

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: May 1, 2003

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

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- A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities of the District for the month of April, 2003, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:** None.
- 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 April, 2003. 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 April 13, 2003. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
- E. **NRDs GENERALIZED REPORT ON GROUND WATER LEVELS:** Attached for your review is a copy of the NRDs Generalized Report on Ground Water Levels compiled by Dick Ehrman, NRD-NDEQ Liaison. The report is a summary of ground water level measurements submitted by the 23 NRDs across the State of Nebraska. The report in general indicates that levels over the past one or two years are down anywhere from a few inches to a few feet. The areas of greatest ground water level declines appear to be in southwestern and western Nebraska. If you have any questions on this information, please give me a call.
- F. **ICWP TESTIMONY AT HEARING ON TWENTY FIRST CENTURY WATER COMMISSION ACT OF 2003:** As one of 14 National Board of Directors for the Interstate Council on Water Policy (11 state agency directors and 3 local water resources managers), I am pleased to share the attached testimony to be presented by Susan Gilson, ICPW Executive Director, before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on May 7, 2003.
- G. **NEWS CLIPS:**
- ➔ March 27, 2003, South Sioux City Star Article – Funds available for spring construction
 - ➔ March 28, 2003, Blair Enterprise Article – 100th anniversary of National Wildlife Refuge System observed at Boyer Chute

- ➔ April 3, 2002, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Midlands Voice by Chad Smith and Duane Hovorka – Time for leadership on the Missouri River
- ➔ April 4, 2003, Hastings Tribune Article – LRNRD (Lower Republican NRD) tightens well regulations
- ➔ April 10, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Platte on list of troubled waters – The Missouri removed
- ➔ April 13, 2003, Lincoln Journal Star Article – New funding sources sought for Republican River meters
- ➔ April 15, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Study group: Go for total merger. The panel looking into the union of Omaha and Douglas County governments urges that the first steps start now.
- ➔ April 15, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Rural residents near Blair want to limit urban sprawl
- ➔ April 16, 2003, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Put out the fire. Lawmakers should save Forest Service for the sake of rural residents.
- ➔ April 19, 2003, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Sidney, Neb., farmers have plan to save water
- ➔ April 18, 2003, Blair Enterprise Article – Water plan outlined – Meeting lets residents in on NRD proposal
- ➔ April 22, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Proposed: New fees for runoff projects. If state lawmakers approve plan, monthly charges would cover stormwater costs.
- ➔ April 22, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – 1st of two Earth Days observed
- ➔ April 22, 2003, Lincoln Journal Star Editorial – Local View by John Rosenow – Save the trees – and the Nebraska Forest Service
- ➔ April 24, 2003, Lincoln Journal Star Article – Agencies have plan to maintain river traffic
- ➔ May 1, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Compromise clears way for subdivision near Blair
- ➔ May 1, 2003, Omaha World Herald Public Pulse Letter – Our trail is a big plus
- ➔ May 1, 2003, Omaha World Herald Editorial – New emphasis for UNL – What institution is better suited to lead the way on knowledge and wise use of water?

April 2003

Information & Education Report

Information

- Continued work on spring SPECTRUM
- Continued work on Back to the River Slide Program
- Continued work on Earth Day Omaha celebration
- Began work on production of Walnut Creek T-shirt
- Gave speakers bureau presentation to N.W. Rotary Club
- Updated Chalco Hills Nature Trail brochure
- Worked on draft I&E budget for FY 2004
- Continued preparations for NE Envirothon Competition
- Attended NARD I&E Group meeting in York

Education

- Continued planning for Water Works 2003
- Trained 3 new Visitor's Center Hosts
- a Presented Surface Water Programs to all Benson West 5th Graders
- a Held 7 Chalco Hills Field Trips (215 Students visited the park)
- Presented Surface Water Program to Gretna Elementary 3rd Grade Class
- a Presented Bird Program to all Benson West 1st Graders
- a Held Tree Give-Away (Handed out 8,000 trees to area schools)
- a Trained Pre-Service teachers at Creighton University in PLT and PWET
- a Started coordination of Visitor's Center Hosts for Summer 2003
- a Sent out news released detailing NRD Arbor Day activities
- Edited door hanger for Walnut Creek Watershed
- Held training for all presenters of Enviroscape for Water Works
- Continued to plan spring field trips at Chalco Hills
- a E-mailed weekly wellness tips to all NRD staff
- a Up-dated Volunteer Notebook at the front desk
- Coordinated 170 volunteer hours

Sayrise

Shawn

Daniel

Katie

Ke
ma

Haley

Christine
Paula

Jake

William

Alexa

Valerie

Thank you!
Ms. Gasper

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April 2003

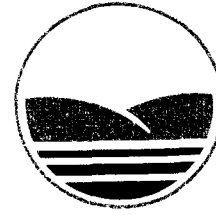
Emmett,

Things are happening at St. Mary's School in Bellevue!! Our outdoor classroom, albeit moving along slowly, is taking shape and we should be all planted and set for Phase One by the end of May.

The Environmental Discovery Lab would not be possible and would not exist without the help of the Papio WRD, so on behalf of St. Mary's School I extend to you our sincere and heartfelt appreciation.

May you be blessed,
Julie Petr

PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER
NATURAL
RESOURCES
DISTRICT



**Current and On-Going Projects
P-MRNRD Legal Counsel**

8901 S. 154TH ST
OMAHA, NE 68138-5621
(402) 444-6222
FAX (402) 895-6543

★ = Top Priority

F = Future Work – No Assignment

N = New Assignment

O = Others Handling

W = Work in Progress

C = Completed

P = PFP's Portion Completed

- **Big Papio Channel Project - West Center Road to West Dodge Road** (Woodward):
 - Subordination Paperwork for Happy Hollow (W)
- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio :** (Cleveland)
 - Whitted Creek Easements to Vacanti (W)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (F)
 - Land Exchange with Gollehon (96th St.) (F)
 - ★ Sloderbeck ROW Agreements (W)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Sklenar, Cleveland):
 - Closing with Bundy's (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
 - Complete easements –three dikes and one drainage ditch (F)
 - Amended drainage ditch easement on Hickey (First National Property) (W)
 - Preview Corps draft scope of services for appraisals(N)
 - ★ Procedure for cabin acquisitions (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Elbow Bend Purchase Agreements as needed (F)

(Over)

- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Brawner Liability Suit (Platte River Connection) (O)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - ★ California Bend – Final settlement with tenant (Wright's) (W)
 - ★ Lower Decatur Bend – Appraisal Review, prepare ROW purchase agreement documents (W)
- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects and Silver Creek Watershed** (Puls/Petermann/Cleveland):
 - Papio Site S-30 – development agreements (F)
 - Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (W)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:**
 - Dam Site 19 agreement (Petermann) (W)
 - Candlewood Easements (Chris Curzon) (O)
 - Dam Site 13 Agreement (Petermann) (F)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
 - Storm water Utility Legislation (P)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
 - Dakota County Rural Water – South Sioux City sale agreement (F)
- **Other:**

TO: NRD Managers, NARD Board Members, Conservation Partners, and
Interested Parties

FROM: Dick Ehrman, NRD-NDEQ Liaison

DATE: April 28, 2003

SUBJECT: Natural Resources Districts Generalized Report on Ground Water Levels

Attached you will find the above-named report, which is a summary of ground water level measurements submitted by the 23 Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) across Nebraska.

The report shows three basic kinds of ground water information for each NRD. First, it gives an indication of the most recent ground water levels measured by the Districts. In most cases, this includes information for 2001-2003, although about half of the NRDs had not completed or only partially completed their water level measurements for 2003 as of this writing. Second, the report shows general information about the longer-term historical ground water levels across Nebraska. Although the term of record for each NRD varies, these levels have been recorded in many areas since the early 1970s. Finally, for several NRDs, there is additional information provided to indicate any other concerns or comments regarding ground water levels.

In general, the report shows that most ground water levels over the past one or two years are down anywhere from a few inches to a few feet. This is not unexpected given the general pattern of below-normal precipitation prevailing across much of Nebraska during that period. The areas of greatest ground water level declines appear to be mostly in southwestern and western Nebraska, again as would be expected since these areas have been most markedly below normal precipitation. Even though many levels are down, it is important to note two points. First, there are some areas where ground water levels have come up slightly during some of the past few years, especially in 2001. Second, even though the recent record is one of ground water declines, ground water levels in most locations are still higher than they have been in past dry periods, such as the early 1990s.

I hope that the information provided in this summary is useful. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (402) 471-2219 or Dean Edson at (402) 471-7674.

**Natural Resources Districts
Generalized Report on Ground Water Levels
April, 2003**

NRD, Headquarters City	Most Current Water Level Information	Long-Term/ Historical Water Level Information	Additional Comments
Central Platte, Grand Island Ron Bishop, General Manager (308) 385-6282	2002: Average level down 1-5 ft.; some areas w/ down as much as 10 ft.; a few areas with small water level rises. 2003 measurements not completed.	Over the period 1982-2002, most ground water levels in the District have increased, with the exception of Merrick County, in which levels are down 1-7.5 ft. However, Merrick County, because of shallow depth to water and aquifer characteristics, is generally first to show problems and the first to recover.	With the hot, dry summer in 2002, expectations are for more significant water level declines in 2003.
Lewis & Clark, Hartington Tom Moser, General Manager (402) 254-6758	No significant declines in past 3 years. 2003 measurements not completed.	No serious long-term concerns over water levels mainly due to aquifer limitations on well production capacity.	Local conflicts have occasionally arisen due to temporary drawdowns.
Little Blue, Davenport Mike Onnen, General Manager (402) 364-2145	2001: Average level down 1.29 ft. 2002: Average level down 0.32 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.69 ft. (based on 90% of measurements); this is about 2.75 ft. above 1992 low.	Over the period 1975-2003, the lowest levels were seen in 1992. Average levels have since risen 6 ft. through 2000, then declined 3.25 ft. through 2003.	Ground water levels appear to be fluctuating but maintainable over most of the District. Increased monitoring is being instituted in southern Thayer and Jefferson Counties due to additional concerns there.
Lower Big Blue, Beatrice Ron Fleecs, General Manager (402) 228-3402	2001: Average level down 1.88 ft. 2002: Average level up 0.06 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.88 ft.	Spring groundwater levels have increased in 6 of the last 11 years. Fluctuations are greatest in wells in the Dakota aquifer.	Ground water levels rose over the fall and winter of 2002-03 an average of 2.44 ft. Wells average 1.46 higher than baseline Spring 1982 levels. The District has seen some problems with domestic wells needing to be lowered.

