

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager Report

DATE: July 7, 2008

FROM: John Winkler, General Manager

- A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities for the month of June, 2008, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**
1. **District Accountant Retires:** Jack Lawless, District Accountant, has retired from his position as of June 27, 2008. We are in the process of hiring both a District Accountant position and the Senior Accounting position. In the meantime, Roxanne Pfeiffer will be filling in the accounting department.
- 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 May, 2008. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.
- D. **PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP REPORT:** Attached is the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Monthly Update for June, 2008. Please review and if you have any questions, contact me. The next Partnership meeting will be held on July 31, 2008, at 10:00 a.m. at the NRC.
1. **Annual Review of Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Agreement** – Attached is the Watershed Fund Summary per 2nd Interlocal Agreement and the July 2008 – July 2009 Partnership Budget. A report will be given at the July 10, 2008 Board meeting.
- E. **BUSINESS INSURANCE RENEWAL FOR FY 2009:** We have been notified by Carl Bibb, President/CEO of Dunbar-Peterson, that our overall premium for FY 2009 is \$141,707 - down \$2,326 from FY 2008. This does not include the separate aviation (non-owner) policy which will be renewed in April, 2009. This coverage cost \$5,823. Also, the Workers Comp estimated renewal is \$74,057 which is down \$4,630 from last year. Once again, District employees are to be commended for practicing established safety rules and guidelines in our O&M facilities, job sites and offices.

F. **NEWS CLIPS:**

- ✓ June 8, 2008 – Lincoln Journal Star article – Reservoir fills, but water dispute grinds onward
- ✓ June 13, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Some reservoirs low despite rains
- ✓ June 11, 2008 – Kearney Hub article – River Rivals: Recreation also benefits from clearing of weeds
- ✓ June 11, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Storms strike Omaha area with flooding, power outages
- ✓ June 12, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Flash floods, lightning plague metro area
- ✓ June 12, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Metro flooding not problem today
- ✓ June 13, 2008 – Blair Enterprise – Capitol View written by Ed Howard, Government lobbying government
- ✓ June 14, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Dry weather takes pressure off levees
- ✓ June 19, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Study focus: rehabbing Lake Manawa
- ✓ June 19, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Townsfolk bank together to halt water. For some, the battle is already lost; others cling to hope the levees will hold.
- ✓ June 19, 2008 – Wall Street Journal article – Midwest Floods Dredge Up Dispute. Critics Say Building Near Rivers Is Cause Of Recent Problems
- ✓ June 20, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Some flood victims feel misled by FEMA. After being reassured about levees, thousands dropped flood insurance.
- ✓ June 21, 2008 – Lincoln Journal Star article – Seacrest steps down from Environmental Trust Board
- ✓ June 22, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – State considers changes in water-czar requirements
- ✓ June 29, 2008 – Omaha World Herald article – Central Platte NRD gets river credits

June 2008

Information & Education Report

Information

- ◇ Designed and placed informational ads in Omaha Newspaper
- ◇ Continued to prepare fact sheet on P-MRNRD for state assoc.
- ◇ Began distribution of bicycle trail maps
- ◇ Continued work on Water Quality campaign
- ◇ Began work on Omaha Trails campaign
- ◇ Continued work on Summer Spectrum
- ◇ Continued work on PCWP efforts
- ◇ Updated web site pages and began planning for complete site update

Education

- ☐ Continued planning for NRD Summer Day Camps
- ☐ Held 2- 1 week pre-school day camps
- ☐ Continued working on GPS curriculum
- ☐ Held Boy Scouts of America mentoring program (Venture Program)
- ☐ Did Ralston Summer School Programs on Water Sampling, Owl Pellets, Bugs, Water Cycle (130 kids at each program)
- ☐ Presented Enviroscape at Jackson Elementary (150 students)
- ☐ Presented Water Sampling Activity to Latina Academy (35 students)
- ☐ Attended Hands on Herps Workshop at Spring Creek Prairie
- ☐ Held Omaha Outside Steer Committee Meeting
- ☐ Continued working on Millard West Outdoor Classroom
- ☐ Sponsored Discover the Missouri River Watershed Teacher Workshop at Fontenelle Forrest
- ☐ Continued working with GBT Children Academy on an Outdoor Classroom
- ☐ Took pictures/documented high water at Chalco Hills
- ☐ Coordinated Animal Display at Chalco Hills with Wildlife Learning Encounters

June, 2008

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MONTHLY UPDATE

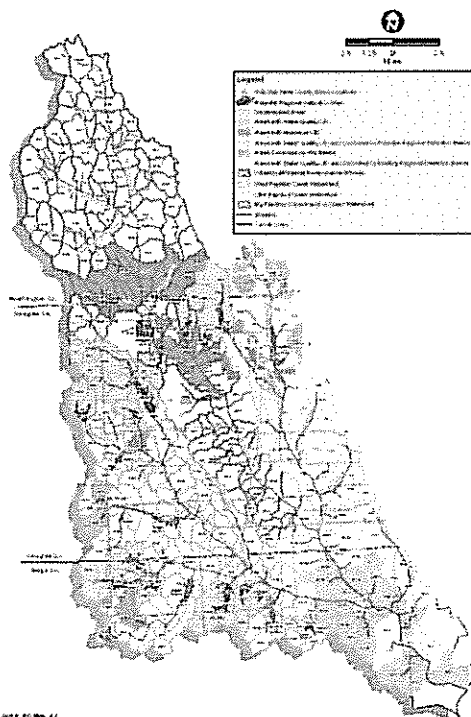
JUNE 2008



The Partnership held a subcommittee meeting on June 12th and a full Partnership meeting on June 26th. Meeting minutes and other materials are updated regularly on the Partnership's website: www.papiopartnership.org.

Stage IV Watershed Evaluation

HDR took a look at some modifications to the watershed management plan and provided cost details and a cash flow summary to the Partnership members. Financial considerations have led the group to look at the development of the watershed management plan in incremental timeframes which corresponds to the Omaha Master Sewer Plan. This allows the group to have a snapshot of the improvements that could be completed by the year 2050, following projected development. The exercise provided the Partnership members with some realities to consider while making decisions on the watershed management plan. Below is a map showing the projected limits development by 2050. The beige watersheds, shown in Washington, Douglas and Sarpy Counties, are not projected to be developed by that time which will affect when flood reduction is realized.



Stormwater Management Policies

Discussion continued during the month of June on the stormwater management policy revisions. The group continues to address and consider items such as creek setbacks and exemptions, the implementation and maintenance of maximum LID (which includes on site detention), and floodplain restrictions such as No Adverse Impact. In the next few months, the Partnership has decided to focus on the amended Stormwater Ordinance being proposed by the City of Omaha. This ordinance addresses the water quality issues in the policies and is an important step in moving the watershed management plan forward.

Upcoming Stormwater Regulations

The City of Omaha will be presenting their stormwater ordinance revision to the City Council in July. The ordinance will require LID on all new developments and significant redevelopment to provide water quality control of the first ½ inch of stormwater runoff. All Partnership members are encouraged to adopt this ordinance change.

The City, along with the Papio-Missouri River NRD and Olsson Associates, will be hosting a workshop for developers and engineers on the ordinance change and post construction stormwater management requirements. The workshop is scheduled from 8 AM to 12 PM on September 25th at the Douglas/Sarpy Extension Office.

Local Stormwater Projects

Progress is being made on the rain gardens and bioswales at Under the Sink (120th and I Street) and the green roof at Saddlebrook (151st and Fort Street). These projects are made possible through the State's stormwater grant fund, so stop by and check them out!

Next Meeting: The next subcommittee meeting is tentatively scheduled for July 24th and the next Partnership meeting is scheduled for July 31st. Both meetings are at 10:00 AM at the Papio-Missouri River NRD.

