



From the Coordinator...

Monthly Report for the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance for January 2008

Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator

- **\$100,000 NETF Grant:** We just learned that our application for a \$100,000 grant from the NE Environmental Trust Fund (NETF) to carry out Phase II & III of the Environmental Suitability Assessment (ESA) project was preliminarily approved. There will be a public hearing on April 3rd, 2008 to take public comments on the preliminary recommendations and the funding will become available shortly thereafter barring any changes to the recommendations. This was the third time we submitted for this project. However, the project has changed since our first submission and we were able to show how the ESA is a very important and unique project this time around. In the past, there was some confusion on the part of the reviewers that we were duplicating other efforts such as those carried out by the NE Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) and the Joslyn Castle Institute (JCI). I was clear to point out in this application that all of these efforts actually give us a complete picture and fulfill a unique role in protection/management of the Lower Platte River Corridor. Go to the NETF website and click on the link on the left that reads, "2008 Preliminary Grant Recommendations" for a complete listing of 2008 recommendations or click [here](#) on the online version of this report.
- **River Obstruction Removal Project Article:** On Sunday, we had a nice article in the Lincoln Journal Star Newspaper on the Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project. I have included a copy with this report minus the photos.
- **LPRCA Quarterly Meeting:** On Thursday, February 7th, 2008, the LPRCA held a quarterly meeting at the LPNNRD. The meeting went very well and we covered many topics including the project updates, the FY09 budget, and this year's major events – airboat tour, WQ Open, and the LPR Summit. A couple of items that emerged from the budget discussion: (1) at the request of a couple of the agencies themselves, we plan to ask for an increase in their contributions in the amount of \$7,000 up from the \$5,416.67 we have requested for the past 7 years, and (2) We would like to begin banking funds for the next River Obstruction Removal Project (probably Two Rivers State Rec Area) in the amount of \$20,000 per NRD. This amount can be somewhat offset with a reduction in administrative contributions (if agencies agree to give \$7,000 rather than \$5,416.67) and reduction in ESA contributions due to the NETF grant award. We will not be able to eliminate all requests for the ESA from the NRDs since some of that is required to carry out the project and we must have a match for the grant funds. The next LPRCA quarterly meeting will be April 29th, 2008 at the NG&PC office in Lincoln (UNL East Campus) starting at 9:30 a.m.
- **NE Land Trust (NLT) Grant:** Looks like 2nd time is a charm for the NLT in regard to a grant submission to the NE Environmental Trust Fund (NETF). The NETF preliminarily recommended the NLT's Schramm Bluffs Preservation Project in the amount of \$1.1 million to work with landowners using conservation easements. Together with the ESA project we are undertaking and other efforts such as the NE Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) regional planning and the Joslyn Castle Institute (JCI) Metroplex project, we are finding ways to protect the LPR Corridor.