<p>Lower Elkhorn, Norfolk Stan Staab, General Manager (402) 371-7313</p>	<p>2001: 77% of wells showed levels down from 2000; 23% were up. 93% of wells were within 2 ft. of 2000 levels. 2002: 53% of wells showed levels down from 2001; 47% were up. 94% of wells were within 2 ft. of 2001 levels. 2003 measurements not completed. Monitoring wells at 18 sites equipped with data loggers and pressure transducers that record depth-to-groundwater automatically show a 1.5 to 2.0 foot drop in spring groundwater levels from May of 2000 through May of 2002.</p>	<p>Three sites measured during 2001 and 2002 were record lows, although all were within 4.5 in. of previous record low readings</p>	<p>New well permit application numbers have doubled for this time of year, probably due to poor dryland yields last year and the concern of well drillers and farmers that a moratorium of new wells will be in place in the near future.</p>
<p>Lower Loup, Ord Butch Koehlmoos, General Manager (308) 728-3221</p>	<p><u>Valley County:</u> 2001: Average level steady 2002: Average level up 0.75 ft. 2003: Average level down 0.25 ft. 2003 level is 9.75 ft. above 1982 baseline. <u>Wheeler County:</u> 2001: Average level up 0.5 ft. 2002: Average level down 1 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.5 ft. 2003 level is 5.0 ft. above 1982 baseline. <u>Rock County:</u> 2001: Average level up 0.25 ft. 2002: Average level down 1.5 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.25 ft. 2003 level is 8.25 ft. above 1982 baseline. <u>Sherman County:</u> 2001: Average level steady.</p>	<p>Over the period from approximately 1976-present, water levels in the District have varied widely from year to year, but in all counties, the overall trend for water levels in those years is distinctly upward. Compared to the 1982 baseline, water levels during the period 1976-present have varied from a low of about 3 ft. below baseline in Platte County in 1980 to a high of about 11.25 ft. above baseline in Rock County in 1999.</p>	

Lower Loup, Ord (continued)	<p>2002: Average level down 0.5 ft. 2003: Average level 1 ft. 2003 level is 3.75 ft. above 1982 baseline.</p> <p><u>Nance County:</u></p> <p>2001: Average level down 0.5 ft. 2002: Average level down 0.5 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.25 ft. 2003 level is 3.5 ft. above 1982 baseline.</p> <p><u>Platte County:</u></p> <p>2001: Average level down 1.5 ft. 2002: Average level down 1 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.5 ft. 2003 level is 3.5 ft. above 1982 baseline.</p>		
Lower Niobrara, Butte Duane Filsinger, General Manager (402) 775-2343	<p>2001: Average level down 2.0 ft. 2002: Average level up 0.9 ft. 2003: Average level down 3.6 ft. (2003 measurements not completed.)</p>	Over the period 1981-present, water levels have varied, but have never gone below the 1981 average.	
Lower Platte North, Wahoo John Miyoshi, General Manager (402) 443-4675	<p><u>Platte Valley:</u></p> <p>2001: Median level up 0.7 ft. 2002: Median level down 1.0 ft. 2003: Median level down 1.1 ft.</p> <p><u>Todd Valley:</u></p> <p>2001: Median level down 1.1 ft. 2002: Median level down 1.0 ft. 2003: Median level down 1.8 ft.</p> <p><u>Shell Creek:</u></p> <p>2001: Median level down 1.5 ft. 2002: Median level down 0.7 ft. 2003: Median level down 2.1 ft.</p> <p><u>Uplands:</u></p> <p>2001: Median level down 1.3 ft. 2002: Median level down 1.6 ft. 2003: Median level down 3.0 ft.</p>	<p>Most wells have been measured since about 1985 or the early 1990s. Over this period, water levels have varied, but in general decreasing water levels have been seen over the past 3 years. The Platte Valley and Todd Valley levels are at the lowest levels seen since 1990, although they are only 5-6 ft. below what is considered a full aquifer. Shell Creek levels are considered to be average (although still decreasing). Levels in the Uplands vary considerably over time; all 2002 levels were historical lows while spring 2003 levels are about 4 ft. above historical lows.</p>	Without significant spring rains, further declines are anticipated. The number of well permit applications has increased significantly. Last year saw the greatest number of permit application since a management area was implemented in 1997. This year has already seen twice as many application as any of the previous years at this same time.

Lower Platte South, Lincoln Glenn Johnson, General Manager (402) 476-2729	<u>Dwight-Valparaiso Aquifer:</u> 2001: Spring level down 2.62 ft. 2002: Spring level down 1.01 ft.	Over the period 1982-present, spring water levels in the four identified aquifer areas have varied from a high of 6.38 ft. above baseline to 8.17 feet below baseline. Fall readings in 2002 were close to what was recorded in 1991.	Calls have been received from people who live near irrigators worried about having lowering water levels and not having water. One near Alvo supposedly had to replace a well for that reason but the District is not sure of the cause. People who call seem to be frustrated that the regulatory system won't do anything about it until people run out of water.
	<u>Crete-Princeton-Adams Aquifer:</u> 2001: Spring level up 0.11 ft. 2002: Spring level down 2.23 ft.		
	<u>Dakota Aquifer:</u> 2001: Spring level down 1.43 ft. 2002: Spring level up 0.09 ft.		
	<u>Lower Salt Creek Aquifer:</u> 2001: Spring level down 0.66 ft. 2002: Spring level down 0.87 ft.		
	2003 measurements not completed.		
Lower Republican, Alma Mike Clements, General Manager (308) 928-2182	2001-2003: Average levels have varied across the District, but in most cases are down anywhere from a fraction of a foot to 2 or 3 ft.	Most wells have been measured since the early 1980s. Over that period of record, the average spring water level is up 1.05 ft. compared to the initial baseline reading.	
Middle Niobrara, Valentine Mike Murphy, General Manager (402) 376-3241	2001-2002: Average levels for NRD have remained relatively stable. 2003: For Cherry County, average levels are down as much as 1.5 ft. 2003 measurements for Keya Paha and Brown Counties not completed.		Generally, inactive wells show fairly stable levels, while those actively used for irrigation are decreasing. Wells north of the Niobrara River are down the most, with those south of the river showing smaller decreases.
Middle Republican, Curtis Dan Smith, General Manager (308) 367-4281	2001: Average level down 0.853 ft. 2002: Average level down 0.47 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.08 ft. Average level is 4 ft. below 1974 baseline.	Over the period 1974-present, average water levels have shown a small but steady annual decline.	Past three years have seen an accelerated drop in water levels; recently initiated drilling suspension should help water levels recover if normal precipitation returns.

<p>Nemaha, Tecumseh Bob Hilske, General Manager (402) 335-3326</p>	<p><u>Northern Paleovalley Alluvial Aquifer Area:</u> 2001: Average level up 0.42 ft. 2002: Average level down 0.59 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.60 ft. <u>Southeastern Paleovalley Alluvial Aquifer Area:</u> 2001: Average level down 0.06 ft. 2002: Average level down 2.46 ft. 2003: Measurements not completed <u>Dakota Sandstone Area:</u> 2001: Average level down 1.22 ft. 2002: Average level down 2.65 ft. 2003: Average level down 3.88 ft. Above levels are relative to historical spring ground water levels, from as early as 1989.</p>	<p>Spring ground water levels have been mostly below average since 2001.</p>	
<p>North Platte, Gering Ron Cacek, General Manager (308) 436-7111</p>	<p><u>North Tablelands Area:</u> Average water level declines of 0.4-0.5 ft./yr. over last 10-20 years <u>Pumpkin Creek Basin:</u> Some water level declines of 0-1 ft. historical; 3-5 ft. over past few years <u>South Tablelands Area:</u> Some declines; area of limited development <u>North Platte River Valley:</u> Some water level changes in the range of 1-5 ft./yr.</p>	<p>See comments at left.</p>	<p>There have been 15,000 water level measurements made for the spring fall water level program from 855 wells over the period of record in the North Platte NRD. The majority has been made in the last 10 years. Numerous other water levels have been made for special studies. The District also operates 37 continuous recorder wells some with rain gauges.</p>
<p>Papio-Missouri River, Omaha Steve Oltmans, General Manager (402) 444-6222</p>	<p>2001: Average level up 1.9 ft. 2002: Average level down 3.0 ft. 2003: Average level down 0.9 ft. (2003 only partially completed)</p>	<p>Most wells have been measured since the late 1970s or early 1980s. Over that period of record (up until the most recent measurement), the average water level is down 1.0 ft. compared to the initial reading.</p>	

South Platte, Sidney Rod Horn, General Manager (308) 254-2377	<u>Cheyenne County:</u> 2002: Average level down 1.88 ft. <u>Deuel County:</u> 2002: Average level down 0.39 ft. <u>Kimball County:</u> 2002: Average level down 1.52 ft. 2003 measurements not completed.	Over the period 1998-2002, the average water level changes in the three counties are: <u>Cheyenne County:</u> Down 4.29 ft. <u>Deuel County:</u> Down 2.49 ft. <u>Kimball County:</u> Down 1.27 ft.	A drought monitoring network has been implemented across the District in January 2003. The area of greatest concern is a 124 square mile area west of Sidney, including the confluence of Lodgepole Creek and Sidney Draw, where declines since Spring 2002 range from 2 to 6 ft.
Tri-Basin, Holdrege John Thorburn, General Manager (308) 995-6688	<u>Little Blue River Basin:</u> 2001: Average level down 0.506 ft. 2002: Average level down 0.038 ft. <u>Republican River Basin:</u> 2001: Average level up 0.339 ft. 2002: Average level down 0.879 ft. <u>Platte River Basin:</u> 2001: Average level down 0.568 ft. 2002: Average level up 0.010 ft. 2003 measurements not completed.	Over the period 1983-2002, the average water level changes in the three basins are: <u>Little Blue River Basin:</u> Up 6.325 ft. <u>Republican River Basin:</u> Up 10.376 ft. <u>Platte River Basin:</u> Up 5.384 ft. For the entire NRD, the average 20-year change to 2002 is up 9.015 ft.	For the most part, ground water levels have recovered or exceeded the levels from the dry years of 1982-92, and have not yet repeated those declines.
Twin Platte, North Platte Kent Miller, General Manager (308) 535-8080	<u>Central High Tablelands Area:</u> 2001: Average level down 0.43 ft. 2002: Average level down 1.10 ft. 2003: Average level down 2.39 ft. <u>Sandhills Area:</u> 2001: Average level up 2.06 ft. 2002: Average level up 1.63 ft. 2003: Average level up 1.18 ft. All levels expressed relative to 1983 baseline.	Over the period 1983-2000, water levels in the District were stable.	Target Areas for increased management activities have been implemented in 5 townships in southern Keith County and 1 township in southwestern Lincoln County since 1996-98; no new target areas implemented since 1998.
Upper Big Blue, York John Turnbull, General Manager (402) 362-6601	2001: Average level down 2.25 ft. 2002: Average level down 1.77 ft. 2003: Average level down 2.96 ft.; this is 0.38 ft. above 1961 baseline.	Over the period 1961-present, average water levels have varied from a low of 7.28 ft. below to a high of 7.36 ft. above the 1961 baseline.	As of 2003, 535 wells across the District are being measured to establish water levels.