Bellevue
Nebraska
GRENA



BENNINGTON

**PAPILLION CREEK
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP**



**Watershed Fund Summary
Per 2nd Interlocal Agreement
Updated June 30, 2008**

CONTRIBUTIONS

Entity	New Annual Contribution	Percent (%)	Contributions-To-Date	Amount Due June 30, 2008	Total 5-yr Contributions
Bellevue	\$20,000	4.6%	\$80,000.00	\$0	\$100,000
Bennington	\$500	0.1%	\$1,500.00	\$500	\$2,500
Girls and Boys Town	\$1,000	0.2%	\$4,000.00	\$0	\$5,000
Elkhorn*	\$0	0.0%	\$0.00	\$0	\$0
Gretna	\$1,000	0.2%	\$4,000.00	\$0	\$5,000
La Vista	\$5,000	1.2%	\$20,000.00	\$0	\$25,000
Omaha	\$187,500	43.2%	\$937,500.00	\$0	\$937,500
Papillion	\$7,000	1.6%	\$28,000.00	\$0	\$35,000
Ralston	\$2,500	0.6%	\$10,000.00	\$0	\$12,500
Douglas County	\$65,000	15.0%	\$195,000.00	\$65,000	\$325,000
Sarpy County	\$55,000	12.7%	\$220,000.00	\$0	\$275,000
Papio NRD	\$90,000	20.7%	\$360,000.00	\$0	\$450,000
TOTAL	\$434,500.00	100.0%	\$1,860,000.00	\$65,500.00	\$2,172,500.00

*Elkhorn contributions and fees are included in the Omaha values

EXPENSES

Item	Expense-To-Date	Future Expenses
Omaha Reimbursement	\$1,103,988.00	\$275,997.00
NRD Reimbursement**	\$129,559.53	\$34,400.00
Actual Expenses FY05 - HDR	\$118,970.07	\$0.00
Actual Expenses FY06 - HDR	\$162,535.29	\$0.00
Actual Expenses FY07 - HDR	\$139,403.95	\$0.00
Actual Expenses FY08 - HDR	\$289,307.99	\$60,592.01
Actual Expenses FY08 - IMS, LLC	\$87,000.54	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$2,030,765.37	\$370,989.01

Note: In FY05 Stage II was completed and Stage III of HDR's study was started and continued through FY06. In FY07 Stage III was completed and Stage IV started.

**NRD reimbursement is less \$3640.47 for checking corrections.

BALANCE

	Projected Balance 07/01/08	Future Balance
Balance from 1st Agreement	\$265,331.65	\$265,331.65
Contributions by 07/01/08	\$1,860,000.00	\$2,172,500.00
Expenses	\$2,030,765.37	\$2,401,754.38
Interest	\$60,425.05	\$80,425.05
TOTAL	\$154,991.33	\$116,502.32

PARTNERS

Bellevue Bennington Boys Town Gretna La Vista Omaha
Papillion Ralston Douglas County Sarpy County Papio-Missouri River NRD

**PAPILLION CREEK
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP**



**July 2008 - June 2009 Partnership Budget
Per 2nd Interlocal Agreement
July 2, 2008**

CONTRIBUTIONS

Entity	Annual Contribution	Percent (%)	Contributions-To-Date	Amount Due June 30, 2009	Total 5-yr Contributions
Bellevue	\$20,000	4.6%	\$80,000.00	\$20,000	\$100,000
Bennington	\$500	0.1%	\$1,500.00	\$1,000	\$2,500
Girls and Boys Town	\$1,000	0.2%	\$4,000.00	\$1,000	\$5,000
Elkhorn	\$3,500	0.8%	\$0.00	\$0	\$17,500
Gretna	\$1,000	0.2%	\$4,000.00	\$1,000	\$5,000
La Vista	\$5,000	1.2%	\$20,000.00	\$5,000	\$25,000
Omaha	\$184,000	42.3%	\$937,500.00	\$0	\$920,000
Papillion	\$7,000	1.6%	\$28,000.00	\$7,000	\$35,000
Ralston	\$2,500	0.6%	\$10,000.00	\$2,500	\$12,500
Douglas County	\$65,000	15.0%	\$195,000.00	\$130,000	\$325,000
Sarpy County	\$55,000	12.7%	\$220,000.00	\$55,000	\$275,000
Papio NRD	\$90,000	20.7%	\$360,000.00	\$90,000	\$450,000
TOTAL	\$434,500.00	100.0%	\$1,860,000.00	\$312,500.00	\$2,172,500.00

EXPENSES

Item	Future Expenses
Omaha Reimbursement	\$275,997.00
NRD Reimbursement	\$34,400.00
HDR Engineering, Inc. (Stage IV)	\$60,592.01
Contracted Engineering Study	\$116,502.32
TOTAL	\$487,491.33

BALANCE

	FY 08 Budget
Balance (projected as of July 1, 2008)	\$154,991.33
Contributions (by 06/30/09)	\$312,500.00
Expenses	\$487,491.33
Interest	\$20,000.00
TOTAL BALANCE	(\$0.00)

PARTNERS

Bellevue Bennington Boys Town Gretna La Vista Omaha Papillion Ralston
Douglas County Sarpy County Papio-Missouri River NRD

DUNBAR•PETERSON
I N S U R A N C E A G E N C Y
1902 HOWARD STREET/OMAHA, NE 68102



June 23, 2008

Pat Teer
Papio-Missouri River NRD
8901 South 154th Street
Omaha, NE 68138-3621

RE: Business Insurance Renewal July 1, 2008-2009

Dear Pat:

The Package policy renewal is attached for your review along with a Binder and our invoice. We have reviewed the renewal offer and find it in line with our instructions to underwriters. This does not include the flood warning gauges we submitted to them last week.

The overall premium this year is down \$2,326 for the package comparing to the 07-08 policy year. This includes all changes we made with the exception of the flood warning gauges.

Received the attached Workers Compensation renewal this morning, it is also down compared to the 07-08 policy by \$4,730. That is due to rate changes and the experience modification changes. That policy is on a direct bill payment plan from AIG.

Thank you for the continued business, we appreciate it and look forward to working with you and your staff in the upcoming year.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carl M. Bibb".

Carl M. Bibb
President/CEO
cbibb@dunbar-peterson.com

Reservoir fills, but water dispute grinds onward

BY ART HOVEY / Lincoln Journal Star
Sunday, Jun 08, 2008 - 12:35:02 am CDT

It matters little to state officials fighting over \$70 million in potential damages, but it is now possible to water ski all the way from the dam at Republican City to Alma.

Harlan County Reservoir, long depleted and a long-standing symbol of a water supply disagreement between Nebraska and Kansas, is fully restored to its 10-mile length between the two Nebraska towns.

In fact, in sharp contrast to at least five years of drought, recent rainfall has been so generous the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been releasing water to control possible flooding downstream on the Republican River.

After years of drought, the Harlan County Reservoir is replenished.

And water that had retreated more than two miles from its normal U.S. 183 boundary is now lapping reassuringly at the shoreline four blocks from Wilber Holloway's Fisherman's Corner headquarters in Alma.

"Some of the biggest white bass we've seen in years are out there right now," Holloway said.

Over at Republican City, marina operators Bruce Beins and Dee Scott are just as jubilant about the reservoir recovery that began in earnest last year and reached the replenishment goal over Memorial Day weekend.

Their days of having to shift their docks farther from the normal shoreline are over.

"Before, all we'd hear is 'Harlan County — there's no water in the lake. The lake is so low you can't do anything,'" Scott said.

"It's just so nice to hear, 'You guys have got water.'"

Beins said up to 40 of his 100 parking spots for boats were open during the worst of the downturn.

Now they're all full again.

Jim Bowen, manager of reservoir operations for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Republican City, said he hasn't had to think about flood control in a long time.

"It made me kind of have to dust off my brain cells," Bowen said, "and remember what

we're supposed to have to do — because, for the last seven years, we haven't had to worry about these situations.”

But with all that said, David Barfield, the top water official in Kansas, didn't sound like a guy who was about to respond to that sort of news by grabbing his fishing pole or his water skis.