- **WQ Monitoring Network – Shell Creek Site:** At last month's LPNNRD Project Committee meeting, the USGS attended and proposed two projects: 1) monitoring/sampling of Shell Creek for 2008 which would require up to \$30,000 local match from the LPNNRD, and 2) monitoring/sampling of Shell Creek in 2009 through a USDA program that would not require any match but some in-kind. The LPRCA would serve as the applicant for this 2nd project with the LPNNRD serving as fiscal agent. In regard to the second project, the USGS did not get the application submitted in time to qualify. However, there may be another grant program that can provide funding for additional monitoring/sampling of Shell Creek with no required dollar match from the NRD or LPRCA. We would only be asked to provide some outreach and education. I will keep you updated on this issue.
- **3 NRD Meeting to Discuss LPRCA:** The LPRCA held a joint 3 NRD meeting on January 22nd, 2008 at Mahoney State Park as a part of a strategic planning effort. With 35 attendees, the meeting was a great success and attendees decided that we should hold this joint meeting annually. The meeting started with a review of the LPRCA's mission, goals, programs, projects, and a little history of the organization. Attendees then reviewed a comparison of programs/projects/activities to the mission/goals and to the "8 Reasons." We also considered alternative titles for the "8 Reasons" to see if existing categories/titles really cover the important issues or whether they need to be changed. A short survey was also handed out to gather input on existing activities. A copy is included with this report and I would like to have those who did not make the joint meeting to fill out and return to me ASAP. I will summarize all of this info for review at our 6-year strategic planning meeting later this year.
- **Cumulative Impact Study (CIS):** The COE had some delays again and they were unable to complete assigned activities/tasks, so the January 30th partner meeting was delayed until February 21st at 10 am at the LPSNRD in Lincoln. At this meeting, we will review the latest draft of the final Phase II report.
- **Environmental Suitability Assessment (ESA):** We continued to meet with jurisdictions in the Phase II area (Fremont to Plattsmouth) over the past month including Lincoln Water System (LWS), Plattsmouth, Cass County, and Sarpy County. We still need to meet with: Fremont / Inglewood and Saunders County. We have also been working on creating the environmental features layers to use in the McHargian analysis as well as drafting the Phase II report. Phase III will kick off later this spring or summer where we will conduct the needs assessment and meet with local jurisdictions from Fremont upstream.
- **UNL Class Presentation & Tour:** Recently, I assisted with a UNL Honors Water Class that is studying the Lower Platte River Basin. In addition to giving a presentation on the LPRCA and the basin, I helped plan and lead a tour around in the basin. Several students are considering conducting projects on various aspects and issues associated with the LPR Basin.
- **Coffee Shop Meetings:** I have proposed a rather ambitious schedule of 17 coffee shop meetings throughout the Corridor for this year to meet and greet residents of the Corridor in an informal setting. We plan to furnish coffee and rolls/doughnuts for an hour at each location and take a few minutes to talk about river issues and gather input. Most likely we will need to split between this spring and this fall/winter to hold them all. I am looking for assistance from NRD directors and staff who can assist in helping to host the meetings. Erv Bull with the LPNNRD has already helped arrange a meeting in Yutan at Jeris's Café on February 29th, 2008 starting at 8:45a.m. Other proposed locations include: Columbus, Bellwood, Schuyler, Linwood, North Bend, Morse Bluff,

Cedar Bluffs, Fremont / Inglewood, Valley, Waterloo, Gretna, Ashland, Louisville, Springfield, Cedar Creek, and Plattsmouth. If you can help out call me at (402) 429-0334. Leave a message and phone number if I cannot answer and I will return your call.

- **Outreach & Education Programs:** We have decided to hold 3 major events this year: the Airboat Tour on July 18th (upper section of river – Fremont upstream), WQ Open Golf Tourney on September 4th (featuring LPRCA members with demos on various holes), and the Lower Platte River Summit on November 6th with the preferred location at Camp Calvin Crest in Fremont. I am looking for assistance for these events since this will require considerable time. The steering committee for the summit met on February 12th at the LPSNRD and began hashing out the details of the event.
- **Conference Presentations:** I will be making several presentations over the next several months. These include: NE Planning & Zoning Association in GI on February 20th – LPRCA ESA Project; Wetland & Watershed Conference in KC on April 7th to 11th – LPRCA Programs & Projects; and River Management Society (RMS) Biennial Conference in Portland, ME on May 11th to 15th – 2 presentations: one on the LPRCA and the other on project management to protect rivers.
- **Other Items of Interest:**
 - **LPNNRD Board of Directors Meeting** – Feb 11th, 2008 * 5:30 pm * Wahoo
 - **P-MRNRD Board of Directors Meeting** – Feb 14th, 2008 * 8 pm * Omaha
 - **LPSNRD Board of Directors Meeting** – Feb 20th, 2008 * 2 pm * Lincoln
 - **Meeting with Omaha District of the COE to discuss WRDA** – Feb 27th, 2008 * 2 pm * P-MRNRD in Omaha.
 - **LPRCA Quarterly Meeting** – April 29th, 2008 * 9:30 am * NG&PC in Lincoln
 - **LPRCA Airboat Tour** – July 18th, 2008 * 9 am – 4 pm * Upper stretch of LPR. Details to come.
 - **WQ Open Golf Tournament** – Sept 4th, 2008 * Quarry Oaks Golf Course – near South Bend * 10 am presentation/demo * 12:30 pm shotgun start * Demos on course featuring each of the 9 LPRCA members.
 - **Lower Platte River Summit** – November 6th, 2008 * Noon to 8 pm * Camp Calvin Crest (tentative) in Fremont. Details to come.