Upper Elkhorn, O'Neill Dennis Schueth, General Manager (402) 336-3867	<u>Antelope County:</u> 2001: Average level down 1.13 ft. 2002: Average level up 0.47 ft. 2003: Average level down 2.53 ft. <u>Holt County:</u> 2001: Average level down 0.41 ft. 2002: Average level up 0.37 ft. 2003: Average level down 2.43 ft. <u>Rock County:</u> 2001: Average level down 3.45 ft. 2002: Average level up 1.02 ft. 2003: Average level down 2.90 ft. <u>Wheeler County:</u> 2001: Average level down 1.78 ft. 2002: Average level up 0.15 ft. 2003: Average level down 1.87 ft.	Over the period 1976-present, average water levels have held fairly steady and are largely at or above the 1976 baseline.	
Upper Loup, Thedford Helen White, General Manager (308) 645-2250	2001: Average level up 0.44 ft. 2002: Average level down 1.47 ft. 2003 measurements not completed.	Over the period 1976-present, average water levels have varied slightly, but in general water levels are still above 1976 baseline.	2002 was most noticeable in terms of drought; greatest concern is effect on lakes, wet meadows, and creeks.
Upper Niobrara-White, Chadron Lyndon Vogt, General Manager (308) 432-6190	2001: Average level down 0.56 ft. 2002: Average level down 1.25 ft. 2003 measurements not completed.	Over the period 1992-present, water levels in recorder wells throughout the District have varied from an increase of 0.81 ft. to a decrease of 20.53 ft.	
Upper Republican, Imperial Bob Hipple, General Manager (308) 882-5173	1999-2002: Average level down 1.13%/yr.	Over the period 1997-2002, average water levels have gone down by 0.78%/yr. Over the period 1992-2002, average water levels have gone down by 0.48%/yr.	

Testimony of the
Interstate Council on Water Policy

Presented by
Susan Gilson
Executive Director

Hearing on the
Twenty First Century Water Commission Act of 2003

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

Water Resources
and Environment Subcommittee
Chairman John Duncan

May 7, 2003

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before your panel today on issues relating to the Twenty First Century Water Commission Act of 2003, H.R. 135. I am testifying today on behalf of the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP). ICWP is the national organization of state, interstate and regional water resource management agencies.

In particular, ICWP focuses on the interstate perspective of issues involving water quantity and water quality, particularly, the dynamic interface between state and federal management responsibilities. ICWP is committed to seeking more comprehensive and coordinated water management across all levels of government that integrates quantity and quality concerns, ground and surface water management, and economic and environmental values.

ICWP was founded in 1959 to provide a voice for the states in national water policy. In the late 1960s, ICWP successfully fought for the Water Resources Planning Act that provided the basis for improved state water planning programs. During the 1970s, ICWP served as the Standing State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Water Resources Council. In the late 1980s, ICWP was influential in the development of the 1986 Water Resources Development Act, which redefined cost-sharing for federal water projects.

In the 1990s, ICWP continued its leadership by spearheading development of a National Water Policy Charter and promoting a national dialogue on water policy. We urge the Committee to closely review the ICWP National Water Policy Charter as themes outlined in this document should be considered in any effort to establish a national water policy commission. Similar themes to those expressed in the Charter are also put forward in the Enlibra Principles supported by both the Western Governors and the National Governors' Associations.

ICWP National Water Policy Charter Principles that could help guide the duties of a national water policy commission include:

- Manage water for long-term goals, recognizing both human needs and the health of water dependent ecosystems.
- Manage ground and surface water as an integrated system, by hydrologic units, including both quality and quantity in all phases of the water cycle.

- Realign government roles and responsibilities for water management, shifting responsibility and authority from federal government to states, regional agencies and local government where appropriate. (*Similar to Enlibra Principle – National Standards, Neighborhood Solutions*)
- Improve government performance, recognizing, consolidating and integrating government water programs to increase their effectiveness and responsiveness to the public.
- Set water management priorities based on relative risk, considering the cost and benefits of management actions. (*Enlibra – Recognition of Benefits and Costs*)
- Recognize and include all affected interests in water policy making (*Enlibra – Collaboration, Not Polarization*)
- Emphasize water management program results, not the bureaucratic process (*Enlibra – Reward Results, Not Programs*)
- Use economic and other incentives, wherever feasible to achieve water management objectives (*Enlibra – Markets Before Mandates*)

Twenty First Century Water Commission Act of 2003

ICWP is pleased that H.R. 135 recognizes the ever-growing importance and need to appropriately define the means to draw national attention on water management issues. As noted in testimony provided by Betsy Cody of the Congressional Research Service last May as background on issues relating to H.R. 135, “there has been no comprehensive change in federal water resource management since enactment of the Water Resources Planning Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-80, 42 USC 1962 et seq.). Instead, changes have occurred incrementally, agency by agency, statute by statute.”

Since 1965, complexities in addressing national water resource issues have only grown. According to CRS, as of May 2002, at least 12 different standing committees had some type of jurisdiction over various components of federal water policy. With the advent of new homeland security issues, the issues have only grown more complicated and the number of committees

with jurisdiction over these issues has likely grown. While ICWP commends the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee for looking into this critical issue, it also observes there are two definitive schools of thoughts on the need for establishing national water policy. The first notes the lack of national policy since 1965 and sees a need for re-assertion of federal perspective in new policy through a commission.

ICWP notes that since the water resource and environmental legislation of the 1960's and 1970's, national water policy has typically been expressed in three ways: 1) administrative regulations to implement and interpret existing statute; 2) Congressional riders and provisos, often attached to appropriation bills, intended to direct federal action on water resources; and, 3) district and appellate court decisions regarding federal agency actions. The second school of thought believes this approach in policy development is balanced and implements water policy at the state level while meeting the nation's needs. While there is no consensus on the manner of establishing national water policy, ICWP suggests that an appropriate start to any policy analysis and review would be the 1973 Report by the National Water Commission.

The policy recommendations contained within that report have been implemented to varying degrees in the past thirty years. Any contemporary national commission should examine the modern-day applicability of those past policies, water issues not considered in 1973 and the role of the three branches of government in setting water policy. Further, we urge that any such analysis and review be developed with the explicit involvement of state, interstate and local water resource managers who implement the nation's water resource statutes and programs on a daily basis.

Narrowed Focus on Water Supply Issues

ICWP members have raised concerns regarding the bill's new exclusive emphasis on water supply issues. In contrast, H.R. 135's predecessor legislation (H.R. 3561) charged the commission with studying "all aspects of water management" and developing recommendations for "a comprehensive water policy." If a national commission on water policy is formed, it would be myopic not to broaden the panel's focus to look at other critical water policy issues. As federal policy moves forward to recognize integration of management of quantity and quality issues at all levels of government, it seems that any national snapshot of current water management issues must

be broader than water supply acquisition and development. Furthermore, any national commission on water policy needs to be aware of and utilize any ongoing analyses, inventories and assessments being conducted by the federal agencies on the nation's waters, before contracting such data acquisition for its consideration.

Focus Seems to Be More on Increasing Supplies and Less on Conservation

Our members are concerned that language in Section 2, describing the bill's focus on water supply issues, especially combined with some of the duties outlined in Section 4 seems focused more on increasing the availability of water supplies and less on improving conservation approaches. A more balanced approach might be more successful. Due consideration needs to be focused on emerging strategies such as stormwater reuse, surface and groundwater conjunctive use, alternative reservoir operations and water markets.

Commission Size and Structure

Although the bill's language has been improved with regard to the role of states in managing water resources, the current bill still fails to adequately recognize the inherent role of the states in managing water resources. In a related issue, we note that the new bill decreases the size of the commission from its former 17 to 7 members. While this may enhance the commission's efficiency, we are concerned that language was omitted from the legislation identifying the role that state representatives must play in such an initiative. ICWP recommends that representatives from states and interstate water resource organizations be included among the commission members. If the commission is going to be tasked with looking at regional water concerns, representatives of interstate water resource organizations can provide the necessary expertise to address these basin-scale issues.

Length of Time to Prepare Commission Report

In comparing, H.R. 135 to a similar bill introduced by Rep. Linder in the last Congress (H.R. 3561), ICWP is pleased to note that the life of the Commission has been changed from one to three years. Certain water policy issues, such as infrastructure investment, need immediate attention, but one year does not provide enough time for the Commission to be launched and develop a report that adequately addresses these complex and controversial

water supply issues. However, given the urgency of these emerging issues, ICWP would recommend that the interim reports required in Section 9 of the bill, include preliminary recommendations, as well as current activities addressing those issues.

In closing, I would note that ICWP in this new millennium is building on its past efforts by providing a new voice for interstate river basin organizations and for addressing critical water resource issues across state boundaries.

ICWP has developed an Interstate Declaration of Partnership among numerous interstate organizations, all bound by the belief that water transcends political boundaries, that watersheds represent the most effective means of water management and that regional and national water policy should center on the interstate perspective. A copy of the Interstate Declaration of Partnership has been provided to the Committee and we urge you to closely review that document.

I am also pleased to announce that ICWP, in the Spring of 2002, released the results of an interstate survey undertaken by the association with a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Those survey results are also provided to the committee. The goal of ICWP's Interstate River Basin Organization survey was to increase the understanding of interstate organizational interests, authorities and capacities to respond to growing national water concerns. We also hope that the survey will help to improve communications among these important organizations nationwide.