When sought out about a shift from shortage to surplus in Republican River reservoirs on both sides of the border, Barfield was more focused on Kansas and Nebraska going to non-binding arbitration to resolve past differences and past water trouble.

He expects that to happen within weeks, as Kansas presses its case for \$72.3 million in compensation from Nebraska for using more than its share of water in 2005 and 2006.

Barfield doesn't expect an arbitrator or panel of arbitrators to be influenced by a rise of more than 23 feet in the lake level since it reached its low point.

Nor is he willing to just shrug his shoulders, now that circumstances have improved, and forget about the recent past.

“Nebraska's noncompliance is related to dry periods,” he said. “Dry periods are when we all need to comply.”

That stance reflects Kansas' strong conviction that drought wasn't the only factor depleting the river and its storage areas through much of this decade.

Heavy groundwater irrigation from increasing numbers of Nebraska wells along the river is a contributing factor.

Marina operators Beins and Scott think Nebraska water interests have learned something from years of duress in the Republican River Valley.

“People probably just didn't realize that things could get this bad,” Scott said.

Beins said a message of conservation seems to be getting through.

“Nebraska is finally starting to get a handle on water policy,” he said, “and I think five years of drought has taught a lot of farmers to better use the water they have.”

But Brian Dunnigan, acting director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, gives a full lake and a brimming river mixed reviews.

“I think from the standpoint of the Republican River Valley down there, it's a very good thing,” Dunnigan said.

However, “It can't do us any good for water shortage compliance for the years 2005 and

2006,” Dunnigan said, “and that’s the first water-short test” for arbitration review.

On the other hand, “we would always be looking for compliance in the future. And when Harlan County is full, it always helps us with our compliance as we move forward.”

No matter what, Dunnigan isn’t expecting his Kansas counterpart to call him, take note of better times, and say: Aw, shucks, let’s forget about the past.

“I’m not expecting that at all,” he said.

Reach Art Hovey at 473-7223 or at ahovey@journalstar.com.

Some reservoirs low despite rains

BY DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Refilling some of Nebraska's drought-stricken reservoirs and lakes is a tall order — even for the recent rainstorms that have hit parts of the state.

"It's different to go from battling low water to now battling high water," said Larry Janicek, park manager at Harlan County Lake, an Army Corps of Engineers reservoir on the Republican River in south-central Nebraska.

Despite the rain, however, some western Nebraska reservoirs remain at low levels.

In south-central Nebraska, two Republican River basin reservoirs have been beneficiaries of the spring storms.

Harlan County Lake was at 112 percent of normal capacity Tuesday and releasing water to make room for potential incoming flood flows. Near Cambridge, Harry Strunk Lake, also known as Medicine Creek Reservoir, was at 134 percent and releasing water.

The reservoirs have a cushion built in to accommodate flood flows, allowing them to temporarily hold more than their normal capacity.

Even Nebraska's largest reservoir — Lake McConaughy — is experiencing a small rebound, although it continues to suffer from low North Platte River inflows.

The Ogallala-area lake is more than six feet higher than this time a year ago, but that's still 39 feet below capacity and just 46 percent full.

The difference between McConaughy and Harlan County is attributed in part to their locations in relation to Nebraska's historic rainfall patterns.

"The drought still persists in the Panhandle and eastern Wyoming," said Tim Anderson, spokesman for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, which owns and operates McConaughy as an irrigation reservoir for cropland in south-central Nebraska.

"We've had some rainfall, but nothing like the storms and flooding in central and eastern Nebraska," Anderson said.

The central and eastern rainstorms mean, however, that farmers who rely on irrigation water from McConaughy won't need it as early this year. Central has virtually shut down releases from McConaughy's Kingsley Dam, allowing the lake to continue filling.

Melting snow from the biggest Rocky Mountain snowpack in years won't benefit McConaughy this year, Anderson said. The two largest federal reservoirs on the North Platte in Wyoming, Seminoe and Pathfinder, remain less than one-third full. They must fill before extra water is released downstream.

"It's going to take two or three years of above-average precipitation in the mountains before that water shows up in Nebraska," Anderson said.

Still, he said, Lake McConaughy is improving slightly, and district managers are cautiously optimistic. "But it's too bad we can't tilt the state and pour some of the water flowing out of eastern Nebraska into McConaughy."

Other western reservoirs also continue to suffer.

Swanson Lake, further west up the Republican from Harlan County, is about 13 feet below capacity. Hugh Butler, also known as Red Willow Reservoir, is about six feet below capacity. Enders Reservoir is about nine feet down. Hugh Butler and Enders are on tributaries of the Republican.

Box Butte, a Niobrara River reservoir in the Panhandle, is about a third full.

Two Sand Hills reservoirs — Calamus and Merritt — are full because of relatively steady sources of water oozing from the Ogallala Aquifer.

Lewis and Clark Lake on the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska typically remains full because of its role as the final downstream reservoir in a series managed by the Corps of Engineers.

River Rivals: Recreation also benefits from clearing of weeds

By LORI POTTER, Hub Staff Writer

06/11/2008

Updated 06/11/2008 12:43:28 PM CDT

FRANKLIN — Higher spring flows in the Republican River than have been seen in years and prospects for summer irrigation releases have some folks asking if the Franklin Canoe Race will be revived.

The river is flowing because of a wet spring and full Harlan County Reservoir. However, credit also is due to a 2007 state-funded project to spray invasive saltcedars and phragmites around basin reservoirs and in river channels.

Tan twigs of dead phragmites stand in the river channel southeast of Franklin. They'll be re-moved only after the Habitat herbicide sprayed in September has had a full year to do its job.

Lower Republican Natural Resources District Manager Mike Clements of Alma said it takes that long for the chemical to get through the extensive root system of plants that grow a foot a day in the summer. "The tops of the plants obviously are very dead," he said, "but there still might be something alive under there."

"What we want to do is get the river channel back to its original width" of 50 to 100 feet, Clements said, adding that some channels were choked by vegetation to less than 10 feet.

The river now is handling flows of 750 cubic feet per second. He said 300 cfs would cause some lowland flooding at Franklin a few years ago.

Although Republican River Compact compliance is the focus of the channel clearing, state Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege said other benefits include better flood control and improved hunting and fishing habitat.

Money to spray the invasive vegetation was allocated by the Nebraska Legislature in LB701 last year and included \$2 million in 2007 and again in 2008.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture and a special task force allocate the funds for fully appropriated and overappropriated basins. Most of the 2007 money and more than half of the 2008 grants went to Republican Basin projects because of the focus on compact compliance.

Ag Department policy analyst Bobbie Kriz-Wickham of Lincoln said the 23-member task force includes representatives of NRDs, weed control authorities, landowners and other interest groups. It sets goals for the grants and will use the data collected to determine the benefits.

Kriz-Wickham, Clements and Carlson said Republican Basin landowner buy-in was vital. Clements said it was "incredible" that only two landowners from Harlan County Dam to Hardy didn't participate in the project.

The key question is if removing the vegetation will result in water savings or at least more efficient delivery of water to Kansas for compact compliance.

Carlson said the answer will be difficult to quantify. At a panel discussion Thursday in Superior that included Kansas water officials, he said, "I think vegetation takes more water than we even think."

When he was asked by a Kansas official about specific effects on Kansas' water supply, Carlson said, "Sometimes these things are hard to prove to the extent a scientist would like to see it. The practical truth is that it makes a difference."

Standing along the river near southeast of Franklin earlier Thursday, he said, "I truly believe that God created the rivers, but he had no intent of having vegetation in the channel."

Carlson described the river as a "liquid highway" and said money should be authorized for weed control in the same way weeds are managed along asphalt highways.

"If Kansas wants it (water), we have to get it there," the senator said. "A couple of years ago, we couldn't do that ... And then, whatever water this saves is a plus with our agreement with Kansas."

That's especially true if researchers can come up with a "believable estimate" of water saved, he added.