Hazardous pilings, piers removed from river at Camp Ashland

*BY ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS / Lincoln Journal Star
Saturday, Feb 09, 2008 - 11:53:18 pm CST*

With their shaved tips, the wood pilings pulled out of the Platte River near Camp Ashland looked like giant pencils.

The well-preserved pilings were once used to support an old bridge — one of several across the Platte River — near that location. The wood pilings, some at least 30 feet long, could be close to 100 years old.

The wood pilings were sunk 20 to 30 feet in the river bottom to stabilize a bridge. Workers also found concrete piers, encased in steel, in the vicinity and similar cylindrical concrete objects, weighing more than 9 tons, laying on their sides.

The Lower Platte River Corridor, a group working to preserve the long-term vitality of the river, spent two years and about \$600,000 removing all of the submerged structures about one-half mile north of the U.S. 6 bridge.

The project was paid for by three natural resources districts — Lower Platte North, Lower Platte South and Papio-Missouri, the Nebraska Military Department and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

The submerged pilings and piers were removed for safety reasons, said the group's coordinator, Rodney Verhoeff. When water levels drop in the river, as they often do in the summer, the wood pilings and concrete piers are closer to the surface. Airboats have sustained thousands of dollars in damage, he said.

Worse, a person drowned near Louisville years ago when a canoe was pushed against a piling near the Nebraska 50 bridge by the force of the river flow.

The wood pilings and concrete piers also contribute to ice jams that back up water and cause floods in low-lying areas, Verhoeff said.

Removing the submerged structures near the National Guard's Camp Ashland wasn't easy. Workers had to build a coffer dam around the obstructions, pump out the water, then use a cutting torch to slice through the metal casing of each concrete pier.

"They were huge," said Verhoeff; each concrete pier measured 4 feet in diameter.

Workers used backhoes and other heavy equipment to extract the structures from the river. When the work was done, a dozen concrete piers and 11 wood pilings had been removed over a two-year period.

Alliance members praised the project at their quarterly meeting in Wahoo on Thursday. Several members noted that when they see or hear of such work being done, it shows them that something is being done to "fix" the Platte River.

Said Mike Jess, with the University of Nebraska Conservation and Survey Division: "It is very tangible. It's something people can see."

The obstruction removal project near Camp Ashland was the second such project for the alliance, which is made up of three NRDs and six state agencies.

In 2005, the group undertook a pilot project to remove old railroad and bridge pilings in the Platte River near Louisville. They spent \$380,000 to take out 20 concrete clusters of pilings and 400 wood pilings.

"It was a mess," Verhoeff said, noting that many of the concrete pilings had iron rebar poking out of the sides.

The group has identified 10 more spots with such obstructions in a 110-mile river corridor from Columbus to Plattsmouth.

Verhoeff told alliance members that money is not available to do any more piling removal this year, but several alliance members urged him to try to obtain funding for an additional project.

Submerged pilings near the Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Venice are next in line for removal, Verhoeff said. A survey has identified 31 clusters, with seven wood pilings in each, at that location, plus 19 concrete pilings.

"I've seen kids playing on them," he said.

Reach Algis J. Laukaitis at 402-473-7243 or alaukaitis@journalstar.com.

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- **Do you agree with the categories of the “8 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River” or should we re-categorize (change a particular category)? If yes, what category should be changed and to what?**

- **What else can the LPRCA staff do to better communicate activities and issues to LPRCA members (i.e. other than existing means)?**

- **What do you feel is the top issue the LPRCA should be working to address (i.e. water quality, flood control/reduction, river restoration, land use planning, habitat, T&E species, climate change, etc)?**

- **What does the LPRCA do well? Are there any programs/projects/activities that really stick out in your mind of a job well done?**

- **General comments:**