For further questions, please feel free to contact me at 202-218-4133 or ICWP Chairman Tom Stiles at 785-296-6170. On behalf of ICWP, thank you again for this opportunity.



Star

South Sioux City, NE

Cir. W. 3,490

MAR 27 2003

Universal Information Services, Inc.

Funds available for spring construction

Cost-sharing funds for the construction of spring conservation practices available through the Conservation Assistance Program (CAP) administered by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD).

This program provides funding for the construction of terraces, grade stabilization dams, waterways and diversions. These programs are made available to encourage conservation measures to reduce erosion, silting and pollution of our streams and lakes.

The current cost-share rate is 75 percent of the actual cost (not to

exceed the local average costs) of these practices and will be made available to interested landowners. In the case of grade stabilization dams, 75 percent of the drainage area must have land treatment in the form of terraces or be seeded to grass to be eligible for cost-share assistance for that particular practice. Waterways are eligible only if they are part of a terrace system.

For a limited time, landowners in the Pigeon/Jones Creek Special Watershed Project area can receive 85 percent cost-share rate for the construction of conservation practices in the watershed area. In addi-

tion, landowners can also receive 100 percent of the costs associated with the construction of dams if they provide a voluntary easement for land-rights needed to build the dam.

All NRD programs and services are available without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status.

To sign-up for cost-share or for additional information contact your local Natural Resources District (NRD) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in South Sioux City.

MAR 28 2003

Universal Information Services, Inc.

100th anniversary of National Wildlife Refuge System observed at Boyer Chute

Crystal-clear blue skies prevailed on Friday March 14, as Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. As migratory birds of all descriptions filled the air, Refuge Manager Bryan Schultz highlighted the System's wildlife legacy.

He recognized no less than 25 federal, state, local, and private entities that have joined to make the refuge a reality and dedicated the day to the alliance of conservation stewardship. This power of partnerships was showcased by a ceremonial transfer of the Nathan's Lake area from Steve Oltmans, General Manager, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The actual transaction will take place later this year.

Later in the day, the refuge turned to the dedication of a time capsule to be opened 100 years from now. Pastor Gregg Miller, Ft. Calhoun Presbyterian Church presented a thought provoking, scripture-based appeal for human stewardship of the land. The capsule's memorial-stone plaque was donated by the Paulsen Family, former owners of the tract of land containing Horseshoe Lake. A mock-up of the plaque bearing the name of Harry and Mildred Paulsen was presented to the matriarch, who also broke ground for the time capsule site.

The refuge continued with the open-house of the refuge headquarters the following day with food and an assortment of informational materials for visitors. The Ft. Calhoun Post Office was on-site with a temporary philatelic station to cancel the newly-issued Pelican Island postage stamp.

Pelican Island was the first National Wildlife Refuge, established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903.



Refuge Manager Bryan Schultz (right) presents Mildred Paulsen of Blair with a mock-up plaque of the Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge time capsule dedicated on March 14, 2003. (Courtesy photo)

Birding/Refuge tours were provided during the day.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses nearly 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery re-

source offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

Midlands Voices

Time for leadership on the Missouri River

BY CHAD SMITH AND DUANE HOVORKA

Smith is director of American Rivers' Nebraska field office in Lincoln. Hovorka is executive director of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation.

Recently, American Rivers and the Nebraska Wildlife Federation, along with several other conservation groups, filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for allegedly failing to do their jobs properly in managing the Missouri River.

In 1989, the corps began a review of the operation of the Missouri's six big dams. This review was prompted by a severe drought in the basin that exposed inequities in river system management. Fourteen years later, while the basin is in the midst of yet another severe drought, the corps has done nothing to address problems with Missouri River management. With no end in sight to the corps' interminable delay, litigation is unfortunately the last recourse.

Attorney General Jon Bruning's March 28 commentary ("Nebraska must guard its interest in river") plays directly into the hands of this delay. Mr. Bruning, like the corps, seems to believe Nebraska's future with the Missouri River is tied

**Plenty of
Nebraskans do not
agree that the
status quo
adequately
protects
'Nebraska's
interests.'**

to a management plan that, according the National Academy of Sciences' 2002 report on the river, largely reflects "social values from the mid-twen-

tieth century."

Uses of the river such as flood control, water supply, hydropower and navigation are important. We all enjoy many benefits of the Missouri River system as it is now managed. But we also bear the burden of a river system that is in a sad state of ecological decline. The Missouri is everyone's river, and plenty of Nebraskans do not agree with Mr. Bruning that the status quo adequately protects "Nebraska's interests."

Public values in the Missouri, such as native fish and wildlife, hunting, fishing and quality-of-life benefits, are just as important to Nebraskans as the private values of navigation and other uses. In practice and in law, this set of benefits comprises the contemporary social needs of Nebraska and the rest of the basin. We do not support changes in management on the Missouri that elevate fish and wildlife and recreation above other uses of the river. Rather, developing a management plan for the Missouri that truly solidifies a balance between these public and private values is the end we seek.

Mr. Bruning suggests that flow changes, particularly the recommendation for lower flows for a short time in July and August to provide more shallow, slow-water habitat and sandbars on the lower river, will "substantially harm" Nebraska water interests. Flow changes may indeed affect some river uses, and those effects must be quantified and properly addressed. But management decisions must be based on fact, not rhetoric.

Last summer, the Missouri

River experienced a five-week period of low flows during July and August. According to the corps, there were no significant effects on hydropower, lower river power plants or water supply. Marinas along the lower river operated all summer. And, according to agencies like the Missouri Department of Conservation, recreation such as fishing and camping increased. So, during the summertime low-flow period, the world did not end. Instead, there was a moderate shift among river benefits.

The corps, however, remains wedded to the status quo in the face of strong scientific, economic and legal evidence that shows Missouri River dam operations must be changed from their 1960s-era guidance to a modern 21st century plan. The corps continues to find ways to ignore the pressing needs of the river and the people who depend on it. The corps refuses to restore more natural flows to the Missouri, yet provides no scientific information to suggest that these flow changes would not benefit native species — as the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Academy of Sciences, all of the basin state fish and wildlife management agencies and even the corps itself have concluded they would.

There is a long list of numbers from the corps that shows how modest flow changes can be implemented without causing undue impact on current uses of the river: We'd get 99 percent of the current flood control benefits, 2 percent greater annual hydropower benefits, no major flooding of farmland, navigation on the Missouri in the spring and fall, improved navigation on the Mississippi River — the list goes on.

We also should not fail to recognize the additional economic benefits of a restored Missouri River. Healthy populations of native fish and wildlife are important, but consider the tremendous benefits of increased opportunities for recreation and tourism. A healthy Missouri River will be a much better attraction for those who want to fish from its banks, picnic on its sandbars, hike along its course and boat on its water.

This approach makes good environmental sense and good economic sense.

Also in its 2002 report, the National Academy of Sciences wrote: "Stakeholders with vested interests in tightly controlled systems may wield great political influence and may resist changes to traditional management policies." It is unfortunate that Mr. Bruning has so quickly succumbed to this political influence and that he fails to recognize that a healthy Missouri River and a healthy Missouri River valley should be viewed as an asset to our state and basin.

It's easy to support the status quo in anything and find ways to delay and deny. Change of any kind brings with it challenges and experiences that require vision, determination and leadership. The corps and Attorney General Bruning have the opportunity to show such leadership as they engage in Missouri River decision-making and do the right thing for the future of the river and all the people of Nebraska.

We're still waiting.

APR 4 - 2003

Universal Information Services, Inc.

LRNRD tightens well regulations

&PLACEMENT WELLS
CAN'T IRRIGATE
ADDITIONAL ACRES

DIANA LAMBSON*Hastings Tribune*

ALMA — Amending the Lower Republican Natural Resources District's flow meter and well moratorium rules and regulations required three hours of closed-door consideration Thursday.

Mike Clements, district general manager, said the board worked hard to clarify the language in the moratorium regulations regarding replacement wells.

The LRNRD board imposed a moratorium on the digging of new upland irrigation wells in much of the district in December 2002. A provision enacted at that time allowed for "replacement wells" to be dug if necessary, with some restrictions.

When first written, he said, the regulations indicated only that a replacement well had to be for the same tract of land.

"Now," Clements said, "if the well is for irrigation it must be constructed to provide water only to land historically irrigated by the well being replaced, and, it shall not be used to irrigate any additional acres."

The board's action Thursday

was prompted by questions that had arisen over two replacement wells dug in the district recently, he said.

In addition to making that wording change, the board decided to add a requirement for a permit process for replacement wells, Clements said. The date and time for a public hearing on that proposed requirement will be scheduled at the regular board meeting April 11.

Because of a legal requirement that the hearing date be advertised for at least three weeks, Clements said, the hearing probably will be set for sometime in May.

In other business Thursday, the board heard a report from Clements that money the district had been promised from the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program for flow meter cost shares is gone.

To this point, he said, the district has been providing cost-share assistance from the remainder of the money left over from an alluvial well-metering cost share program.

Beginning today, Clements said, all further flow meter cost share applications will be held pending further funding from the state.

"The board believes the state made a promise to fund these meters through NSWCP and now they should live up to it," Clements said.

Platte on list of troubled waters

*River again gets
endangered status*

The Missouri removed

4-10-03

BY NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The Platte River, the lifeblood of Nebraska and internationally important for migrating birds, has been ranked as one of the nation's 10 most-endangered rivers by an environmental group.

At the same time, American Rivers has removed the Missouri River from its list — a sign the group is betting that the courts eventually will pressure the Army Corps of Engineers into allowing a more natural river flow. The Missouri had been on the list for the past nine years and was at the top of the list the past two years.

The Platte was ranked seventh-most endangered. The group added the Platte to the list because it believes the drought could push irrigators and others into taking more water from the Platte and because a crucial river management proposal is to be released later this year.

The annual list targets rivers that face imminent danger or pivotal policy decisions. The Platte, which drains portions of Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska, was on the list five other times during the previous 17 years.

"This is a world-class resource that we've got right here in Nebraska," said Duane Hovorka, executive director of the Nebraska Wildlife Foundation, which nominated the Platte. "We've seen what happens in the western part of the state when we ignore problems — the Pumpkin Creek went dry because we ignored all the drilling that was going on along the creek."