Clements said weed project organizers in the eastern part of the basin were ready to move when the \$772,500 LB701 grant for 2007 was awarded. Bids were let in July, and Habitat was sprayed, almost entirely by helicopter, in 83 miles of river channels where phragmites were 12 to 15 feet tall.

The explosion of phragmites occurred in the past five years, he said, with channels almost totally infested from Bloomington to Guide Rock. The good news was there was very little saltcedar found below Harlan County Dam.

There will be some follow-up spraying, but Clements described Habitat as being effective to the point that "everything it touches, it kills." The second phase will focus on removing more dead vegetation with mechanical excavation.

There was a disking experiment on two miles of channel near Red Cloud. "That's the ticket," Clements said, if machinery can get access. A controlled burn southeast of Franklin also worked well.

"We've got the plants killed. Now we need to get rid of the residue to allow scouring," he said. "... I think it's a success story. We're making a documentary on it."

e-mail to:
lori.potter@kearneyhub.com

EDITOR'S NOTE: Information for the "River Rivals" series was gathered by Hub Staff Writer Lori Potter during the June 3-5 Nebraska Water and Natural Resources Tour of the Lower Republican Basin.

Published Wednesday June 11, 2008
Storms strike Omaha area with flooding, power outages
BY JASON KUIPER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Updates:

12:56 p.m.

Glitches in Cox Communications severe weather alert system blocked out the sound to many cable television stations at different points during Wednesday nights storms.

Kristen Gohr, Cox spokeswoman, said on two separate warning messages, the last tone got stuck and produced a continuous beep that lasted for several minutes.

Gohr said the first extended beep happened about 7 p.m. She said it was fixed by 7:10 p.m. The second continuous tone lasted from 8:30 until 8:40 p.m.

Another occurred around 10:15 and lasted several minutes.

Gohr said there were a total of four of five alerts throughout the evening. She said Cox is looking into what caused the extended beeps.

- Chelsea Keeney

* * *

Despite numerous reports of tornado sightings in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, flooding, lightning and a few downed trees appeared to be the main problems as two storms pounded the Omaha metropolitan area Wednesday night.

The storms came just days after two tornadoes caused serious damage in southwest Omaha.

In Sarpy County, lightning reportedly struck a house at 10834 S. 166th St. in Lake Ridge Estates near Tiburon Golf Club. Firefighters were battling a blaze there just after 9 p.m. Lightning also hit a house at 12432 S. 217th St. in Chestnut Ridge, but there was no fire.

There were other reports of extensive lightning damage elsewhere in Sarpy County.

One-inch hail was reported in parts of Papillion, Bellevue and western Douglas County. Torrential rains also caused their share of woe.

Darryl Meusch no longer has a storage building for his business, Granite Works. Sometime between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m., Meusch said, the roof of his building at 1415 N. Saddle Creek Road collapsed, resulting in damage estimated at more than \$100,000.

"I was just shocked," he said. "It had, evidently, just too much water on the roof."

The collapse destroyed his brother's 2008 Ford truck, granite supplies and his trailer, Meusch said, but no one was injured. The building's roof was replaced two years ago. He said he has insurance.

Flooding was reported throughout Omaha and across the river in Council Bluffs. At Eppley Airfield, 2.27 inches of rain had fallen by late Wednesday.

Police dispatch reports indicated that several vehicles got trapped in high waters at Interstate 480 and Martha Street; the I Street ramp onto Interstate 80; 12th and Cuming Streets; and 48th Street and Ames Avenue.

A reporter near the overpass of Interstate 480 and the North Freeway near Creighton University reported four trapped vehicles

"We're getting lots of flooding reports - almost too many to keep track of," said Paul Landow, Mayor Mike Fahey's chief of staff.

At 168th Street and Ames Avenue, there were unconfirmed reports that between 6 to 8 inches of rain had fallen. Flooding also was reported on 50th Street under I-80 and in much of the Elkhorn neighborhood.

Thousands of homes in Omaha were without power. Mike Jones, a spokesman with the Omaha Public Power District, said 3,300 customers were affected as of 9:15 p.m.

About 2,500 were in the area between 153rd and 168th Streets and Douglas and Grover Streets, he said. The rest were scattered throughout the metro area.

There were numerous reports of tornadoes touching down in Lincoln, but no touchdowns were confirmed, said Kerry Eagan of Lancaster County Emergency Management. Heavy rains caused flash flooding in parts of Lincoln, along with scattered power outages.

Eagan said he knew of no injuries.

The first storm came through between 6:30 p.m. and 7 p.m., and the second hit between 7:50 p.m. and 8:15 p.m. Four tornado warnings were issued for Douglas County between 6:28 p.m. and 9:15 p.m., said Barbara Mayes of the National Weather Service in Valley.

From early evening on, Omaha police were busy putting cruisers and barricades at flooded intersections. Flood reports were coming from throughout the city, said Officer Michael Pecha, a police spokesman.

In the northwest precinct alone, there were 15 reports of flooded streets including Cole Creek Drive and 72nd Street; Ames Avenue at 49th Street; 68th, 72nd and 168th Streets; and 132nd Street and Military Road. Flooding was blamed for a car accident with injuries.

Major flooding also occurred on Saddle Creek Road from Leavenworth to Cuming Streets. That water was receding by 9:30 p.m.

Local creeks were going down by 10 p.m., said Fred Thole, street superintendent of Omaha's Public Works Department. Earlier, Cole Creek may have crossed the road at Maenner Drive between Western Avenue and at Blondo Street near 75th Street, and water lapped at bike trails in the area.

Thole said he also heard reports of basement flooding in eastern Omaha around the Storz Expressway.

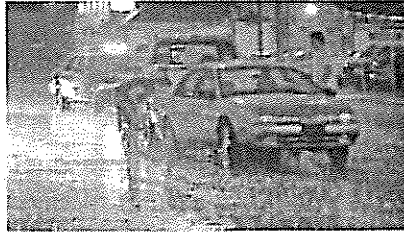
Flooding on the Papio Creek closed the bridge at 36th Street and Raynor Parkway and at the intersection of Halleck Street and Patricia Drive.

Published Thursday June 12, 2008

Flash floods, lightning plague metro area

BY JASON KUIPER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



Good Samaritans help Brian Tobin move his car from the intersection of Saddle Creek Road and Leavenworth Street after a manhole cover blew under his car and his tire became wedged. "The bags went off and it stopped me cold. Just, bam! Just like that. Just like hitting a wall," Tobin said.

Despite numerous reports of tornado sightings in areas across eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, lightning and flooding appeared to be the main problems as storm after storm pounded the Omaha metropolitan area Wednesday night.

In Sarpy County, lightning reportedly struck a house at 10834 S. 166th St. in Lake Ridge Estates near Tiburon Golf Club. Firefighters were there battling the blaze just after 9 p.m. Lightning also hit a house at 12432 S. 217th St. in Chestnut Ridge.

There were other reports of extensive lightning damage elsewhere in Sarpy County.

Flooding was reported all over Omaha.

Dispatch reports indicated that vehicles were trapped in high water at Interstate 480 and Martha Street; at the I Street ramp onto Interstate 80; at 12th and Cuming Streets; and at 48th Street and Ames Avenue.

A reporter near the overpass of I-480 and U.S. Highway 75 near Creighton University also saw four trapped vehicles.

"We're getting lots of flooding reports, almost too many to keep track of," said Paul Landow, chief of staff for Mayor Mike Fahey.

At 168th Street and Ames Avenue, there were unconfirmed reports that between 6 to 8 inches of rain had fallen. Flooding also was reported at 50th Street and I-80 and in much of the Elkhorn area.

There were numerous reports of damage and of tornadoes touching down in Lincoln, but no tornadoes were confirmed, said Kerry Eagan of Lancaster County Emergency Management. Heavy rains caused flash flooding in parts of Lincoln, along with scattered power outages.

Eagan said the Lincoln-area flooding appeared to result from storm drains that couldn't keep up with the sudden heavy downpour.

There were reports of roads closed where they cross Salt Creek, including West O Street, Lincoln's main street.

