The \$10 million request is part of a legislative package suggested by the Water Policy Task Force, he said.

One piece of that package, LB 805, would use the \$10 million to create a grant program to help resources districts carry out water management responsibilities. The grants would require a 20 percent match from the district. LB 805 has been advanced by the Natural Resources Committee.

A second bill would raise the maximum property tax levy by 3 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation for resources districts in areas where all available water is spoken for.

Ann Bleed, acting director of the Natural Resources Department, said the additional property taxes could be used as a match for state funds.

Part of the governor's budget recommendation calls for \$2 million to aid resources districts in carrying out water management plans. The intent is

for local districts to match each \$1 in state funds with \$2 of local funds, Bleed said.

Some of the state aid could be used to buy water in the Harlan County Lake from the Bostwick Irrigation District and release it downstream to help Nebraska meet its obligations to Kansas.

Nebraska agreed to a legal settlement with Kansas and Colorado in 2002 over water in the Republican River basin. The agreement ended a lawsuit Kansas brought based on a 1943 compact.

Bleed said the governor's budget recommendation only addresses the state's most immediate water management needs. Most of the money would be spent trying to bring the state into compliance with the Kansas settlement.

The governor's budget recommendation also includes money for three new staff members for the Natural Resources Department — one to review requests for transferring irrigation permits from one well to another and two to work on studying groundwater patterns and flows.

The Appropriations Committee took no immediate action on either Schrock's proposal or the governor's budget recommendation.