See **Platte**: Page 2

Endangered rivers

- 1) Big Sunflower River, Mississippi.
- 2) Klamath River, California and Oregon.
- 3) Ipswich River, Massachusetts.
- 4) Gunnison River, Colorado.
- 5) Rio Grande River, Southwest.
- 6) Mattaponi River, Virginia.
- 7) Platte River, Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska.
- 8) Snake River, Idaho, Washington, Oregon.
- 9) Tallapoosa River, Alabama, Georgia.
- 10) Trinity River, Texas.



Continued from Page 1

The Pumpkin Creek is a tributary that enters the North Platte River near the Panhandle town of Bridgeport.

The report faulted Nebraska for allowing unrestricted drilling of irrigation wells in much of the Platte watershed. Other threats in the river's three-state area include pressures for additional dams and expanded reservoirs.

Tim Anderson, spokesman for the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, said American Rivers is right in its criticism of well-drilling in Nebraska.

"There's no question we've put our heads in the sand," he said. But he cautioned against

"throwing stones" and said the state needs to let the various studies that are under way come to light.

Later this year, the U.S. Interior Department will release a plan to manage the river, which will trigger an extensive public comment period. The National Academy of Science is conducting an independent review of the science supporting the management plan. And a Nebraska water policy task force is preparing policy suggestions for the Legislature.

About 70 percent of Nebraskans get their drinking water from aquifers along the Platte. The river also supplies water for much of the state's electric needs and irrigates some of Nebraska's driest ground. The

river is a major engine for tourism and recreation.

At the same time, it has international importance because of its role in providing habitat for migrating birds. About 300 species of migrating birds, including the endangered whooping crane, depend upon it. About 80 percent of the continental sandhill crane population stops along the Platte each spring to fatten up for the arduous journey north.

"We're not saying that fish and wildlife are more important than other uses of the river," said Chad Smith, Nebraska director of American Rivers. "We maintain they are equally important and need to be considered properly."

American Rivers and nine other conservation groups have sued the Corps of Engineers over its management of the Missouri.

The State of Nebraska has joined the case in opposition to American Rivers. Attorney General Jon Bruning said he believes lower flows in the summer could hurt municipal, electric generation and other interests along the Missouri.

Hearings have not yet been set, but American Rivers believes the courts will order changes in the operation of the upstream dams.

"If you stick to the facts and look at the science, the economics and the law, the endpoints are pretty obvious," Smith said. "We think it will be pretty compelling to the judge."

New funding sources sought for Republican River meters

The Appropriations Committee suggested giving fewer state funds to the project.

4/13/03
BY BRIAN G. CARLSON
Lincoln Journal Star

With the well of state money drying up, Nebraska may have to find other money to install well meters in the Republican River basin.

In December, Kansas and Nebraska settled their four-year legal dispute over the use of water from the Republican River.

As part of the settlement, Nebraska was required to provide data on water use. The settlement did not require meters on every well in the basin, but experts say that is the best way to gather the required data.

The four natural resources districts in the basin agreed to require irrigators to pay for half the cost of purchasing and installing the well meters, with the state picking up the remainder.

The Republican River flows out of Colorado, crosses through the northwestern corner of Kansas, loops through Nebraska and drops back into Kansas just south of Superior.

Throughout the basin, 4,845

'(Irrigators) should, in my opinion, have part of the fiscal responsibility for following through with what needs to be done.'

— Sen. Chris Beutler, on who should pay for installing well meters in the Republican River basin

meters must be installed. About half have been installed so far, said Roger Patterson, director of the Department of Natural Resources.

Gov. Mike Johanns has proposed \$2.27 million of funding, enough to pay the state's half.

But the Appropriations Committee is considering significantly less funding.

The total amount of state and federal funding envisioned under the Appropriations Committee's tentative proposal for 2003-04

could range from about \$1 million to \$1.7 million. In order to reach the higher figure, the feds would have to contribute about \$200,000.

The committee also approved a declaration that no more state money would be provided for well meters after next year's appropriation.

Most of the state money would come from funds earmarked for legal expenses in the two states' dispute over the river.

Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln voted to cut off state funding after next year's appropriation. He said irrigators in the Republican River basin were the primary beneficiaries of the settlement, which for the most part allows them to continue existing water use.

"They should, in my opinion, have part of the fiscal responsibility for following through with what needs to be done," he said.

The attorneys general for Kansas and Nebraska negotiated the settlement, with the Legislature having little involvement, Beutler said. He said the state should set a precedent for future well meters by not funding the Republican River meters beyond next year.

See METERS, Page 5D

Lincoln Journal Star
Sunday, April 13, 2003

5D

■ Meters

Continued from Page 1D

Sen. Roger Wehrbein, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, voted against the intent to end state funding for the meters.

He argued that the state had a responsibility to help carry out the terms of the lawsuit.

Patterson, director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, said his agency would seek other sources to make up for the lower amount of state support.

Nebraska must comply with the settlement beginning in 2006. Patterson said he expected all of the well meters would be in place by 2005.

The Lower Republican River Natural Resources District, one of the four districts in the basin, recently suspended its deadline for well-meter installation in response to the likelihood of lower-than-expected state funding.

Dean Edson, executive director of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, said well meters could cost as much as \$1,000 to \$1,200.

Edson said other funding sources would be pursued, including environmental trust funds. But he said the state should share the meter costs.

"I think there's a responsibility there to help with that, especially when the state negotiated it."

Reach Brian G. Carlson at 473-7251 or bcarlson@journalstar.com.

Study group: Go for total merger

Recommendations:

That the City of Omaha and Douglas County merge into a municipal county, work to commence immediately, and that functional consolidations begin in as many departments as possible, including but not limited to Parks, Fleet Management, Purchasing, Facilities Management, local Planning and Personnel.

That the City of Omaha should explore annexation of Elkhorn or find alternate means to grow compatibly with Elkhorn.

That a regional approach should be explored for planning, law enforcement, transportation, parks and health services.

That the city should explore annexation across county lines.

■ The panel looking into the union of Omaha and Douglas County governments urges that the first steps start now.

By NICHOLE AKSAMIT

WORLD-HERALD STAFFWRITER

4-15-03

Total merger it is.

Though the final report's not yet inked, a study committee on Monday recommended that local leaders start the legwork to merge Omaha and Douglas County governments and, in the short term, begin merging select city and

county departments.

An audience of about 25 people, including former Mayor Hal Daub, turned out to watch and weigh in as the seven-member Joint Committee to Study City/County Merger deliberated the proposal, its first to directly address full merger.

Daub urged the panel not to let city-county turf battles sidetrack its work. Approving the concept and getting it before voters, he said, was the most important thing.

"About 95 percent of the people in our county are served in a variety of ways and a major way by one government," Daub said. "And yet we have two huge, colliding, tax-eating governments. ... Changing city-county government won't happen without the concept of merger being adopted as a start by this organization."

Others, however, wanted answers

about how citizens would benefit from a merger.

Committee member Chuck Powell cast the lone no vote. He said the committee had yet to justify such a merger.

County Engineer Tom Doyle said the committee has looked for a compelling reason to merge and, absent one, is saying merging makes sense anyway.

"It's like, there's gotta be a pony in there somewhere in all of this stuff you've had to shovel out of the horse stall," he said.

Elkhorn City Administrator Don Eikmeier said the committee has no evidence that a merger would do anything other than concentrate political power. He said there is a reason for multiple layers of government. "Our founders didn't want to name anybody king."

Committee Vice Chairwoman Kathleen
See Merge: Page 2

Merge: Committee to present final report in June

Continued from Page 1

Jeffries said the total merger proposal emerged from the group's research, not any pre-conceived notions about consolidation.

One expert told the committee that it could expect merger savings or costs of plus or minus 5 percent, which Jeffries deemed "quite sizable." Jeffries said government mergers can

help communities provide more efficient service. And, she added, having a single, county-wide government would lessen public confusion about who is responsible for a specific government service issue or problem.

Since May, the committee has recommended merging select departments through city-county agreements in all

but a handful of areas.

Chairman Lou Lamberty said those individual mergers posed different hurdles — many of them legal or financial — that could be addressed at once by making the changes needed for a total merger.

It would take at least two years before such a merger could come before voters, Lamberty said. He noted that that

would happen only if city and county leaders agreed to follow the recommendation and quickly worked out some kinks in state and local laws.

The committee plans to discuss a draft report May 14 and is to issue a final report to the City Council and County Board in June.

Rural residents near Blair want to limit urban sprawl

4-15-03

By TODD VON KAMPEN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

BLAIR, Neb. — There's still a lot of elbow room north of Omaha, especially for folks who staked their claims in the rolling hills and dense trees near Blair.

Some of them, like Erin Turner-Bird, don't want too many city folks to get the same idea.

Worries about water and urban sprawl have prompted them to pass around petitions asking Washington County to prevent new acreages smaller than their area's typical 10-acre lot.

It may sound a little selfish, they admit. But if too many people buy and build in the area, the panoramic view from Turner-

Bird's living room 3 miles south of Blair might someday have more chimneys than trees.

"We feel like the most progressive communities recognize what they have before it's all gone, and they find ways to control the growth before it's inevitable," said Turner-Bird, who moved from Omaha in 1997 with her husband, Fred Bird.

The petition drive, which has gathered about 150 signatures so far, illustrates the growing pains faced by rural counties around Omaha as more and more people seek refuge from urban life.

They're especially acute in Washington County, where some water-starved acreage

owners are pushing for a rural water system as developers buy and mark off land for more people, homes, roads and wells.

Some developers weren't happy when, on March 11, county supervisors imposed interim standards for subdivision roads and required hookups to central, public water systems for developments to proceed.

Such moves could hinder the county's ability to cash in on Omaha's growth, said Ron Henn, who is drawing up another subdivision near his Lakeland and Eagle View developments along Nebraska Highway 133.

"It's progress, and you're See **Sprawl**: Page 2



BILL BATSON/THE WORLD-HERALD

Erin Turner-Bird, with her dogs Isaac, left, and Moxy, on her property near Blair. Turner-Bird is leading a petition drive to ensure lots in the area are at least 10 acres.

Sprawl: Washington County feels growing pains

Continued from Page 1
going to cut your tax base when you have these great big lots," said Henn, whose earlier developments total about 300 homes.

Officials in Washington County, whose population leapt by 13.1 percent from 1990 to 2000, began in 2000 to rewrite the county's comprehensive plan for the first time since 1970.