Eagan said it did not appear that area streams were beyond their banks. Officials with the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District continued to monitor the creeks.

Eagan said emergency officials had confirmed only one damage report: that of minor wind and water damage outside Lincoln.

He said no injuries and no serious damage had been reported as of 9 p.m.

The storms that hit the Midlands sprang from a big storm system that started over Washington and Oregon on Monday and moved into the northern Rockies on Tuesday, said John Feerick of Accuweather, The World-Herald's weather consultant. The system picked up strength and on Wednesday moved into the northern Plains.

The system pulled up a lot of very moist air from the South that clashed with the unseasonably cold air from the northwest; and where it clashed, the storms popped up, he said.

Published Thursday June 12, 2008
Metro flooding not problem today
BY TOM SHAW AND JASON KUIPER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

No flooding problems were reported this morning for the Omaha area, although heavy rains overnight caused parts of the Papillion Creek to rise rapidly.

The waters reached within 2 to 3 feet of levee tops in some locations in the Omaha area, said Martin Cleveland, construction engineer with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

"We have no concerns unless we have a lot of rain again," Cleveland said this morning. "It will take a while to get back to normal because of the runoff from various locations."

Specifically, he said the west branch of the creek at 84th Street in Papillion was within 2 feet of the top of the levee at 10:40 p.m. Wednesday. The Big Papio at 48th Street and Cornhusker Road was within 3 feet of the levee top at 11 p.m. Wednesday.

In Valley, heavy rainfall forced officials to close four city streets for two hours early today — two because of knee-deep water and two because water reached the curb, Mayor Mary Caffey said.

Omaha's Saddle Creek Road experienced flooding Wednesday night.

Crews were to remove sand and debris from the road today, said Omaha street maintenance engineer Scott McIntyre.

Despite numerous reports of tornado sightings Wednesday night in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, flooding, downed trees and lightning appeared to be the main problems.

Thousands of homes in Omaha were without power late Wednesday.

Mike Jones, a spokesman with the Omaha Public Power District, said 3,300 customers were affected, but that number had dropped to 170 customers by this morning.

About 2,500 of those who had been without power were in the area between 153rd and 168th Streets and Douglas and Grover Streets.

About 200 MidAmerican Energy Co. customers in the Council Bluffs area were without power this morning.

In Sarpy County, lightning reportedly struck a house at 10834 S. 166th St. in Lake Ridge Estates near Tiburon Golf Club. Firefighters were battling a blaze there just after 9 p.m. Lightning also hit a house at 12432 S. 217th St. in Chestnut Ridge, but there was no fire.

One-inch hail was reported in parts of Papillion, Bellevue and western Douglas County.

Darryl Meusch no longer has a storage building for his business, Granite Works. Sometime between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. Wednesday, Meusch said, the roof of his building at 1415 N. Saddle Creek Road collapsed, resulting in damage estimated at more than \$100,000.

Flooding was reported throughout Omaha and across the river in Council Bluffs. At Eppley Airfield, 2.27 inches of rain had fallen by late Wednesday.

The first storm came through between 6:30 p.m. and 7 p.m., and the second hit between 7:50 p.m. and 8:15 p.m. Four tornado warnings were issued for Douglas County between 6:28 p.m. and 9:15 p.m., said Barbara Mayes of the National Weather Service in Valley.

Government lobbying government

LINCOLN - Never fails.

Mention "lobbyists" or "lobbying" and at least some of the people can be depended upon to go ballistic.

Mention that millions and millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent over the years to lobby the Legislature. Some

of those same people will turn purple before starting to shake, rattle and roll their eyes.

Every few years a news story reminds the public that such spending is common among



Capitol View

Ed Howard

local governments and various government entities and associations. They range from school districts to natural resources districts, to associations of law enforcement agencies, public health organizations and many others.

More than one-half million dollars was spent that way during the 2008 legislative session.

Some taxpayers are insulted by the very notion of one entity of government hiring a lobbyist to influence another entity of government. How could it be justified?

It's one of those things requiring an explanation beginning with: "You probably have to see it to really understand it."

Does it annoy you to think your city is chipping in money so that it, together with lots of other cities, can try to convince lawmakers and the governor to send more state dollars to schools, so that increases in local property taxes can be minimized or (hope against hope) reduced a tad? What if county officials have their lobbyist in Lincoln working to put more money into repairing some raggedy county highways?

That lobbyists represent powerful interests, which can sometimes grant or withhold political support, is always an issue. But remember: A lobbyist is not a source of power - a lobbyist represents power. Take away the lobbyist and the power would still be there.

6-14-08

Dry weather takes pressure off levees

By JASON KUIPER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Friday's dry, warm weather took some pressure off area levees and dams, including the "high hazard" ones in the Omaha area.

Saturated ground and swollen creeks and rivers have begun to recede.

"The levels should be able to go back down fairly quickly with this dry weather," said Steve Chick, state conservationist with the Nebraska Natural Resource Conservation Service.

If the rain hadn't stopped, Chick said, there probably would have been flooding in the metro area, and the scene could have

been similar to what eastern Iowans are facing.

While none of Nebraska's levees or structures have been damaged and all are holding up, some in the Omaha metro area have been serving at their maximum level. Water behind some dams has been flowing through emergency spillways.

Chuck Leinen, an engineer with the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, said the area has received 20 inches of rain so far this year. The average for an entire year is 26 inches.

In the Omaha metro area, 10 to 12 high-hazard dams are in various stages of rehabilitation. And the metro area has a number of

high-hazard levees.

"High-hazard" refers to potential to threaten life and property if a breach occurs.

Chick said nearly 900 dams, most in eastern Nebraska, were built in the 1950s. By 2010, 172 will have reached their projected life span. Work is being done to give them 100-year life spans.

Funding is available to rehabilitate high-hazard dams but not for the others, many of which also need work.

"I look at these as being as important as the bridges and roads, which you see routinely rehabilitated ever 10 years," Chick said.

■ Contact the writer:

444-1279, jason.kuiper@owh.com

Study focus: rehabbing Lake Manawa 6/19/08

■ An Iowa Department of Natural Resources worker will discuss the study today in Council Bluffs.

By Jason Kuiper

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

COUNCIL BLUFFS — A deeper Lake Manawa with cleaner water and better fish is the goal, but how to get there isn't quite clear.

An Omaha engineering firm has been hired to do a feasibility study on the lake. And a year from now, officials expect to have identified the route to improving the lake just south of Council Bluffs.

A similar study was done at Carter Lake, another recreation lake facing some of the same problems.

Mike McGhee of the Des Moines office of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will speak about the study at a public meeting at 7 p.m. today. The meeting will be at the Western Historic Trails Center, 3434 Richard Downing Ave.

There will be no definitive answers provided at the meeting, McGhee said.

"We are just trying to keep people informed about what's going on at the lake and want the public's input," he said.

McGhee said the goal is to have a lake with consistent water levels and better visibility. The lake is currently just less than 7 feet deep. Ideally, the lake would be 10 or 11 feet deep.

McGhee said officials also hope to improve water clarity from its current 12 to 18 inches to about 4 feet of visibility at least 50 percent of the time from May to October.

The study will have no impact on lake use this year, McGhee said.

Lake Manawa was identified as one of the 35 priority lakes whose conditions are considered appropriate for lake restoration out of a total of 130 significant public recreation lakes in Iowa needing restoration.

The study is being completed by Tetra Tech, an international engineering and consulting firm with offices in Omaha. The study will have three components: determining whether a large dredge operation would be feasible; studying the water budget— a balance of the inflow, outflow and water storage in the lake — and developing an implementation plan for the lake and watershed.

The study will cost about \$210,000, with just less than 25 percent of the funding to come from the Friends of Lake Manawa and the rest from state funds for lake restoration projects. Iowa requires that a study be done to make sure a plan is in place and to assist in securing funding.

McGhee said officials also will look at whether the Iowa Department of Transportation could use sand taken from the lake bottom in a long-term Interstate project in the Bluffs. That could create a unique partnership and a "winwin" situation for both sides.