Until a Jan. 28 open house, they had heard little from residents about where the county should aim its growth, said Planning Director Doug Cook.

The interim standards were inspired by comments from the open house, he said. They will expire when the comprehensive plan is finished in up to a year.

"This does not stop develop-

"It's progress, and you're going to cut your tax base when you have these great big lots."

Ron Henn

ment," Cook said. "We want to channel it in certain areas."

Residents of the "De Soto Hills" area hope to influence the plan's shape, said Bruce Hansen, who leads the petition drive and is collecting signatures with help from Turner-Bird and others.

They were spurred to action when developer Mitch McGowan proposed a subdivision with 31 lots of 3 to 5 acres — half as large as those prevailing just to its north, between Blair, Nebraska 133, U.S. Highway 75 and County Roads 32 and P32.

Neighbors' protests led the County Board to reject McGowan's first plan in December.

✕ Supervisors approved a 24-lot plan in February, but required McGowan to tie the homes into a rural water system proposed by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District. The NRD kicked off its sign-up campaign Tuesday night.

Too many acreages could strain county roads and add to the number of residents whose water supplies are spotty, Hansen said. He lives in Omaha, but has a weekend home on 50 acres

two miles north of Fort Calhoun.

Petition leaders proposed a minimum 10-acre lot size for their triangle only. But they have heard from acreage owners in other parts of the county who want limits there, too, Hansen and Turner-Bird said.

Planning consultant JEO Inc. of Wahoo is looking into defining one or more "scenic preservation areas" where development would be limited, Cook said.

The current comprehensive plan draft envisions more homes between Blair and Omaha than north and west of Blair.

JEO also is working on revisions to the comprehensive plan in Saunders County, west of Omaha. Its current draft would permit only one home per 40 acres of farmland, said Planning Director George Borreson.

W-H
A-14-03

Put out the fire

Nebraska lawmakers are scrambling to protect the state Forest Service from the axe they themselves have required the University

of Nebraska to wield. Given the importance of the agency to thousands of Nebraskans, we hope they can find a way.

Why the Forest Service is housed within the university system is unclear. Its functions are only peripherally educational, and that only in a broad sense. Now university officials want to shed its \$837,000 price tag to help meet a \$41 million shortfall in state funding.

That's understandable from the university's point of view. NU's core missions are teaching and research. The Legislature has ordered painful cuts in its budget. The Forest Service is not integral to its mission and, thus, seems expendable.

Therefore, the university might not suffer from the loss. But many rural Nebraskans surely would. The Forest Service is the middleman between the federal government and small rural fire departments; it oversees 364 pieces of firefighting equipment, mostly military surplus, loaned to 77 counties. No Forest Service, no equipment.

The Forest Service also contracts for 43 airplanes to suppress fires; that would disappear. And it offers expert advice and oversees grants — \$4 million in the last 10 years — to landowners and communities to fight tree diseases.

One proposal has surfaced that deserves consideration. The existing problem is that the agency isn't sufficiently important to the university to warrant continued funding. But perhaps the Forest Service could be moved to another state agency

**Lawmakers
should save
Forest Service
for the sake of
rural residents.**

where it would enjoy a higher priority.

Several lawmakers have suggested, as has U.S. Rep. Doug Bereuter, finding a new home for the service,

or perhaps turning it into a separate state agency. Gov. Mike Johanns has indicated interest in the idea.

There's sense in the proposal. It would be worth considering even if budget cuts weren't looming. But merely moving the service doesn't help lawmakers. They're wrestling with a budget that must be cut by \$761 million over the next two years. For the Forest Service to live, some other agency or service must die or be pruned back — or taxes must rise. Those alternatives are not attractive.

A way should nonetheless be found. Stripping fire protection from thousands of rural Nebraskans ought to be a non-starter. This state needs its Forest Service. The Legislature — not the university — should see that it has one.

Furthermore...

■ The Old Market is going to take on added importance once the convention center-arena and the new performing arts center open. It was encouraging, then, to learn about a brainstorming session focusing on new, creative uses of public spaces in the Old Market. One possibility discussed was a walkway across Gene Leahy Mall to connect 11th Street to the area at the performing arts center. Such forward thinking is what is needed to help Omaha make the most of its impressive new development downtown and along the river.

Sidney, Neb., farmers have plan to save water

BY DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

SIDNEY, Neb. — Faced with the prospect of tight irrigation restrictions this summer, a group of Sidney farmers has developed a billion-gallon solution for stretching water supplies west of drought-worried Sidney.

The irrigators estimate that they'll save 1 billion gallons of water by voluntarily planting crops that consume less water, turning off the end guns on center-pivot irrigation systems and reducing the number of acres under irrigation.

"We have 90 percent of the people who are really trying hard," said Randy Miller, a farmer who helped organize the initiative.

The Nebraska Panhandle city of 6,300 is in a region entering its fourth consecutive year of drought. Strict lawn- and garden-watering restrictions imposed last year reduced daily consumption in town to less than 2 million

gallons from a historic high of more than 6 million gallons.

Similar restrictions are already in place this year because most water wells in the region either continue to decline or remain at below-normal levels. Most of the Panhandle is expected to experience significant water shortages and limited drought improvement through June, according to the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center.

The South Platte Natural Resources District approved the irrigators' plan as an alternative to restrictions considered earlier by the board, such as limiting irrigation to 12 hours a day.

Mike Davis, chairman of the NRD board, lauded the plan.

"They're saying they're going to work with us and sacrifice money for the good of everybody," he said. "If this can be solved by the farmers themselves, we don't want to go the direction of mandates."

Water plan outlined

Meeting lets residents in on NRD proposal

By Keith Rydberg
Reporter

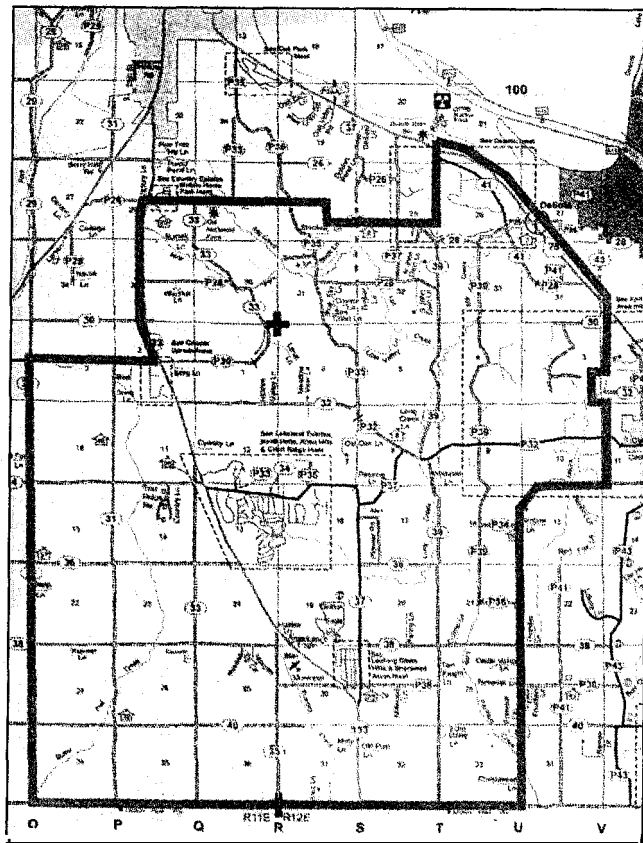
Although there was no school-sponsored activity at the school, the gymnasium at the Fort Calhoun High School was a busy place Tuesday evening as residents in an area south of Blair met to discuss a proposed rural water project.

Residents living in an area of land south of Blair between Nebraska Highway 133 and U.S. Highway 75 met with representatives of the Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District and consultants to discuss the results of a feasibility study conducted in the area. The study was conducted by the district to determine whether bringing rural water into the area was possible.

The consultants who conducted the study determined installing water lines in the area was feasible, and suggested interested landowners pay a \$2,600 fee to hook up to the proposed water line.

The district has asked for the fees to be paid by at least 80 percent of all landowners, or 689 residents, by June 30 as a way of determining whether enough interest remains among landowners to warrant the line installation. Also, the NRD is hoping to receive input from representatives of five water systems that currently exist in the 48-square-mile area. If not enough interest is gathered by the June 30 deadline, all fees will be refunded back to the landowners.

Although no formal agreement has been made, the study found the city of Blair to be the



This map outlines the area in which residents would be sewed by a proposed water system.

most cost-effective supplier of water with the water to come directly from the city's water supply. The study noted that while the Metropolitan Utilities District would have a cheaper annual water charge, the initial cost to hook up the area to the Blair water supply is less expensive than having the area supplied by the MUD.

Steven Oltmans, general manager of the NRD, noted the project is nothing new for the district. The NRD is presently involved with 30 rural water projects throughout the state. He also noted that the meeting would simply serve to answer

any questions the public may have regarding what is being proposed.

"The purpose of this meeting is to explain to you what the possibilities are and what has to be done to make this happen," Oltmans said. "It takes a lot of patience, durability and assistance to make this happen but I think you folks are up to this. At least, I certainly hope so."

Chris Koenig, project manager for hgm Associates Inc., then gave a presentation to the audience members which was

SEE WATER PAGE 12A

12A

THE ENTERPRISE

WATER: Proposal outlined for residents

FROM PAGE 1

similar to a presentation given to the Washington County Board of Supervisors at the board's March 25 meeting. Noting that hgm and McIntyre Consulting served as consulting firms on the projects, Koenig said previous studies of the areas, as well as surveys of landowners, were used to determine that water line installation was a feasible option.

"In our opinion, this is a great opportunity to provide quality water and reliable water to our residents in the area," Koenig said.

Based on the statistical information that was received in the surveys, Koenig said the average monthly bill for a homeowner should be about \$40 with all homeowners asked to read their own meters each month. Koenig said each homeowner would be assessed a basic monthly charge of \$13.75, with additional charges assessed to each property owner based on the amount of water they use.

An audience member then noted that the city of Blair gets its water from the Missouri River and asked if there was any concern about the water level of the Missouri River dropping like the levels on the Platte River and Lake McConaughy.

Oltmans responded that there should be no concern and added the amount of water needed for the area should always be available based on the size of the river.

"I feel very confident that (water level drop) won't happen," Oltmans said. "There's a big difference between the Platte and the Missouri river. We are in a drought situation right now but the volume of water that exists in the Missouri River is such that it really shouldn't be a problem. When you take the amount of water needed from the river to operate this system and compare it to the amount of water in the Missouri River, the amount needed to operate the system is about the size of a thimble comparison."

Mike Anderson, who lives in the area, asked if the fate of the project hinges on having all the five existing water systems agree to participate in the water line installation.

Koenig said having representatives from all five systems agree to the project would be beneficial, the project will necessarily be doomed if all of the systems choose not to participate.

"Having the existing private systems sign up would obviously add a lot of stability to the system," Koenig said. "If all of the systems decline to participate, it would obviously change the impact of our system. What we're presently trying to figure out is exactly what the impact would be."

Oltmans agreed with Koenig and added representatives of each system have at least expressed interest in the project thus far.

"It certainly would be helpful to the project if we had the right amount of density in the area but not entirely necessary," Oltmans said. "How all of the system owners said they would at least like to sit down and talk about the matter."



Land Construction employees, in conjunction with the city of Lincoln and the lower Platte South Natural Resources District, work on a bank stabilization project on Beal Slough in Tierra Park near South 27th Street. Several Nebraska cities have asked the Legislature to allow them to charge property owners for flood-control projects.

TED KIRK/Lincoln Journal Star

Proposed: New fees for runoff projects

If state lawmakers approve plan, monthly charges would cover stormwater costs.

BY NANCY HICKS
Lincoln Journal Star

A cigarette flicked into the gutter. A car slowly leaking oil as it sits parked along the street. Dirt from a new construction site washed down the street by a spring rain. These are all pollutants that eventually are carried through the city's storm sewers into local streams and rivers. Nebraska's larger communities, under pressure from the federal Clean Water Act to clean up lake and river water, are asking the Legislature for help in paying for projects that prevent flooding and water pollution. They want permission to charge property owners a fee — as much as \$4.16 a month for most homeowners, more for those who own large buildings, parking lots or other impermeable surfaces that don't soak up water. LB32, sponsored by Sen. Ed

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Schrock of Elm Creek, would allow cities to create storm water utilities, much like city water systems. It will likely be discussed this year, but it has

opponents. The proposal is described as a fee system. But it's a tax, a tax on rooftops and driveways, says Korby Gilbertson, who lobbies for several groups that oppose the bill, including Realtors, nursing homes and Lincoln Public Schools. The storm water fee system

would exempt agricultural land, which also contributes to water pollution, Gilbertson said. And there are no limits on the use of the fee, she said. Cities could use it for programs that go beyond the basic Environmental Protection Agency requirements, she said. The controversial bill will likely be discussed this year, said Schrock, chairman of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee, which named it a priority bill. But he's not sure what the outcome will be. A similar measure stalled on the floor last year because of opposition. "I have no way of knowing what's going to happen with it,"

Schrock said. The goal of storm water management programs is to contain the pollution and prevent future flooding caused by rainwater runoff. Sediment is Lincoln's greatest pollutant. Dirt scours the banks of streams, eroding into those waterways. And the dirt ends up downstream, filling up lakes, which then require expensive drainage and dredging. A lot of the sediment that filled Holmes Lake over the past few decades came from construction sites upstream, said Nicole Fleck-Tooze, special project administrator. See RUNOFF FEES, Page 2A

Continued

■ Runoff fees

Continued from Page 1A

tor for city of Lincoln.

The same conditions that lead to stream pollution — urbanization and the building of more rooftops and more parking lots — also increase flooding problems.

Rainwater that used to soak into the open land, now rushes across the parking lots and into streams, increasing the chance of floods downstream, Fleck-Tooze said.

Lincoln's storm water management master plan includes a variety of programs, from education to creating new wetlands and building retaining ponds, intended to deal with both water quality and flooding problems.

■ At Holmes Lake, now being drained and dredged, a wetland of plantings will be created to act as a filter, keeping sediments and other pollution from reaching the lake, Fleck-Tooze said.

■ Local governments are lining the banks of Beal Slough with rocks and plants to keep the stream bank stable and trap dirt and pollution. The \$600,000 project is being split by the city and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.

■ The Wilderness Ridge subdivision, south of Yankee Hill Road and west of South 27th Street, is putting in swales — sloping roadside ditches with plantings — instead of curbs and gutters. The grass-lined swales will allow more rainwater to soak into the ground rather than rush into the storm sewer and out to a stream.

All this work takes money Lincoln has been paying for its program through a combination of voter-approved bonds and general tax dollars. A \$10 million bond issue is

on the May city ballot.

But there is no consistent funding mechanism, said Fleck-Tooze.

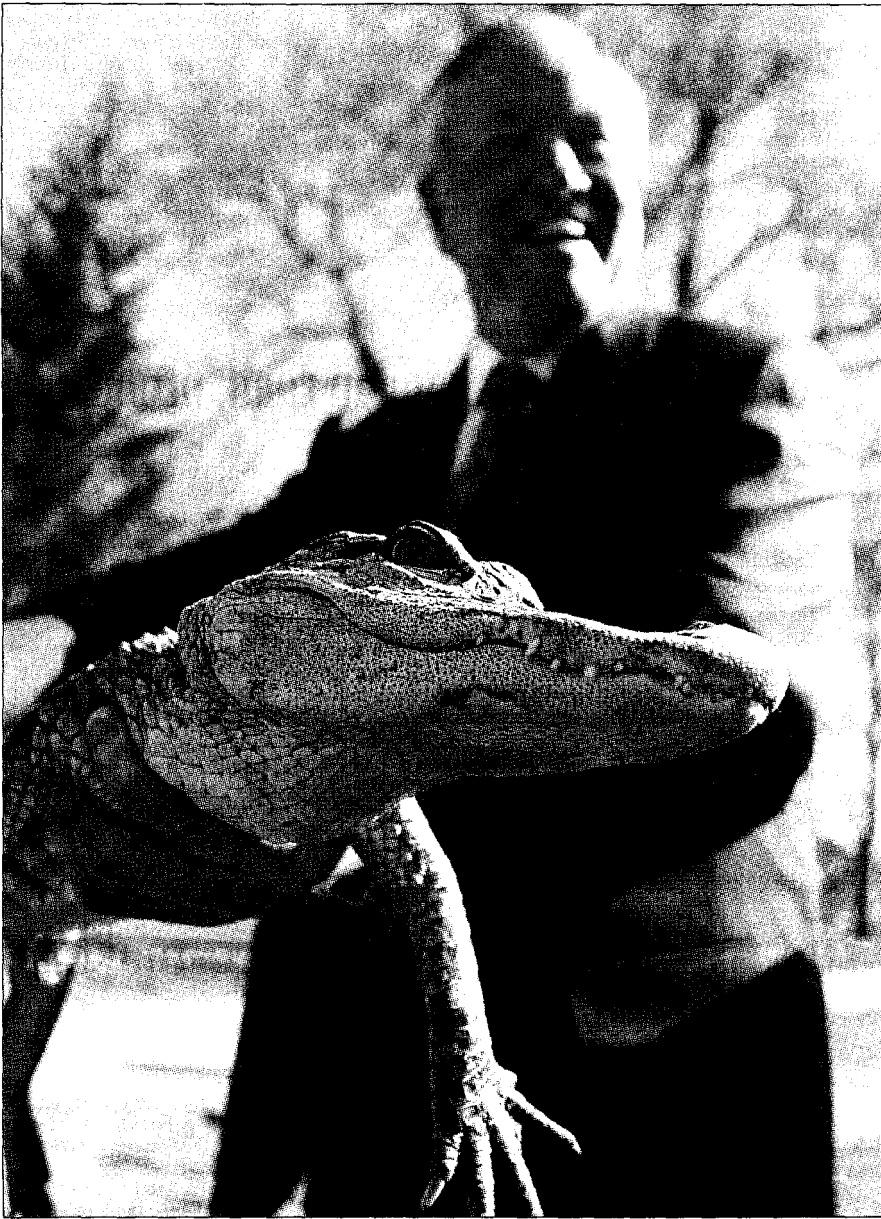
Several of Nebraska's large population areas have similar situations. Sarpy and Douglas counties and Lincoln, South Sioux City and Dakota City have immediate requirements to develop programs for reducing the pollution from storm water runoff, said Gary Krumland of the League of Nebraska Municipalities. Smaller communities will soon have to begin the permitting process and eventually meet the EPA requirements, he said.

The bill would allow local communities to create storm water utility systems, with a fee for all property owners based on the impervious surface area of a property. In many communities across the country that have created storm water utilities, the basic fee is based on the rooftop, sidewalk and driveway area of an average home, often about 2,200 square feet of impervious surface area, Fleck-Tooze said. That area constitutes one unit.

The bill as drafted would set a \$50 annual fee (\$4.16 per month), on the fee per unit. But a business would be charged more based on its square footage of roof, parking lot and sidewalk area.

In Lincoln, a \$3-per-unit monthly fee would raise the \$4.5 million now spent each year on storm water management programs, said Fleck-Tooze. The fee system would require those who contribute most to the problem — those with large amounts of impervious surface — to contribute the most dollars to the solution, she said.

Reach Nancy Hicks at
nhicks@journalstar.com or 473-7250.



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD HERALD

On May 10, animals such as Ali the alligator will highlight the annual festival hosted by the Earth Day Omaha Coalition at Elmwood Park. Mayor Mike Fahey, who holds Ali, proclaimed Tuesday as Earth Day in Omaha. Several Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts cleaned up Elmwood Park Tuesday.

1st of two Earth Days observed

4-22-03

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nebraska's fickle weather has earned Omaha two Earth Days.

There's the official day, Tuesday, when people pick up litter and plant trees. And then there's the day of fun and festivities — set for May when the weather should be more reliable.

Tuesday, under crisp blue skies, the Omaha Earth Day Coalition honored the day with a park cleanup and tree planting

and announced their activities for May 10. With them were Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts and local public officials.

Ten-year-old Aaron Gilman, a Boy Scout with Troop 378 from St. Margaret Mary School, said taking care of the Earth ultimately is a way of taking care of ourselves.

"If we don't take care of it," he said, "the animals and plants will die. Plants give us oxygen, and animals give us food."

Several Scouts cleaned up Elmwood Park. Aaron found

See Earth Day: Page 2

Earth Day Omaha

When: Saturday, May 10, noon to 9 p.m.

Where: Elmwood Park, 808 S. 60th St.