McGhee said the Lake Manawa situation is similar to Carter Lake in that both lakes need to be deepened to improve water quality and both have water runoff and fish quality concerns.

■ Contact the writer: 444-1279, jason.kuiper@owh.com

U.S. NEWS

Midwest Floods Dredge Up Dispute

Critics Say Building Near Rivers Is Cause Of Recent Problems

BY DOUGLAS BELKIN

ST. CHARLES, Mo.—Since the historic flood of 1993, nearly 30,000 homes have been built on land that was underwater around the Mississippi and Missouri rivers near St. Louis. This weekend, the dwellers may find out if they built wisely.

As the swollen Mississippi rolls south, breaching levees, drowning crops and submerging towns, a debate is intensifying among scientists, environmentalists and developers about whether development not only flirts with disaster, but helps cause it.

Developers who started building a planned, 5,700-unit subdivision called New Town at St. Charles after the 1993 flood said the river waters would never reach New Town's borders. But residents of New Town, about 20 miles west of St. Louis, are uneasy.

"I asked my sister this morning if she had flood insurance," said Patty Moore, who was walking her dog near the town green this week. "She said, 'We live between two rivers, it would be foolish not to.'"

The White House on Wednesday asked Congress for \$1.8 billion in emergency disaster aid in the wake of the Midwest floods. The money is intended to replenish the federal disaster-relief fund in anticipation of future losses. Losses from the current floods might have been higher if the federal government hadn't purchased low-lying land after the 1993 flood caused \$12 billion in damage. The government has since bought out thousands of homeowners and turned much of their land into parks and undeveloped areas.

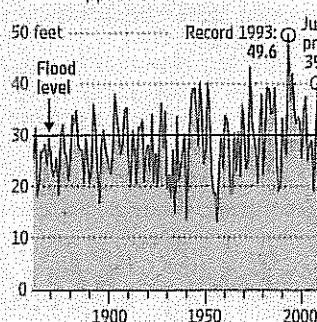
Around St. Louis, where the Mississippi is expected to crest this weekend, a number of scientists and activists argue the floods aren't caused by heavy rainfall but by irresponsible development. There has been considerable building since 1993 in Greater St. Louis, where demand



Houses sit in flood waters in La Grange, Mo., north of St. Louis. The Mississippi River breached at least nine more levees Wednesday.

Water-Logged

Yearly peak levels of the Mississippi River at St. Louis



Source: Bob Criss, Washington University



for accessible property is at a premium. New and expanding communities pushed for new, taller and stronger levees.

By building along the riverbanks and forcing the Mississippi into a bed that is less than half the width of where it ran a century ago, residents are displacing water and forcing the river to run faster and higher. That, in turn, increases demand for taller, broader levees.

But as those levees make way for development that paves over wetlands, more runoff water is channeled into the river. Critics said the result is a self-perpetuating cycle: The rivers rise higher, new levees are built bigger, the rivers rise again.

Bob Chriss, a professor of earth and planetary sciences at

Washington University in St. Louis, said about the same amount of water washed down the Mississippi during a flood in 1903 as did in 1993. But in 1903, the river crested at 38 feet in St. Louis; in 1993, the waters rose to almost 50 feet.

"We're making these flood levels higher," Mr. Chriss said. "A stage of 38 feet was almost unheard of 100 years ago. Now it happens all the time."

Tim Kusky, a professor of natural sciences at St. Louis University, said, "Eventually some of these levees are going to fail. The question is when, not if."

At the center of the problem is an absence of any comprehensive river-management plan. Each levee along the Mississippi is under local control.

"Each levee has a small impact, but cumulatively they can have a large impact," said David Busse, the chief of engineering and construction for the St. Louis District of the Army Corps of Engineers. "From an engineering point of view, it would be great to look at the system as a system." Past efforts to assemble such a plan have fallen short.

The Army Corps itself, which helps build levees, has been a target of criticism by groups such as the Great Rivers Habitat Alliance in St. Louis, an advocacy group led by Adolphus Busch IV, a scion of the beer-making family. The organization was founded in 2000 to fight development on the flood plain between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

Mr. Busch said floods have three times destroyed his home on a 2,000-acre spread west of St. Louis. In 1993, water rose to the second floor. Since then, he has had the structure raised onto an 18-foot-high mound of earth. "The Corps can't keep pushing more water downstream and then be surprised when there are serious consequences," Mr. Busch said.

Once planned, levees are rarely stopped, but a recent lawsuit halted construction of a levee on the Missouri River in Jefferson City, Mo., on environmental grounds.

"[Hurricane] Katrina was the real turning point for all of this," Mr. Busch said. "For a long time the Army Corps of Engineers was as close as you could get to God in the United States, but I think that's finally changing."

The Corps' Mr. Busse said the agency is neutral when it comes to building levees and acts at the request of Congress and local communities.

—John D. McKinnon
contributed to this article.

WSJ.com

ONLINE TODAY: See an interactive map of the flooding in the Midwest, plus photos, at WSJ.com/OnlineToday.

Townfolk band together to halt water

■ For some, the battle is already lost; others cling to hope the levees will hold.

OAKVILLE, Iowa (AP) — As the rivers rise, the modest small towns across the Midwest survive because neighbor helps neighbor, and the people reinforcing the levees are business owners, farmers and fellow church members who have lived there for years.

"My house is past help. So we're trying to save everybody else's," Bethany Frank said as she helped fill sandbags in a church parking lot in Oakville, about 40 miles southwest of Davenport. Her home on the outskirts of town was flooded up to the roof.

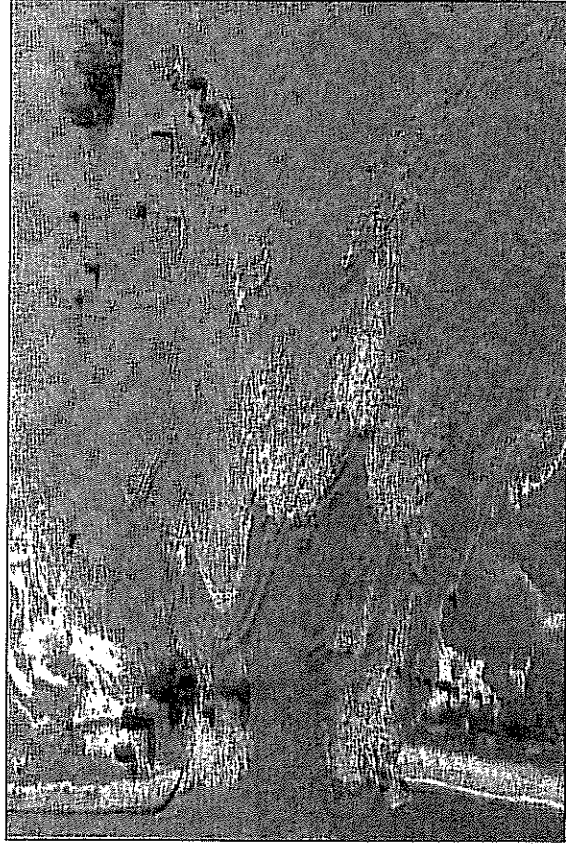
Wednesday, Iowans assessed their losses from flooding that inundated Des Moines and Iowa City. But small towns up and down the Mississippi still awaited the worst of the flooding. Some rivers were not expected to crest until today.

Storms and flooding across six states this month have killed 24 people, injured 148 and caused more than \$1.5 billion in estimated damage in Iowa alone — a figure that will rise as river levels climb in Missouri and Illinois.

Federal officials predicted that as many as 30 levees could overflow this week, leaving industrial and agricultural areas vulnerable but sparing major residential centers. So far this week, 20 levees have overflowed. At least 10 levees have been topped in Illinois and Missouri in recent days, including two south of tiny Gulfport, Ill., that threatened to swamp 30,000 acres of farmland near Meyer, Ill.

Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt sent 600 members of the National Guard to the northeastern part of the state, plus an additional 100 to the St. Louis area to help towns farther downstream. In Illinois, 1,100 Illinois National Guard troops have been sent to help flooded communities.

"My property is right on this street. I've got a lot to lose," said Tony Dye, whose home in Canton, Mo., stands beneath the



The Mississippi River rushes through a break in a levee north of Quincy, Ill., on Wednesday. So far this week, 20 levees have been breached.

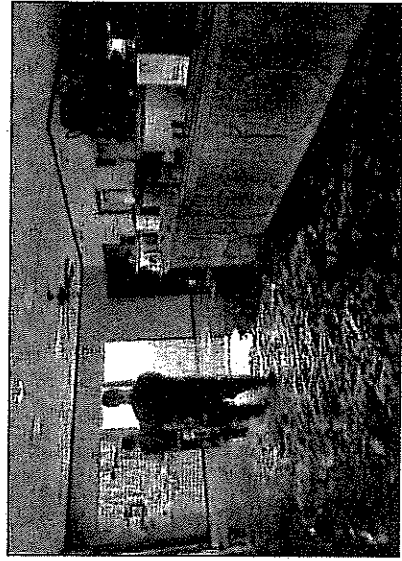
levee and well below the river's expected crest. The river was to crest at Canton today at nearly 14 feet above flood stage.

In Iowa, parts of downtown Burlington remained flooded Wednesday, but sandbagging efforts had stopped and officials said they were confident levees would hold. The Great River Bridge at Burlington was still closed because of high water.

In Cedar Rapids, officials allowed more people into damaged homes and businesses. Residents were being urged to conserve water because the water system had only half its normal supply.

South of Iowa City, the town of Columbus Junction, population 2,000, suffered a major blow because it's below the confluence of the Iowa and Cedar Rivers. The medical center, pharmacy, day care, senior center, a hotel and a dozen other businesses were under about 10 feet of water after a levee broke Saturday.

Connie Lewis, 78, who has lived in Columbus Junction for 40 years, often wondered who would keep the town going when her generation passed. When she saw droves of young people filling sandbags and vacuuming the



Workers remove a pump from a bank in La Grange, Mo., on Wednesday. The pump was put in another location in town after the bank lost its battle against the floodwaters of the Mississippi River.

United Methodist Church so it could be used for a shelter, she got her answer.

"And now we know we are going to be OK," she said. "It was such a good cementing experience. Children of all colors were helping. You find out when you need them, they step up to the plate."

These are places where people have learned to lean on each other instead of waiting for outside help.

Oakville sits at the bottom of a hairpin turn the Iowa River makes on its course to the Mississippi. When it became clear the levee would fail, trucking company owners Trina and Ward Ga-

Failing levees

Levees are dirt or clay embankments built to keep water within a channel. While they are designed to help protect agricultural and urban areas from river flooding, they can fail.

Overtopping

Water rises above the levee, typically built 1 ft higher than an area's 50-year flood level

Underflow

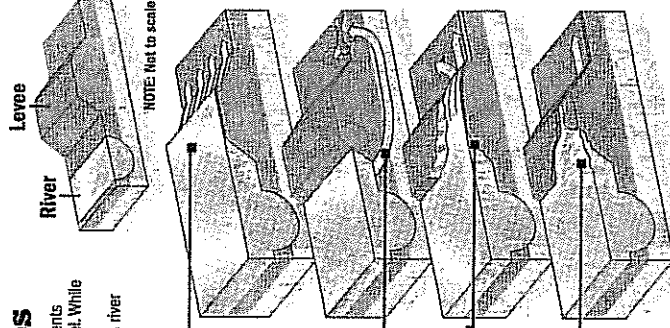
Water permeates sand deposits underneath the levee and water rises up on the other side

Slumping

Weight of the contained water pushes over a levee's sides

Erosion

Waves cause the top and sides of the levee to slowly give way



SOURCE: U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

believe scrambled to help friends save whatever they could.

They gathered about three dozen truck trailers and dropped them off at houses so families could load them with furniture and heirlooms. Then the company retrieved them and hauled the cargo to higher ground.

"We didn't do it expecting to get paid," Trina Gabeline said, her eyes bloodshot from crying. "We did it to help the people. Because these things that are in these trailers, that's the only thing these people have left right now."

Meanwhile, Gabeline's three brothers helped shore up levees. One was filling trucks with sand, another hauled the sand to bagging stations, and a third used an all-terrain vehicle to take finished sandbags to the flood walls.

Troy Massner, who lives on a bluff above Oakville, took the day off from his job as a systems manager for Wal-Mart to help friends. He spent much of Monday wading through putrid water retrieving propane tanks that had floated loose from sub-

merged hog farms.

The day of the flood, local excavating company owner Jon Fye braved the strong currents to rescue a grain elevator worker who became trapped at the Tri-Oak plant. When river levels had stabilized, he went back with Gabeline to inspect the damage.

Fye steered the small boat gingerly around submerged cars and past a picturesque Victorian house.

Gabeline stared at house after house flooded to the eaves and ticked off the names of the families who had lived there: "Hayes, Yotters, Browns, Beedings, Reids, Krontfeldts, Beedings, Kuntzes and Lanzas along here."

Fye said wealthier farmers should bounce back from the disaster fairly quickly. But for many friends and neighbors already living on the edge, the floods could spell doom.

"For some it's a bad year, a terrible year," he said as he cleared corn stalks from the propeller of his boat. "But for some, it's the end."

Some flood victims feel misled by FEMA

6.20.08

■ After being reassured about levees, thousands dropped flood insurance.

GULFPORT, Ill. (AP) — Juli Parks didn't worry when water began creeping up the levee that shields this town of about 750 from the Mississippi River — not even when volunteers began piling on sandbags.

After all, FEMA and local officials had assured townspeople in 1999 that the levee was sturdy enough to withstand a historic flood. In fact, some relieved homeowners dropped their flood insurance, and others applied

for permits to build new houses and businesses.

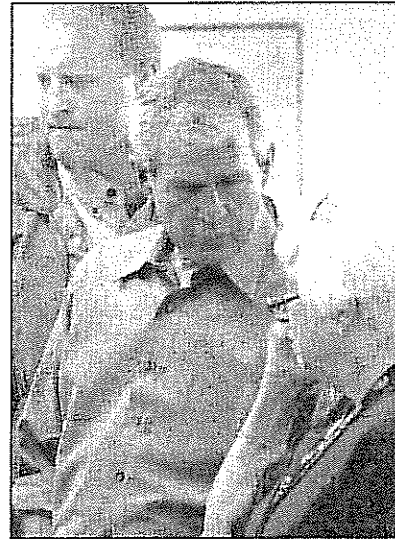
Then Tuesday the worst happened: The levee burst, and Gulfport was submerged in 10 feet of water. Only 28 property owners were insured.

"They all told us, 'The levees are good. You can go ahead and build,'" said Parks, who did not buy flood coverage because her bank no longer required it. "We had so much confidence in those levees."

Around the country, thousands of residents who relied on the assurances of the Federal Emergency Management Agency may unknowingly face similar risks.

"People put all their hopes in those levees, and when they do fail, the damage is catastrophic," said Paul Osman, the National Flood Insurance Program

See Insure: Page 2



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

On Page 4A

President Bush, at left with Iowa Gov. Chet Culver and Cedar Rapids Mayor Kay Halloran, lends encouragement during a visit Thursday to check out the flooding damage and promises federal assistance.

Some suspect that the flooding can be blamed in part on man-made changes to the land.

Insure: Some dropped coverage

Continued from Page 1

coordinator for Illinois. "New Orleans is the epitome; a lot of those people didn't even realize they were in a flood plain until the water was up to their roofs."

Now — amid disastrous flooding across Iowa, Illinois and Missouri — some policymakers are demanding that the government come up with more accurate, up-to-date flood-risk assessments, inform the public better of the dangers and require nearly all homeowners to buy coverage if they live near dams or levees.

Currently, if FEMA agrees that a levee can withstand a 100-year flood — that is, a flood so big that it has only a 1 percent chance of happening in any given year — then the homes and businesses protected by the levee are not considered to be in a flood plain. That means homeowners living there do not have to buy federal flood insurance.

However, some FEMA flood-plain maps are 20 years old and seriously outdated. Moreover, some of this year's floods exceeded the 100-year benchmark, including Gulfport's, which was a 500-year deluge, the Army Corps of Engineers said.

Parks said she was told that flood insurance on her Gulfport home would cost more than \$1,000 a year. But Osman said that in Illinois, policies average \$400 a year for those in flood plains and \$120 to \$317 for people like Parks who are not in a designated flood plain.

At least 22 levees in the three flood-stricken states already have been topped by floodwaters this week, the corps said. Dozens more could overflow.

FEMA, which administers the National Flood Insurance Program, has spent almost \$1 billion since 2003 to modernize its maps. Also, Mike Buckley, a

deputy assistant administrator, said FEMA officials encourage everyone to buy federal flood insurance and have never claimed that levees eliminate flood risk.

The agency said it is up to Congress to decide whether everyone whose home could be swamped by a breach of a levee or dam should be required to buy flood insurance.

Communities protected by the 52-mile Sny levee, along the Mississippi River near Quincy, Ill., worked hard to persuade FEMA in 2004 to accredit the levee, rebuilt after failing in 1993, as providing protection against a 100-year flood. FEMA relented, even though the decision was based on 1979 data and an unpublished Corps of Engineers study indicated that elevations in the river had risen substantially. Now the Sny is in danger of failing, and many people no longer have flood insurance.

Seacrest steps down from Environmental Trust board

BY JOE DUGGAN / Lincoln Journal Star
Saturday, Jun 21, 2008 - 12:51:14 am CDT

The governor will need to appoint a new board member to the Nebraska Environmental Trust with the recent resignation of Susan Seacrest of Lincoln.

The former president of The Groundwater Foundation stepped down from the trust last week because she has accepted a counseling position at North Star High School. A one-time middle school counselor, Seacrest said her new work schedule simply would not allow her the time to remain on the trust board.

"It was a tremendous experience and probably one of the most educational experiences of my professional life," she said Friday.

Trust director Mark Brohman said Seacrest is one of two citizen members who was appointed to the board at its inception in 1993.

"She's been a great board member," Brohman said. "She's definitely a champion of the environment and natural resources in Nebraska."

The trust awards about \$10 million annually to projects that benefit wildlife, natural resources and recycling. It derives its funding from a portion of state lottery proceeds.

The trust's work is overseen by a 14-member board, consisting of three citizen representatives from each congressional district and five state agency directors.

"Susan is just a delight," said board Chairman Paul Dunn of Omaha. "She is so dedicated to groundwater and the work the Environmental Trust does."

For 24 years, Seacrest led The Groundwater Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Lincoln that teaches about aquifers and runs programs that protect water resources.

The foundation's work gained international attention that took Seacrest across the globe, including the United Nations. She has been named an environmental hero by Time magazine and last year, she was honored by the Heinz Award for the Environment. Seacrest gave the accompanying \$125,000 prize to the foundation.

Thursday night, Seacrest's friends and colleagues honored her at a dinner in Lincoln. The trust took the opportunity to present her with a service award, Brohman said.

An application for state boards and commissions is available on Gov. Dave Heineman's Web site: www.gov.state.ne.us/.

Published Sunday, June 22, 2008

State considers changes in water-czar requirements

BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

With the state facing a variety of water woes, Nebraska is considering changing the job credentials required for its next water czar.

The March retirement of Ann Bleed as director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources launched a plan in the Legislature's waning days to study changing the minimum educational and professional requirements for her replacement.

Some irrigation and natural resources interests want to eliminate the current requirement that the director be a professional engineer with at least five years' experience in irrigation. They favor someone with administrative, negotiating and public relations skills.

"The job has evolved a lot. . . . Now it's much, much more community outreach," said State Sen. Chris Langemeier of Schuyler.

Others say it still takes an engineer to properly interpret hydrological studies and other complex information.

"People, particularly the natural resources districts, just plain don't understand that the director sits like a judge on complicated, technical issues," said Tim Anderson, spokesman for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

The Legislature's Natural Resources Committee plans three public hearings on the question. The first is at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at North Platte Community College. Other hearings are expected in Scottsbluff and Lincoln, but dates haven't been set.

The debate comes at a critical time in Nebraska's water history.

In the Republican River basin, Kansas claims Nebraska owes it more than \$72 million for overuse of river water. Kansas also wants Nebraska to shut down irrigation wells in the region. The dispute, now headed toward arbitration, could wind up in the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the Platte River basin, Nebraska faces a year-end deadline to complete a plan to roll back use of underground water to 1997 levels to avoid violating an agreement with Colorado, Wyoming and the federal government.

In the Niobrara River basin, the Natural Resources Department faces opposition from some landowners, irrigators and others for slapping a temporary ban on new irrigation wells until water supply and demand are balanced.

Gov. Dave Heineman named Brian Dunnigan acting director after Bleed retired, citing her disagreements with the governor. A professional engineer and certified flood plain manager, Dunnigan has worked in the Natural Resources Department for more than 20 years.

Heineman plans to take his time in naming a new director, said spokeswoman Jen Rae Hein.

"There's no definite timetable. . . . The governor is happy with the work that Mr. Dunnigan is doing as acting director. He wants the department to focus on resolving water issues," she said.

State Sen. LeRoy Loudon of Ellsworth, chairman of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee, said he hopes to learn from the hearings what Nebraskans want in a water regulator and what resources the department needs to do its job.

The requirement that the director be an engineer has its roots in the early 20th century, when the then-Department of Roads and Irrigation handled the duties of today's Natural Resources Department. At that time, the director supervised construction of roads and irrigation dams, canals and ditches.

Opponents of the engineer requirement said the job is different today. No canals of significance have been built in Nebraska for more than 20 years, and new reservoirs are unlikely to be constructed.

They also note that the Department of Roads director isn't required to hold an engineering degree.

The primary role of the Department of Natural Resources director today is to administer water laws and formulate public policy concerning underground water and water in streams and rivers, Langemeier said.

"I'm not saying that a good candidate couldn't be a professional engineer, but any number of people with backgrounds in geology, hydrology, economics or public policy - including people without engineering degrees who handle water issues for the federal government - could be well qualified," he said.

John Turnbull, general manager of the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District in York, said Nebraska needs a "go-to people person" in the job.

He said many NRDs have staff hydrologists to advise top managers and elected board

members. The Natural Resources Department could work the same way, he said.

Jay Rempe, a Nebraska Farm Bureau lobbyist, said his members favor dropping the engineering requirement but want to maintain the element of science in department decision-making. "Limiting us to an engineer ties our hands too much," he said.

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Central Platte NRD gets river credits

GRAND ISLAND — The Central Platte Natural Resources District water bank soon will have about 1,000 acre-feet of credits to the Platte River.

It's part of the district's share of responsibility to return the river upstream from Elm Creek from overappropriated to fully appropriated status. Fully appropriated means there's a balance of water supplies and uses.

The district's general manager, Ron Bishop, told his board Thursday in Grand Island that he had closed one perpetual water easement agreement that brings the bank's total to about 827 acre-feet. He said five additional agreements that should be completed this week would raise the total to about 1,000 acre-feet.

Of that total, 940 acre-feet of credits are upstream of Elm Creek, with most coming from retiring Dawson County land near the river from irrigation.

Given the wet spring weather that has flooded crops and basements — and raised water tables by up to 7 feet since late May in some places — several directors asked Bishop if the eastern part of the district could be dropped from fully appropriated status. The designation resulted in moratoriums on new wells and new irrigated acres, and requires offsets for new water uses to maintain the supply-use balance.

"It's not our moratorium," Bishop said. "It's the state that put the moratorium on 60 percent of the district."

—The Kearney Hub