Events will include: Tree giveaways, Lewis & Clark re-enactments, Native American dancing and drumming, science show and interactive exhibits, pony rides, a rock climbing wall, petting zoo, kite flying exhibition and concerts

Earth Day: Scouts help out

Continued from Page 1

plenty of food wrappers, Easter candy wrappers and even a sock. The boys also observed the planting of two hackberry trees and a water quality test of the creek in Elmwood. David Bubb, field data specialist for the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, said the field tests indicate the stream is in good shape.

Mayor Mike Fahey attended the event and proclaimed Tuesday Earth Day. The mayor said local communities can do much

to reverse environmental harm

The two trees planted by the Papillion-Missouri River Natural Resources District are native to this area and can grow to a height of 70 feet.

The May 10 Earth Day celebration will center on the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark journey. Melissa Gardner, spokeswoman for the coalition, said the festivities were moved to May because cold weather has dampened activities the past couple of years

Save the trees — and the Nebraska Forest Service

January 1998

BY ILLIEN

In proposing the first Arbor Day in 1872, I believe Morton knew how important trees are to Nebraska. As a businessman and town-builder, as well as a farmer, Morton promoted tree planting in part as an economic development strategy for our young state.

Morton knew that if people are to live comfortable lives in our variable climate, the moderating and civilizing effect of trees could be decisive.

Then, as now, people had many choices where they can make their homes and build their businesses.

Then, as now, trees helped beautify our communities, cool our towns and homes in the summer, slow cold winter winds, reduce energy costs, bring songbirds close by, conserve topsoil and protect the quality of our rivers and streams. Trees significantly improve the quality of life ... and where people will choose to make their lives.

The extremes of our weather still exist, and today as in Morton's time, trees make all the difference.

In our mobile economy where businesses and jobs can move swiftly, quality of life considerations are more important than ever in influencing the flow of jobs. Tree planting and care, more than ever, should be regarded as part of an effective economic development strategy in Nebraska, as well as just being the right thing for our residents and for the environment.

Despite our great tradition of tree planting, the state's primary tree-care delivery agency, the Ne-



ROS

LOCAL VIEW

braska Forest Service, is on the chopping block.

Each of the 50 states has a state forester and a state forestry agency. The state foresters carry out a number of state agency functions, provide technical assistance to communities and landowners, conduct extensive educational programs in community tree care for thousands of Nebraskans each year and administer federal funds that support community tree care, woodland management and rural fire protection.

Of course it would be a national embarrassment for the home of Arbor Day to be the only state without a state forestry agency.

But more importantly the loss would be a very bad thing for the people of Nebraska and for our future. Without a state forestry agency, this is what Nebraska would be missing:

■ We would be without \$2 million in federal funds annually coming to Nebraska for our communities, landowners and rural fire departments.

■ We would be without vital community and rural forestry technical assistance for the state's towns, cities and rural residents. Local volunteer boards, professional city foresters and all Nebraskans benefit immeasurably from healthier community forests and woodlands.

■ We would be without the administration of the Tree City USA program, which is made possible in each state by the state forester, and which engages more than 110 towns and cities in Nebraska.

■ 364 fire trucks on loan in 77 counties would be recalled, and other wildfire-suppression grants and programs would be eliminated. (During a drought!)

■ Technical assistance and grants for tree planting forest rangers and fire protection would no longer be available to landowners.

□ Tree-care training for thousands of arborists, master gardeners, extension educators, and federal and state agency personnel would come to an end.

□ Numerous other services to the people, organizations and communities of Nebraska, so valuable in caring for our trees, would cease.

As residents, it's all too easy to take for granted the technical expertise that is available in a government agency until there is an emergency. For example, few pay attention to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention until there's an outbreak of a dangerous disease. The professionals of the Nebraska Forest Service are quietly carrying out their essential work every day — even though most of us may only be aware of them during a devastating ice or snowstorm, like the one in October 1997 that damaged countless trees in eastern Nebraska, or when wildfires strike, or in the face of threats like Dutch elm disease. Having the professional team in place absolutely saves the day when there is a crisis that threatens our trees.

Although it is administratively located at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Nebraska Forest Service in practice serves the function of a state agency, delivering vital services for the people of Nebraska. It is reasonable that, during these difficult economic times, the Nebraska Forest Service be expected to live with the kind of budget reductions other state agencies face.

It is not reasonable, in my view, to eliminate the Nebraska Forest Service, as has been proposed.

John Rosenow of Lincoln is president of The National Arbor Day Foundation.

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NEBRASKA

www.journalstar.com/nebraska

Agencies have plan to maintain river traffic

BY LIBBY QUAID 4-24-03
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Weeks after barges began navigating the depleted waters of the Missouri River, government agencies announced new plans to use water from upstream reservoirs to keep the river navigable in case of drought.

The agreement appeared to intensify resentment between states along the upper reaches of the Missouri and those downstream. The deal, announced Tuesday, will allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to vary releases from upstream dams to keep downstream waters deep enough for barge navigation throughout the summer.

The deal also includes a promise of steady flows during the nesting

season for piping plovers, a shorebird on the federal threatened species list at the heart of the long-running battle over the river's flow. The corps said it would release enough water in May to discourage birds from nesting where they could be washed away by later releases.

The Fish and Wildlife Service blocked the corps from a similar approach last year out of concern for the plovers.

But Tuesday, the service said new research showed the birds could handle varied releases for just this one year.

"It looks like ... the population of plovers in this reach of the river could take this hit on their population and still not be under an addi-

tional threat of extinction," said Mike Olson, an official of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Bismarck, N.D.

"While we were able to allow this to occur one time, this is not a long-term management possibility," Olson said.

The service also will allow the corps to move nests if needed, although it will prevent the agency from moving nests and chicks to the corps' captive rearing facility.

The new operating plan drew protests from upstream states, where a multimillion-dollar recreation industry is pushing to keep water in the reservoirs.

They argue downstream barge shipments are worth a fraction of the value of fishing and boating on

upriver lakes.

"This is utterly and completely unacceptable," said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D.

"It's not good economics, it's not good science and it's apparently driven by the electoral votes of one downstream state, and that's the state of Missouri."

Missouri Republican Sen. Kit Bond, however, called it "a reasonable compromise" that "appears to be sound."

Congress has been a major player in the long-running dispute over whether to return the Missouri to spring rise and low summer flows, mimicking nature before the river was dammed for barge shipments and hydropower.

The Fish and Wildlife Service

says mimicking the natural flow is the only way to protect the plover and two other endangered species. It gave the corps a 2002 deadline to comply but the Bush administration postponed the changes indefinitely last summer.

Conservation groups have sued to force the changes, and a leader of the effort, American Rivers, denounced Tuesday's agreement.

"It's a fantasy," said American Rivers spokesman Chad Smith, "We're still in a drought and more than likely will continue to be over the summer. The reservoirs will be drained, the birds' nests will be flooded out, and the corps will be able to do what it normally does — support navigation — so we're right back to the status quo."

Compromise clears way for subdivision near Blair

By TODD VON KAMPEN
WORLD-HERALD STAFFWRITER

BLAIR, Neb. — A compromise between Washington County supervisors and a developer has led to approval of a controversial 100-acre subdivision near here.

The County Board recently adopted the compromise offered by developer Mitch McGowan, who agreed to sign up his 22 Millstone Estates lots for a proposed rural water system, said Planning Director Doug Cook.

The deal, which includes approval of McGowan's preliminary plat, capped a four-month debate that illustrated the growing pains among acreages spreading between Blair and Omaha.

McGowan's original 31-lot plan for his subdivision, about three miles south of Blair, raised concern among acreage owners to its north and west.

They objected to the plan's average lot size of 3 to 5 acres — one-third to one-half as large as the area's typical lot — and said it could worsen water problems

in an area where some wells dry up.

Supervisors rejected the first plan in December. They gave initial approval to a revised 24-lot plan in February, on the condition that McGowan sign up for a rural water system proposed by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Cook said supervisors accepted a plan offered by McGowan's attorney, John Samson, to install private wells but also pay the NRD fee of \$2,600 per lot.

If the rural water system isn't built, McGowan will get his money back and the lots will continue to use private wells, Cook said. If the system is built, the wells can be used to provide water for animals, lawns and gardens.

In a separate move, Cook said, McGowan removed the northernmost 20 acres — the area closest to the objecting neighbors — from his original 120-acre plan. McGowan plans to sell that area as two 10-acre parcels, Cook said.

McGowan and Samson could not be reached for comment.

Our trail is a big plus

A recent column by Harold Andersen suggested that the public should hear from people who live along biking-hiking trails. I can see a biking-hiking trail three houses away when I look out my front door.

I see neighbors from the other end of our area leisurely walking and talking. I see mothers walking and jogging behind strollers. Parents are out walking and playing with their kids. I see grandparents taking their grandchildren for a walk on the trail to Lamp Park to use the playground. I see kids on bicycles having a good time. I have witnessed a neighborhood getting together, getting reacquainted and enjoying our area even more.

The trail curves through a green area and has trees on both sides for most of its length. It connects to other trails and will eventually connect with the new Pagio Creek trail completed last fall between West Center and West Maple Roads, allowing me to ride my bike to Bellevue and back — without having to use roads.

Use of this biking-hiking trail is growing daily, yet, because of good design, it never seems crowded. The trail is a big plus for our neighborhood.

W-H 5-1-03

Franklin J. Hauck Sr., Omaha

10-18
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New emphasis for UNL

What more important job for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln than to lead the way on water research?

Water is among Nebraska's most precious — and, unfortunately, limited — resources. But at the same time, it is absolutely vital to the state's agricultural interests and is important in power production and other uses. Organizations and agencies such as the Nebraska Department of Water Resources and the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District have led the field in offering expertise on the issue, although UNL has always had academics with important knowledge.

The Platte, Missouri, Republican and Niobrara Rivers, among others,

What institution is better suited to lead the way on knowledge and wise use of water?

are major surface-water resources whose management and preservation will play a big part in agriculture's future. And the Ogallala Aquifer, which underlies most of the central and western part of the state, deserves attention, study and protection, too.

With its new initiative, the university could play an important role in how the problems and questions concerning water policy play out across the state. While the NU system is certainly on a tight budget, it must spend its money wisely for the state.

Initiating a water-resources research program, with an eye toward becoming an international powerhouse on the subject, strikes us as an astute use of funds indeed.